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Observatory for Fundamental University
Values and Rights

Case Studies

Academic Freedom and
University Institutional Responsibilities
in South East Europe (1989-2003)



Bononia University Press

Bononia University Press
Via Zamboni 25 – 40126 Bologna

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ISBN 88-7395-028-0

www.buonline.com
e-mail: info@buonline.com

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Printed in Italy

Printed by: Grafiche MDM S.p.A.

First printed in June 2004

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Foreword

Andris Barblan
Secretary General

Principles and charters are often documents to which officials pay lip service only. Not in the case of Michael Daxner, a member of the Collegium of the Magna Charta, who was in charge of education in Kosovo when the United Nations governed that province after the war with Serbia.

When reorganising the university, he clearly referred to the values of the Magna Charta and made sure that the academic institutions would have the power necessary to their independence. With the support of the Council of Europe and of CRE – now the European University Association (EUA) – he pressed for a new law of higher education that made possible and compelling the full responsibility of higher education in social change and institutional progress. Indeed, autonomy and accountability are the two sides of the same coin, as the following essay is showing.

However, the re-engineering of a society torn by conflict cannot be viewed as a single exercise. Although specific to the University of Pristina, the political, economical and cultural situation in Kosovo reminds of difficulties encountered in many areas of former Yugoslavia, not to speak of the Balkans in general. In South East Europe, the Magna Charta points to areas of need, offers some distance from immediate problems, proposes values accepted by the European academic community as a whole. Thus, the document signed in 1988 by some 400 university leaders has become an instrument of change.

To show how and why – in the particular context of the Balkans – the Collegium of the Magna Charta Observatory begged Michael Daxner to write an essay, giving a personal account and vision of South East European academic conditions. This testimony was drafted in Afghanistan where Michael Daxner was asked to advise the Minister of Education in the preparation of the new university law for another torn and divided country.

Readers will find in the following pages the personal experience of a former rector turned politician in order to move forward the ideal of a university central to the development of its community – but also of Europe as such. The text presents also an analysis of the forces at hand that influence the potential of academic change in the more rigorous approach of a political scientist and sociologist, Michael Daxner's specialisation.

With this document the Observatory adds to its series of Case Studies of education systems in terms of

autonomy and academic freedom. This time, the framework is not a province (Mecklenburg), nor a nation (Portugal) but a region (South East Europe) which is still very much in the news. May this essay help understand the difficulties still prevailing in the area!

I want to thank Ryan Schroeder, my former Political Advisor and Assistant in Kosovo, for critique and valuable clarifications; I also wish to thank Professor Vera Vasiljevic, who has supported the development of some of my ideas by a continuous exchange of critical suggestions and real-time information. Last not least, my gratitude goes to Andris Barblan, from the Observatory, for his editing work.

M.D.

Academic Freedom and University Institutional Responsibilities in South East Europe (1989-2003)

*Prof. Michael Daxner
University of Oldenburg*

A. *An analysis*

0. The reason for an essay on the Magna Charta in South East Europe

Taking advantage of my experience in Kosovo and in the Balkans, I was asked to describe in practical terms the underlying structures of higher education reform in South East Europe. The *Magna Charta Universitatum* represents a core element of this reflection as, in technical and symbolical terms, it is used as a key reference by the leaders of universities in the region. Indeed, year after year, despite the fact that the charter was first signed in 1215 already, they travel to Italy to endorse its principles by adding their signature to the document – now kept at the University of Bologna. Thus, recent signatories have often come from countries in transition experiencing the difficulties of evolving from a communist and nationalist framework to democratic structures and market econo-

mies, i.e., to new civil societies. For them, who usually are also key figures in their renovating communities, coming to Bologna is first a symbolic act since the Magna Charta is not necessarily the main text underlying their countries' new organisation of higher education. Indeed, there are many aspects of change that can diverge from the charter and some will be analysed below. As a *subtext*, however, the Magna Charta is important when it imbues and gives shape to a transformed academic organisation. As a *pre-text*, this document could be dangerous if it offers simple lip service to the real changes in higher education that are required by European integration and that many are reluctant to adopt – for fear of jeopardising embedded interests and traditional routines.

1. *What this essay can provide and which expectations it will not meet*

The Magna Charta is one of those long-term sources of progress which may hide for a time in the underground, re-appear where nobody expects it and, all of a sudden, may even stay in the centre of attention. As is the case with all international conventions, people do not carry its text all day long! It is the other way round: the charter is what you miss, in South East Europe, when in debates about reforms and changes there is a need for solid ground to discuss academic freedom, university autonomy – and the predominance of quality over efficiency when it comes to define a *good* university.

My field has been South East Europe (SEE) for many years and, now, I write from Afghanistan where I have been asked to assist a full minister in the drafting of higher education legislation. I was more than happy to see that he and all rectors in the country do see the

Magna Charta and the Bologna process – born out of the 1999 Declaration on the European Higher Education Area – as two sides of the same coin, despite the distance between their country and ‘Europe’. However, in Europe and notably in SEE, I am conscious that the Magna Charta has not really taken root, that academic freedom is being sacrificed on the altar of other reforms; and that many changes in transition societies remain unfinished for a total lack of enlightened and democratic aspirations when it comes to rebuilding institutions, academic or otherwise. The comparison between Afghanistan and SEE is made here with caution as the similarities between the two regions are far from perfect even if the process of transformation knows of parallel developments, not always for the better. The results of the Afghanistan donor conference of March 2004 support my global pessimism: soft sectors – and education in particular, representing the investment in tomorrow’s human resources – did not play the role they deserve. As a result, the issue of a civil society based on enlightened minds, i.e., on an internal sense of liberty and maturity, was not given sufficient prominence. Like in the Balkans, I am afraid.

The era of national systems of higher learning is over, however, even if some democracies in transition still use universities to feed and support the growth of a national identity. In these instances, higher education cannot be separated from nation-building. However, no other sector of civil society has globalised as much in the reality of its daily practice. Hence the existence of real tensions between these national and international poles of development. Although in section 14 of this paper I will address briefly the link between academics as individuals and the globalised world around them, I consider

that this connection to the wider environment is an aspect of institutional accountability and autonomy that would need greater attention in general, also from the Magna Charta Observatory.

This essay will deal mainly with the attraction for and repulsion against academic freedom and the impact of such attitudes on change in South East Europe. Since many thorough investigations and analyses are now available as to what is actually occurring in this region's higher education reforms, I will restrict myself to more general reflections woven together without many quotations, references and case illustrations. My main thesis is that the *direct effect of the Magna Charta debate* is impossible to observe on the surface of events and developments, but that it is quite possible to analyse the background for and the hidden agenda of academic freedom in the region. My second thesis is that this influence depends on *translation*: the meaning of the charter concerning academic freedom, autonomy and quality is really changing in function of different circumstances and socio-linguistic contexts.

Thus, this text is no special case study grounded in the testimonies of identifiable informers or in empirical sources. It may be read that way, though, as it refers to "real situations" and as it relies on objective elements – as I experienced them during my time as the educational officer of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo. My aim is to describe a *situation*, to distinguish certain *constellations* of forces, while pointing to a meta-discourse that is usually hidden from a superficial approach of the area. This paper, as a result, is no deep analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Magna Charta as applied in the Balkans.

The community of higher education experts and peers interested in, and working for, South East Europe

is rather well-defined and limited in numbers. The expertise related to the region is well known and has been largely assimilated already. This means that there exists a sound basis for investigation and comparative research. However, the situation cannot be considered satisfactory, as the *culture of reforms* is so uncertain that expert opinion can only reflect deep suspicions about the on-going process of institutional development. Expectations had been very high, legitimised by friendly support of change in the early stages of the conflicts that affected the region – and after. The former CRE Taskforce for SEE, the Pristina Working group, the support of the Alternative academic educational network (AAEN) in Serbia, all contributed to helping dissenting opinion in former Yugoslavia to express itself in the West where academics and their universities were ready to re-open collaborative links with colleagues needing integration in the European academic world simply to survive their own circumstances at home. These people became the spear-head of democratic evolution in the area but, as recent history has shown, this vanguard of a new Europe and democratic élite has suffered various setbacks: difficult to remain euphoric after the latest rounds of elections in Croatia and Serbia or after the Dayton agreement's failure to lead to a constitution for Bosnia Herzegovina!

SEE or, as will be explained below, 'the Balkans', is a region with a rather unclear profile and shape. Not so much in geographical as in political and cultural terms, an issue now being reflected in the social reconstruction process occurring in its respective countries and political territories. Developing its own dynamics, the re-engineering of higher education has become everywhere a complex issue of high political significance. Higher edu-

cation, indeed, is at the core of social reform as a whole, especially since it is supposed to train a new political leadership. In many cases, when analysing this set of circumstances, the specialists from the higher education community are fully trapped in the “Teichler paradox” (1993): either they give legitimacy to political developments and decisions usually prepared by others – local political leaders or external donors mainly – or they investigate a *black box*¹, the output of which is being compared with what they already know from other parts of Europe. There are only a few second thoughts about *why things work* or *do not function*, why some developments are considered to be useful and transferable, and why others will never be integrated before going through a complicated process of mediation. These phenomena also limit the range of possible research in higher education and reduce the scope of comparative approaches. The latter, especially, often disservice the aims of unification and integration, though involuntarily and with the innocence of positivist convictions. Thus, common patterns imported from the West are becoming similar rather than remaining the same. This is no trivial matter as it touches the under-

¹ The *black box* approach has a long tradition in higher education policies and research – also in the communist times of countries in the region. Some good results in teaching and research may have been produced and maintained that way. But, in older days, some of this knowledge was far from matching the dominant ideologies as applied to the main institutions in society, universities included. The *black box* approach allowed to remain in voluntary ignorance of real interdependencies; as a result, output tended to be interpreted according to the ruling ideology.

standing of standards, their recognition or their translation to specific contexts – at the risk of real differentiation.

In other terms, this essay deals with the *anthropology of reforms and/or changes* in higher education. It considers whether what is observed consists of *reforms* or of much more radical *changes*. It reviews the elements of a tool-kit in social engineering trying to answer one major question: how to explain both the obvious *attraction and reluctance* that political and academic agents feel for academic freedom and institutional autonomy? And, as a consequence, can our understanding have an impact on the correction of existing strategies, thus speeding up well-defined developments which the local higher education community would deserve and expect? Will clear perspectives about the Balkans influence the EU and western policies of higher education that international peers refer to when working with the particular academic circumstances specific to the region – or its constitutive parts? I am using the term *anthropology* because I deal with the *homo academicus balkanensis*. In an area where the university keeps a high reputation – which is often quite separate from real standards of quality – the members of the institution are certainly affected by reform or change. Their reactions can be influenced by religion as well as by civic values or by their understanding of the role of higher education beyond a presence in the training market, since universities in the region have had a long history of evolution and ruptures. That is why academic traditions that prevailed before the times of communism are now being revived in many countries while, in Bosnia and Kosovo, Islam has surfaced again in large communities. In this context, anthropology and ethnology are twin disciplines but I will not enter the methodological jungle of their related ap-

proaches; my objective is simpler: with not too many psychological explanations, try to give a few keys to academic positioning in a given society, problems that could soon require urgent attention, both from the Magna Charta Observatory or from European university colleagues.

As an author, indeed, I believe in the value of the Magna Charta as the necessary backdrop to the so-called Bologna Process. The German President, Johannes Rau, mixed up the two in his address to the Berlin Education Summit of September 2003; I think his ghost writers were right, however, to make the link, even subconsciously. The Magna Charta without an operational European Area of Higher Education is just a promise, the Bologna Process without the Magna Charta remains a mere technicality.

2. *The Balkan syndrome*

For many reasons, no SEE country likes to be considered as part of 'the Balkans' (cf. Busek, Daxner, Todorova, and others). However, since the term 'South East Europe' has its own difficulties, we should deconstruct the Balkan-syndrome and accept that within the next generation this problem of identity building and self-esteem is not likely to be changed. None of the new states or societies under transition in the area has found indeed its definitive role, not even Slovenia, although it is the most 'westernised' country of the group. In terms of identity, each of the republics of former Yugoslavia has at least one major political faction that still considers the country to be the *West of the East*, and thus, Croatia, like Poland, usually defines itself as the *East of the West* (a self-image that has many unfortunate aspects, cf. Jonina 2003). In institution building, we cannot but consider the most sensitive aspect of organisation for a new civil soci-

ety, the '*super-structure*' of old Marxist terminology, i.e., the *cultural and intellectual life* making sense of the community. Higher education in the Balkans plays, and has played, a central role in structuring local society throughout the 20th century. At the same time, universities were the locus of a rather undefined opposition to the system and government. True, as individual institutions had all specific roles to play – and no university was like its neighbour –no generalisation can be fully valid for the entire system of higher learning that was – and still is – constituted also of Academies of Science and other educational institutions.

When finalising this paper, I learned about the March 2004 outbreak of violence between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo and, later, about the burning of churches in Prizren and of mosques in Nis. In terms of the cultural superstructure, the politics were almost back to square one. For our own considerations, the lessons of the situation do not need a redrafting of our arguments, rather their sharpening.

3. *No anthropology without archaeology*

Interestingly enough, and it is often a disturbing fact, the memory that the whole area has been for a long time under *socialist* or *communist* rule is usually downplayed, if not repressed into the collective unconscious. At most, that period is considered to have been a constitutive stage of the country's development, now fortunately overcome. My starting point is that such a self-understanding is irrelevant or wrong when it covers the recent past with a shield of mythology and traditions that evoke a false sense of continuity.

From a historical point of view, the SEE systems of higher education after World War II have been relatively stable mixtures of an old 'central-European' type – i.e., an Austro-Hungarian model characterised by strong governance through state and church – combined with Soviet structures of higher education. As a result, neither the Humboldtian nor the Napoleonic university models have ever applied in the region (cf. Laszlo Frenyö, 2003). Given the fact that universities are *slow systems*, it is no surprise that academic institutions and their members, in terms of image, refer more easily to old structures than to those existing at present. That *situation* calls for thorough analyses in two areas when considering the obstacles to changes and reforms, the *role of intellectuals* in various types of communisms and the *subconscious influence of academic privileges* in former Yugoslavia on the practical perceptions of the present era. The plural '*communisms*' is here deliberately used because the foundations of the communist states were only given some unity through their anti-fascist and/or partisan experience, an experience that downplayed distinctions rooted in different backgrounds. Academic privileges are now empty shells, however, a space of void for growing resentment and hatred.

The break-up of former Yugoslavia has left more or less incomplete nation-states that, anyway, have been lacking the grounding required for nationhood until a few years ago. In other words, each of the new states has inherited specific legacies leaving their identities unfulfilled. For instance, Slovenia (like Hungary), has experienced almost too fast an acceleration of its alignment with the West to refer to its roots; Croatia, on the contrary, has suffered from delays in the development of civil society because of ten years of rule by President Tudjman; Serbia

has inherited the disequilibria from the Milosevic's regime that led to the war over Kosovo and to the assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic in Spring 2002; while Macedonia faces bi-ethnic conflict, Bulgaria remains depleted by a brain-drain of unbelievable dimensions; as for Bosnia-Herzegovina, it suffers from the insufficiencies of the constitutional structures decided by the Dayton peace agreement. The conflict between national identities in 'ethnic people states' (A.Grunenberg) and the former comprehensive 'Yugoslav' identity has not been overcome yet (Ugresic 1998, Draculic). Slovenia and Croatia, with all their privileges, were full participants in the Yugoslav system of higher education, which in itself showed many similarities with other socialist systems, while enjoying a few peculiarities – of which people are proud even today – but which have been overrated, like self-management. The open borders of former Yugoslavia and the related advantages in mobility were in fact the main distinctive traits of the Federation within the Eastern block. To be noted, however, that this freedom of movement was not evenly distributed over the different republics and provinces – now independent. Thus, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia enjoyed more privileges in this field than the rest of the country. Today, the old Yugoslav academic system no longer exists, but its remainders are like the pieces of a broken mirror. They reflect the present system while distorting it at micro-level. In other terms, *national* systems with their various pasts play a significant role in the making of SEE higher education policy, with or without the Magna Charta, but certainly not outside of the Bologna Process (Daxner 2003). Thus, policies can diverge in the area as show legislative changes and aspects of the reforms proposed not only in

Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Slovenia, but also in neighbouring Austria, countries that form an inner circle of comparable evolutions; the rest of the SEE and accession members of the EU represent a second circle of common interests, while the third circle is made of the rest of the 40 so-called 'Bologna' countries working towards a common European Higher Education Area, such a circle leaving out only a few countries of the continent in a waiting position still – Ukraine, Belarus or Moldavia. The policies of the European Union or of the Stability Pact, rather than taking a regional view, indeed focus on *nation states* still, a strategy which could already be doubted when the Pact interfered in Kosovo and Vojvodina matters that touched Serbian statehood: this should be even more problematic when higher education in each of the new democracies will also be influenced by Stability Pact policies. Romania, Bulgaria, Albania – or Kosovo – would need a different approach as their problems are slightly different from those encountered by countries born out of former Yugoslavia; for their solution, they require another set of measures to be put into their own reform "black boxes".

4. *What do Balkan countries share and what divides them: changes or reforms*

SEE societies all share a common and significant target in their transition, i.e., the *establishment of the rule of law* in the region. Rule of law does not only mean a stable legislation, but also *law enforcement capacity* as well as '*republican virtues*', that is law abiding practices that recognise as essential some civic participation in the implementation of good legislation. To reach this level of political consciousness, the universities are needed as the providers

for a new élite that can “translate” old routines into new habits.

All the new laws on higher education in the region are basically similar at the core. To sum up, they consider as fundamental a *stakeholder orientation* – with a strong tendency for social partners to replace the state, when it has proved corrupt or incompetent; consequently, *institutions are granted autonomy*, and are given *entrepreneurial capacities* that induce *accountability for their activities*, i.e., *a product orientation led in a transparent, effective and efficient way*. That is the common frame for a much more complex situation at operational level. Such a reference core reflects the principles laid out not only by the *Magna Charta Universitatum* of 1988, but also by the Council of Europe’s *Legislative Reform Project* developed after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, or by the Convention of Lisbon of 1997, not to mention the Bologna, Prague and Berlin Summits of Education Ministers in 1999, 2001, and 2003 or the Salzburg Seminar and the activities the European University Association – all of these organisations converging in their effort to build up a true European Higher Education Area due to be completed by 2010. From those basic principles, laws on higher education can be derived – and have been. But the incentive to write new legislation is not without ambiguity. On one side, there are *external* demands (from donors, the World Bank, the EU, bilateral interests, but also from parts of European academia) that simply urge for a radical ‘*change*’ in system and structures, while, on the other side, the actors of the domestic adaptation to the new reality prefer some kind of incremental ‘*reform*’ dealing with existing structures and today’s key problems. For example, should change or reform be used in reshaping the teaching and research units? Should the

loss of their traditional status of legal entity be incremental or radical, a question that was discussed every time the *legal positions of faculties within universities* has been analysed. In other words, will institutional reform lead to a mutation or to an adaptation of the system of higher education? These are indeed the two sides of the coin called “social transformation”.

Thus, the first hard issue to face is: *do we want changes or reforms?* From an objective viewpoint, many changes imposed on the new systems of higher education are not considered to be reforms by those affected in university constituencies, or by some of their clienteles and interest groups². Focusing on change is based on the conviction that only a *change* in society – a real break up with the past – will allow people to contribute to a new Europe opened to their participation, development and well-being. Such social re-engineering also requires real changes in higher education. This can be easily illustrated from examples covering the whole SEE region. There will be no real transition into democracy without a changed frame of mind among economical, political and social decision-makers. And no such change can occur as long as the universities do not provide a new class of democratic elites, for instance. Some changes can be based on the re-

² I remember with shame that I fought for reforms, when *Dukagjin Pupovci*, the eminent educator in Kosovo, was urging for changes: my role as a political diplomat and the representative of the UNMIK administration led to my arguing against the needs of change in order not to rebuff the majority of my counterparts ready to accept some reforms. However *Dukagjin Pupovci* was right, change should prevail and, in the end, we agreed on measures for real transformation.

form of a few existing structures, but in many cases, the superficial adaptation to some imported model will not suffice.

The more conservative view of things, paradoxically, hides thus under the term of *reforms*. Basically, the existing system “is not that bad”, even if it clearly lacks resources and connections with the socio-economic reality of the new times; in principle, however, it could be easily amended. It seems a question of means to be set so that ends can be met. The rude form of this argument would be: it is not guns that shoot people, but other people who do so!

This incremental view has also been typical in a different set of circumstances. After 1945, the notorious phrase was that the ‘German system is healthy at its core’, thus implying that the German model should be restored rather than displaced by Anglo-Saxon structures imposed by the western allies. We must not underrate the fact that, in all states and territories from former Yugoslavia, post-war/post-conflict shocks still linger in society, a fact not to be undervalued if one remembers the significance of the post 1945 situation when compared to post 1989 developments.

Indeed, strategies of change and reform have both their followers and adversaries. In many cases, governments, i.e., the ministries of higher education, are more likely to be advocates of change than faculty and academic leaders – who would prefer reform. Dubravka Ugresic says: *the vocabulary has changed, but the grammar remains the same*. This is not only my preferred one-sentence defining argument, in all debates on the SEE, but also an impertinent denunciation of opportunism, cowardice and backwardness.

5. *How the Magna Charta could have succeeded but partially failed*

The Magna Charta Observatory should ask: why is it that, formally, nobody can seriously disagree with the charter's solemn promises for a better academic future, while, practically, the implementation of the principles outlined in 1988 seems to be much less successful? Several answers can be suggested, all of them with some value, even if they are not congruent or compatible with each other.

First of all, it is not so easy to recognise the *universal value* of the Magna Charta, because so many priorities, institutional or otherwise, are being placed before and around it. In other words, providing for bread prevails over the discussion of morals! As a consequence, *relativism* holds sway so that both professors and students are told that they are not mature enough to enjoy the privileges of academic freedom without risking to fall into the trap of abusing them!

Deviation is a second restraining course: outside society presses for a set of actions different from what the Magna Charta would require while, inside the institution, there are parallel domestic pressures pleading for a restricted understanding of the Magna Charta, not necessarily for the same reasons. In some places – like Pristina, for instance – where universities have a monopoly in the distribution of immaterial rewards, examination practices are certainly inadequate in terms of the Magna Charta principles that are officially reckoned with: when the ministry or the university leadership are corrupt, exam results become so irrelevant that even setting up a commission

for transparency, or an anti-corruption task-force makes no sense.

Thirdly, there are not many people wishing to discuss the issue and able to do so; this is a matter of *ignorance* of the lessons of history or of oblivion of present conditions. If this might sound paternalistic, SEE academics should know that the same problem exists in western institutions. This is also a question of translation from one set of circumstances to another. In many cases, the old system guaranteed more privileges with less control by legal measures and instructions than the new systems are now asking for; liberty seemed more ample earlier; the question, however, is whether that type of independence made good the needs for university accountability. If not, would not steered responsibility become a more effective tool towards true autonomy?

Fourthly, potential champions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy have so *little resources* and support that they are often considered to be the unsuccessful fools of academia. Unfortunately, in torn countries, the international community has too often marginalised those willing to change by putting back into power the élite of the past, a phenomenon witnessed in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina – and, more recently, in Iraq; the independent transition states have often been more careful not to allow past “sinners” to regain high positions in academia – sometime a difficult strategy as universities are usually far more conservative than institutions in other sectors. This last obstacle reinforces the two preceding ones as a blemished élite cannot represent the Magna Charta ideals that need translation.

Returning to earlier anthropological remarks, may we imagine for a moment the perceptions many people

would have if, on the way out of Plato's cave, they would be liberated only bit by bit, with those having already experienced the world outside setting the pace of their freedom and deciding on the permanent feedback on the event! In this image, the cave is not a prison *only*, with the outer world representing liberty; such a black and white picture never applied to SEE really – even if the example of Romania will be returned to when illustrating another aspect of a metaphor that, for the moment, can be combined with Ugresic's maxim mentioned earlier: people in the cave have the vocabulary (the call for change) and the outsiders the grammar (the modalities of reform), another simple way to illustrate the ambivalence of the two concepts. The four restrictions to Magna Charta implementation can be spotted around to diagnose possible remedies which, using its principles, could rule out conflict and solve problems inside and outside of academia – and this is the rationale of this essay which refuses to be yet another blueprint for utopia. Indeed, the four restraints and the Platonic metaphor already do provide more of an answer than of a question. Interestingly enough, however, the terms of reference for any program or project tender for the region rarely point to the forces restraining institutional autonomy and academic freedom, as indicated above; nor do successful tenders indicate an interest in these questions...

6. *The Magna Charta applies, though*

The Magna Charta incorporates a vision of the university of the future, both clearly rooted in its European past and also inclined to global perspectives on higher education taken as a whole. It is a document, which

- requires a very thorough *review of the idea(s) of the university* as set within the broader concept of the tertiary sector of education,
- asks for new *definitions of the role of the State* and of its organs when facing higher education as a partner or exerting responsibility for it,
- explains the tension and *incongruence between academic freedom and institutional autonomy*, thus challenging the links between individual and institutional freedom,
- invites further reflections about the role of *universities in the making of civil societies*.

In an impressive keynote, Juri Lotman declared that “we cannot know about the future, as long as we do not know about the present”. And today, it is clear that the attraction of the Magna Charta has transcended the borders of Europe, so much so that, in an old-fashioned way, one could say that *Europe is making its values universal through this document*. It is also clear that the shortcomings in the implementation of the Magna Charta principles have a lot to do with the unfavourable situation it meets in SEE and the Balkans. One should remember that, when the document was drafted and signed in 1988, the world was divided into two power blocks, and that the nation state was the basis for organising society. The end of the cold war had been announced by the USSR *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies, however, but the future was to prove very different from earlier anticipations – as was made clear a year later when the Berlin wall fell. The demise of the State had in fact already begun, a problem for the Magna Charta that calls for an ideal type of State as a trustworthy counterpart for the university. In SEE, the void left by declining nation-states and the resulting struggles for power make it understandable that govern-

ments and people wished to return to an age of stable community structures, that unfortunately never existed except in their dreams. This mythical past has been forced on today's civic institutions – schools, universities, and civil administration – now supposed to dance at that tune. And this is not only true in the Balkans, the disillusionment towards a deteriorating State being rather general around the globe.

At the same time, academia is at the vanguard of globalisation, testing a future of supra-national ties balanced by regional experiments, both levels of organisation emptying the political prerogatives of nation-states that hold to their geographical frontiers. One could claim that even trans-national concepts are now being replaced by expanding forms of *global domestic policy* – as if the world were one entity already. Both trends have some impact on the universities' self-perceptions, with consequences on their interactions with the national governments that, despite doubts on their relevance, are still around – even forcefully.

What does this mean for former Yugoslavia and its neighbours, where SEE is a region and the Balkans a 'principle'³, so much so that Maria Todorova could write a book entitled 'Inventing the Balkans'. If there is something like *Balkanism* analogous to what Edward Said called Orientalism, such a self-image will simply not disappear when, in a few years, most – if not all – States in

³ The Balkans and their vicinity remind of *Gregor von Rezzori's* famous construct, 'Maghrebina', where, in a sarcastic report about self-perceptions accounting for hundreds of years of external prejudices, he finds people simply obsessed by foreign rule, whatever 'foreign' means.

the region have joined the EU. Even if none of them wants to be taxed as Balkanic!

As a region, SEE is a fairly homogenous cultural space, despite many contrary opinions based on political divisions and historical oppositions. The recognition of a commonality of belonging means *denying the ethnic argument* that structures so much of the local discourse, in which religion, language, socio-geography are distorted for the sake of ethnic self-attribution. This, indeed, led to the break-up of the former Yugoslav Federation, a traumatising event as such, that was reinforced by the cruelties of the belligerents during the conflicts and wars of the 1990ies. But the Federation did not cover the entire region. Albania was also destabilised by the questioning of its borders, while Bulgaria found liberation in being accepted as an accession country by the EU; at the same time, the end of various double-games proved highly significant for Romania – which I include in the Balkans, like Greece and Turkey, contrary to Hungary and Moldavia.

Indeed, Greece has played a prominent role in the promotion of SEE higher education during its Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2003 although its Mediterranean geo-political position could have marginalised its interests in other parts of the Balkans. As for Turkey, its role in the Eastern Balkans is often underrated as if it were obscured by its struggle for EU accession. However, some of the solutions applied by this country could be more change-inspiring in the Eastern Balkans than western models.

Then, if there is some cultural homogeneity of the region, what do its systems of higher education have in common? Are there specific differences between former Yugoslav structures and others? What is the position of

the EU and various western partners – or of their own institutions of higher education about South East Europe? And, how does this all relate to the Magna Charta principles? Is a common language developing, and under which influence: if, for instance, the “Bologna” terminology is not fully understood in SEE, is the West to impose its specific interpretation of the process technicalities, a point of crucial importance not only for political reasons but also for institutional eligibility to well endowed programmes? Consequently, when defining ‘autonomy’, how is it possible to avoid the correct or supposed accusation of some neo-imperialist domination by the western discourse? On the other hand, should the spokesmen of old ideas impose their understanding of words without showing any sense of reality as far as the development of the European area of higher education is concerned? This is no theoretical matter as show the conflicts in some major universities between an orthodox leadership and faculties willing to reform themselves – or vice-versa. In short, what is the role and impact of intellectuals?

The Yugoslav model wanted to distinguish between an “honourable intelligentsia”, on the side of workers and farmers, and the rest of a dangerous “intellectual” class. This was done at a time when communism enlarged its power base by integrating nationalist elements and ideologies in its own socialist rhetoric and policies. Members of universities took advantage of these developments. Many used the limited freedom and mobility specific of the Yugoslav system to travel, to import foreign ideas or criticism and to exchange with non-socialist nations (the *Praxis* group of philosophers) as well as with the anti-Stalinist western left (the Summer meetings on the island

of Korcula)⁴. On the other hand, the Academy of Science in Belgrade played a terrible role in heating up the Kosovo issue until breaking point on the basis of aggressive racist and demographic arguments more reminiscent of a fascist than a socialist past. No wonder that Law faculties did not play a prominent role in resisting the pressure from Milosevic; it was more of a surprise, however, that much resistance came from Engineering and Science faculties. Cultural clashes (Huntington) were often a *quid pro quo* for self-justification, the consequences of which were not intended and barely foreseen by their initiators; for instance, the pretence that there are many western Slavic idioms rather than a conventional “Serbo-Croat” language led to terrible effects.

Some of these phenomena were common to all socialist countries, also to Albania despite its dissenting position within the communist camp, and, in a specific constellation, to Romania. If my assumptions about post-communist societies are correct, then we should investigate the social role of intellectuals in order to understand how they can support or impede the present leadership of higher education institutions in the region.

⁴ Many members of today’s younger generation will not even know of such references, and advocates of a clean break with the past would angrily deny any importance to these “movements” for the recent development of their countries. These “re-starters” of history are perhaps a minority but their position goes against any further alignment with the EU, as shown in some parts of Croatian higher education.

7. *The role of intellectuals*

Intellectuals can be a progressive *vanguard* fighting for transformation but they may also be a *group of reactionary peers*; thus, they should be judged in function of their *impact on the public*. Anyway, how much was the *intellectual scene* linked with the universities and how much was there an interest in changes and reforms in post-1989 academic institutions? And what was the influence exerted by migrated academics challenged by those who had stayed “at home”, either in relatively safe positions or in some permanent emergency status, if not under unsafe and threatened circumstances? The work of pre-eminent intellectuals like Žižek, Drakulić, Ugrešić, does not give prominence to the region’s universities, however: the media, the arts or the public discourse are at the centre of most of their considerations. Even Andrei Marga, a rector and the most profiled reformer of Romanian higher education after 1989, does not seem to pay much attention to the universities as agents of change. A similar phenomenon is true in the former German Democratic Republic, where the transition to freedom was not really initiated or even strengthened by higher education, but rather by other parts of civil society, the churches and many non-organised individuals. So, for seemingly cautious intellectuals, what should be so convincing and attractive in the brave new world of Bologna to consider joining it?

The main motive to do so is the wish *to join the club*. The club is not Europe as such, but a specific kind of Europe, the EU as defined by its centre of power, Brussels. All people of some knowledge about higher education know that belonging to that kind of club – be it through the Bologna process, ECTS or any other European network – is a necessity with *real* and *symbolic* advan-

tages. Is one type of advantages more important than the other? Very few are ready to make a balancing exercise between institutional image and substance as influenced by the belonging to any European grouping.

However, in the Balkans, in terms of the *real world*,

- Euro-membership is an *entrance ticket* to various networks, both disciplinary and government related.
- Moreover, the club *norms* offer the guidelines that the governments are increasingly incapable to provide.
- Thus, European rules substitute for the *cohesion structures* that used to prevail in former Yugoslavia or the socialist block.
- Indeed, the political pressure for “*Euro-compatibility*” seems so strong that there is really no other option.

In terms of *self-image*, belonging to a club also helps

- to prove loyalty and fealty to proposed change
- through the adoption of common standards or, at least, of a *common vocabulary*.
- Such concepts can prove useful *tools of domestic policy*, when opposing the established powers of tradition.
- Paradoxically, lip service to change as represented by official club membership can also allow things to stay as they are, at least for a while: *one has to change things in order to let them unchanged*, used to say Tomaso de Lampedusa.

After the *pros*, the *cons*. In the institutions’ daily *realities*,

- the drive towards euro-compatibility may cause *unrest, disorder* and the loss of well-tried structures: changes could lead to a situation worse than what is known at present!
- Anyway, people will *lose their privileges* and authority,

- while national prerogatives will be betrayed.
- Add that, at close inspection, one could wonder if the new standards are really serving their aims better than the old ones: in that case, why change?

At a *symbolic* level,

- Europe kills national values,
- deprives people from their past,
- oppresses citizens with *foreign imposed modalities* of reasoning,
- thus replacing an *authoritarian system* by yet another.

This sample of arguments is incomplete but representative of the mood of the Balkans debate on “Bologna” as a process of transformation. Supporters also want to use Bologna to strengthen young democracies: by adopting rules from the west, there is a chance to *become like the West* although none would wish to be *confused with ‘the West’*. Indeed, the west has many flaws but inspiration from its better points can only mend the deprived situation of SEE countries. That argument in favour can be summed up by the motto imagined by S.J. Lec: *ex oriente lux, ex occidente luxus...*

However, to many of the foreign experts in higher education, mainly from the West, who advise Western decision-makers involved in the region or the local authorities, the attractiveness of the European model is not very clear and the reasons for its adoption remain obscure. Indeed, given the rather tense mood prevailing among academics from “reformed” countries like Germany, it is not really evident what are the incentives to join a system that, in fact, needs renovation itself.

As a result, one should care for developing better insights into the motives and expectations lying behind official declarations; in my opinion, it is not the *real* dimen-

sion which is the stronger in daily choices but the *symbolic* one. In that sense, *Bologna* does not mean a real change in a university's attitudes; rather it signals the wish to break from the past, to align with the mainstream, – in Ugresic's words, to comply with the new vocabulary.

Rather than envisaging the system as a whole, academics often consider that, individually, not all the rejected innovations would hurt the university or its members' culture, if applied. But, at the symbolic level, the constraints and blockages are so entrenched that the feeling prevails that the adoption of new norms could put at risk the country's newly acquired sovereignty. Add the fact that the weaknesses of highly praised external models are usually better analysed and criticised by the adversaries of the reforms than by their supporters. For instance, the two-tier study structure outlined in 1999 at Bologna (dubbed the 3-5-8 scheme) has induced plenty of objections, reasonable or not, when introduced at the Law Faculty of the University of Pristina. However, in many cases, such objections were not a simple cover up for staff unwillingness to change curriculum and teaching methods. The outside scheme also aroused vital debates on the possible threats and opportunities linked to change. Indeed, one of the reasons for the pre-eminent role of the Bologna process could be its possible use by both supporters *and* adversaries of academic transformation!

As for the Magna Charta, the backdrop to the Bologna process, I fear that its implications have not been well integrated in SEE, where the questions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy are no real priority in the discourse on change or in the strategies for reform of higher education systems. The arguments outlined above can perhaps influence the structure and legislation of

higher education in the Balkans; they will not deeply affect the intellectual class, however. Indeed, it is only under extreme hardship – in dictatorships or strongly authoritarian ideological régimes – that academic freedom and institutional autonomy become vital both for university constituencies and for the survival and liberation of society.

8. *The university, an ambiguous field for freedom*

Making the SEE an island, a world of its own, is no way to understand the intellectual set up of the region, even if any anthropological approach means a discourse about “them”. Without patronising, “we” outsiders can apply in the Balkans general considerations on social development at a time of crisis. Thus, for a long time, the universities were the most stable institutions of a relatively damaged civil society trying to survive in dictatorial circumstances. Neither the church, the system of welfare or the family could really match the stability of academia, a phenomenon reflected in the continued attractiveness of higher education. This should not induce us to consider the then academic institutions as forums of permanent dissent, organised or endemic. They were often places simply left alone because the régime had more urgent priorities in other sectors. As a result, the universities *belonged* to their members much more than in the West. Therefore, when ‘we’, westerners, come and preach for autonomy and, as a result, ask for a constructive dialogue to be entered with the political leaders to develop consensus on legislation and organisation, all this seems rather restrictive compared to the relative freedom which

the institutions used to enjoy under socialism⁵. The lesson to be drawn is that academic freedom and individual elbow-margin are different things, and that the construct of socialist and nationalist doctrines – often combined – built social peace on small personal advantages now set aside. One of the major misunderstandings is the European assumption that the introduction of western reforms will actually improve the situation of those directly affected by change in SEE. The “we” vs. “they” approach has some truth because Europe is not yet united and because apparently patronising attitudes from the West are still a necessity to boost real change, especially in the field of academic freedom and a “civic” approach to higher education.

In past times, even when the universities were not kept on a short leash, they were indeed a core element in the system of socialised ownership of both intellectual and physical labour. From that point of view, their integration into the country’s socio-economic structures was much tighter than it has ever been in the West, which gave all the more value to their relative freedom within a framework of submission to the rules, a freedom that could be big, when not almost unlimited, in several cases. I do not want to draw easy comparisons, but the modalities – if not the essence – of dictatorship vary; in the same way as Mussolini had a softer approach than Hitler towards most artists and scientists, socialist countries also developed differences in their handling of intellectuals. And Yugoslavia, for that matter, offered a model of liberal socialism that could be considered as some kind of

⁵ Serb conservatives accused Deputy Minister Srbjanka Turajlic to act worse than Milosevic.

real third way. If many scholars and students suffered from prosecution, the mobility of intellectuals and their capacity to organise outside the university was less restricted than in other countries. That academic freedom, although relative, opened the way to some dissent in communication and exchange, but also produced a tranquil state of grateful conformity. From that paradoxical situation, many intellectuals drew the conclusion that socialism in former Yugoslavia was not “real” and that its remainders are thus less evident or have less impact than, say, in Northern Europe. This is perhaps true from the angle of the pure doctrine of socialist statehood, but it is also rather deceptive because it hides the fact that flaws in civil society were then justified by a very special form of nationalism (Busek, etc.). The university, acting both as a cohesive factor of the nation – and as an agent of personal privileges granted to a large number of its members – was exemplary of the *modus vivendi* holding the Yugoslav Federation together. Today’s reluctance to reforms is thus provoked by a shift away from the old political structure that induces nostalgic regret of some kind of lost “social security”. Indeed, the western import of reforms and changes to Yugoslav institutions did not take into account either the existing enclaves of *delegated freedom* in academia, or the negative social effects which the new market economy inflicted on past links between academia and industry or between universities and other state regulated institutions. Social ownership – in this context – could also be easily de-constructed.

Romania might be compared with Tito’s Yugoslavia in so far as both countries were the chosen friends of Western foreign policy for a long time – an attempt to split the socialist block in supporting Tito as a leader of

the non-aligned countries and Ceaucescu as a loose element of the COMECON. In both countries, the intellectuals had profited of that semi-independence, though not on equal levels, Romania remaining tighter. Today, Romania is left alone with a troubled past and the support which that country in transition enjoys in the academic sector is hardly sufficient to stabilise present reforms. If that country does not face its past, in its various forms, including the marginalisation of a large minority of Roms, change will be difficult indeed. As for Bulgaria, it certainly suffers greatly from the brain-drain and from internal migrations that are emptying the rural parts of the country. To the West, it was a 'forgotten' heart-land of communism, characterised however by a relatively high standard of education, given the circumstances, and by a tremendous lack of those resources and young people that make modernisation possible. For me, the emigration of a well formed generation of young people would indeed entitle Bulgaria to some kind of international compensation from the countries taking advantage of that new diaspora.

In all SEE nations, and not only in Bulgaria, a new *culture of capital cities* is emerging, which has done away with old balances between town and country. Fast growing cities take over the vitality of the nation as a whole, the realities existing beyond their limits having no longer real political weight. Such a centralisation trend is not only going to influence the discussion about "flagship" universities in the Balkans but will also induce further differentiation among institutions of higher education. As a result, greater attention should be given to the *regional agenda* of all institutions of higher education, so that productive use is being made of the tension between "academic freedom" and "civil liberties", the university re-

maintaining one of the rare functioning institutions still able to feed everywhere the development of civil society.

9. *Historical legacies and short-cuts*

If dealing with the political past calls for historical approximations, accounting for today's national identity begs for historical simplification, a way to focus on a few arguments only to justify the present structures – also in higher education. History is thus being used to legitimise national and institutional profiles which are outdated but serve as a *social prop.* For instance, in SEE, university studies enjoy high prestige. After secondary school, the university represents the most attractive next step for a good CV; as a consequence, access and admission policies are important areas for social regulation. Indeed, the way the university is accepted in the region as an unquestioned institution is really impressive; however, at closer look, this splendid image does not correlate with the quality of academic services and the universities' integrative role in civil society. This gap, to be studied, would need some kind of SWOT analysis made by higher education “brokers” bringing together academia and the community. Unfortunately, this expertise does not really exist.

The distortion between public expectations and university services is also reinforced in SEE by the scarcity of resources coming from governments and taxpayers. Moreover, collective psyche has been traumatised in Eastern Europe, and especially in the Balkans, by dramatic events often linked to bursts of extreme violence. Thus, SEE is still shaken by the collapse, through civil war, of the Federation of Yugoslav Republics during the 1990ies or by the NATO interventions in Kosovo and Macedonia; it is also affected by the trials of former po-

litical and military leaders at the International Tribunal in the Hague or by the debate about the democratic benchmarks that need to be met to enter the European Union – not to speak of the split between European and American priorities concerning Iraq and the Middle East. All these tensions are being reflected in the “intelligentsia” and, if not in all aspects, discussed by a minority of people – at least inside the universities and among the younger generation. The move towards a plural society (which implies a less restricted collective ego and the nurturing of more open psychological attitudes) has certainly its place in higher education: indeed, the universities train the teachers who should repair the group confidence needed to face peacefully other communities, in the SEE or beyond, for instance through international exchange. This role of academia will have to be taken into account in all policies supposed to help society to choose between “reform” and “change”. At the heart of such a choice, the definition of “public resources” is at stake: what should one understand to be “public” and what are the “legitimate resources belonging to higher education”? The definitions accepted in the West – used as norms fixing the responsibilities of State and society – have no roots in SEE; and, even imposed by IMF, the World Bank and global business, they are never implemented without compromises to local realities. Under the liberal economy exists a concrete world whose many features are often not brought out in the more global pictures referred to by international decision-makers⁶.

In that context, the bitter struggle of faculties to maintain their power has not much to do with preserving

⁶ cf. the EUA statements on the WTO – GATS negotiations.

efficiency. It reflects much more traumatic experiences of *loss*, even when there is no direct or personal catastrophe to justify negative feelings and attitudes. As a matter of fact, the Serbs are certainly more divided – and open – over painful issues than the Croats, who have managed to bury the issue prematurely under a kind of normality, where “victims” of former dissensions appear to the surface only from time to time. For the governments in Zagreb, obliterating the past seems to be the easiest route on the way to EU membership. Thus, the new government issued from recent elections has stuck to its predecessor’s European priorities at the risk of splitting from its electoral basis. Such an attitude can be explained also by the “democratic fatigue” prevailing in all SEE countries. Indeed, in the Balkans, an efficient alignment with the West, a drive towards a stronger economy and the needs for a better security have marginalised the universities as pillars of civil society. This marginalisation is used by opponents to imminent academic reforms – they take the pretext of fatigue as an excuse not to do anything.

10. *Agents of change and potential buffer institutions*

To be implemented, the Magna Charta as a vision of the university needs champions and allies. The Observatory, its mouthpiece, can develop links with people of a similar mind – academic kin, university leaders and peers in the ministries. They all know each other and form a rather stable community of higher education with varied relations to international organisations (OECD, Council of Europe, CEPES, EUA, OSI, WUS), with national bodies (rectors’ conferences or NARIC/ENIC agencies) or with EU programmes (SOCRATES, TEMPUS) – as well as with a growing constellation of consultants and

researchers in higher education. This all represents, with its own discourse and set of references, a body of thought which does not always reach the persons it should help move towards self-determination and autonomy. Relevance and dissemination are no new problems but they are certainly central to the real influence of ideas that are rather foreign to SEE. Outside experts meet with people who listen, but nobody can be sure that the audience will follow up with action. Immobility, indeed, is a sign of silent opposition, an easy way to preserve a threatened identity. While the West – with difficulties and a lot of troubles – has developed a system of checks and balances that makes exclusion and sanctions real to the members of academia, the Balkans live by a different set of controls: many university peers are still bound to authorities that have lost authority, somewhat like clerics who, having lost faith, still pay their respect to a dead god. Thus, listening without acting or, even, re-acting, reinforces the phenomenon of an unchanged grammar. Transformation needs persons both ready to cooperate and to act as buffers between the old and the new thinking. Finding them is no easy task. I am thinking both of westerners and of local agents with enlightened views.

B. *Proposals*

11. *What shall be done? What can be done?*

In our search for adequate strategies on academic freedom and institutional autonomy, we are stumbling on one fact: in the Balkans, changes in higher education align more or less on a “politically correct” harmonisation process dictated by the logic of access to the European Union. Changes in consciousness and perspectives, how-

ever, should be based on very different assumptions – with no or little reference to the EU. Political correctness applied to “academic freedom” and “institutional autonomy” implies the risk of their being used as *tools* rather than pursued as *aims*. Utilitarianism offers similar temptations in the West although, with more resources, it was possible there to enter a new stage of higher education activities without dwelling too much on principles. Will we all have to learn unexpected lessons for such a lack of perspectives on the essence of academic work⁷? Or can we reconcile ideals and instrumentation, in SEE and beyond? Can the westerners learn about the experience of their colleagues in the Balkans – people who seem better informed about the West than the westerners about them? Answering these questions will help all academics to keep up with developments that will be decisive for the future of the new democracies and societies still in transition. For the Magna Charta, change will not succeed without good universities. If it were for philosophy or the theory of higher education, I could stop here and leave the rest to practitioners. As a member of the Observatory, however, I wish to explore the opportunities for the extension in the Balkans of academic freedom and university autonomy.

12. *A framework*

What does academic freedom entail in any of the SEE systems of higher education? It first means regained *authority for science* as an actor in civil society rather than as

⁷ cf. the four volume *History of the University in Europe* being published presently at Cambridge University Press under the aegis of CRE now EUA.

an agent of politicians. This requires full separation from any kind of corruption. Then, academic freedom can be recognised for what it is: a privilege, an added value if not a joy instead of an obligation restricted by plenty of limitations. Thus, a dual allegiance is made possible for academics, to the institution – rather than the faculty or discipline – and to the new civil order, i.e., the rule of law and the republican idea of the university. A tough list of requirements in the Balkans context! I owe to Ryan Schroeder, my former political advisor in Kosovo, the idea of a “*sub-Magna Charta*” for the South East of Europe: it would have the same focus as the main document but would translate principles to the circumstances of the Balkans as a community of countries with parallel obligations.

In such a context, *authority*, to be regained, would need to be considered as partially lost. Of course, some scholars have received their PhDs from foremost universities; others have proved to be eminent researchers; a few, even, have been so outstanding that the rules of the normal academic market have been waived for them. The majority of academics, however, were employees of a socio-economic system proven insufficient long before it collapsed, a fact that threw doubts on their career. Real authority, indeed, cannot bear with subservience if higher education institutions, as social partners, are to be the “locus of useful and critical minds” rather than the providers of solutions to problems defined by politicians. Real authority then requires the integration of the diverse *quality* assurance mechanisms now under development, not only in a control mode but also in a creative mood vis-à-vis the proposed standards. And this is no institutional issue only, as a true quality culture calls for the re-

view of individual performance vis-à-vis common benchmarks. Thus, the institution – and the members it consists of – would regain international acceptance, reputation and their “position” within the scientific community although on lines probably different from the old hierarchies. Quality as the way towards scientific authority represents the hinge on which change can be promoted.

Ridding the system of any kind of *corruption* is essential for a revamped understanding of academic freedom. This is not easy, all the more so when, under western influence, the GATS negotiators call for a “commodification” of all services produced at the university, a concept that somewhat encompasses the type of intelligence alienation usual in old SEE university systems. There, everything could be sold, entrance exams, access to prestigious disciplines like medicine and law, career promotion, and knowledge itself insofar as students were linked to their professors’ teaching, irrespective of the relevance of their courses. Extortion, sexual harassment, exclusion were thus easy and frequent power games. This should lead the Magna Charta not only to condemn corruption in its routine practice in the Balkans – and beyond – but also to disagree with the WTO use of slogans turning everything (good, service or idea) into commodities that can be exchanged and paid for, according to market laws responding to supply and demand. To face that double-headed challenge, the Magna Charta needs to stress its more humanistic values, its critical understanding of society so that the academic community does not feel abandoned to the invisible laws of the market. This means that the fight against corruption and the correction of distorted market policies cannot be issues separated from the academic agenda. Especially as organised crime could

also affect new areas, for instance research and development now that they are being restored as university activities, or it could increase its hold on access issues now that fees are becoming more competitive in the region.

Why speak of the *joy of academic freedom*? Worldwide, I have noticed a certain “fatigue” in the academic profession, bordering on disillusionment, as the values and appreciation of higher education have been regressing over the last few years. There is no room here to start a political analysis of the reasons of that phenomenon even if such an observation may seem exaggerated in certain regions or totally wrong in the case of specific institutions; in my opinion, in these times of re-alignment, change has made two victims, *the status of intellectuals* and *the environment*. It might then sound a bit paradoxical to advocate an “education of the academic spirit”, if not its re-education, in a manner that would point to the many pleasures of academic freedom when set in a framework of commitment to quality, devotion to teaching or curiosity for research, all areas that are to be based on the constant perfectibility of intellectual work ... a utilitarian job can be boring but a calling to personal growth and development is an open promise of fulfilment!

A dual allegiance should not be too difficult to practise; however, in SEE countries, the challenge of combined *loyalty* is hard to meet. Communism and the traditional organisation of academia have systematically diminished the priorities involving an allegiance to higher education institutions as such, by stressing the individuals’ belonging to legally and economically independent Faculties. Thus, Rectors have been the mere representatives (or the coordinating body) of Deans who held the real power at the university. We know why such a fragmentation of

the university was developed; today, circumstances have changed and there is no way to go back to that system. Academic freedom *in* an autonomous institution is the new principle for linking people, State, science and the stakeholders at large. In short, students do study a discipline but they do so *at a university*, not simply *in* or *at* a faculty. Moving away from the segmentation of the institution *and* of science will allow for a productive reconstruction of a modern system of higher education where universities as such will be agencies of civil society.

13. *Where to start?*

The *Statutes* and internal rules of a university give shape and continuity to the institution's presence in the community. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy should be supported in the bye-laws. This is where change should start. If this is true for western universities, it becomes vital for SEE establishments when legislation affects concrete reform programs. Shared rules for a common type of behaviour structure the institutions not only as lonely actors on the intellectual scene but also as nodes of a grid of knowledge, European or worldwide. For universities that have been heavily damaged or even destroyed by war and political conflict over a long period, international references are indeed essential to live up to the expectations of such a network. Thus, regional cooperation can create an intellectual market of its own, a group of common interests that can even turn to be a real partner for the European Union. Shared vision, tools and projects should also induce a new pride in intellectual and academic achievements, a situation that has not been associated with the Balkans for a long time.

This close connection between rules and external visibility is well illustrated by the case of the University of Pristina. This institution was given the unique chance to reorganise itself through bye-laws passed under a very progressive and effective law, written with the support of the Council of Europe and numerous experts. This new set of rules brought in by the UN mission in Kosovo was needed to replace the applicable law in the province (which was Serbian) as well as the “Parallel regulations” set up after 1991 by the Albanian-speaking academic community. By and large, this course of action was accepted. When, following the promulgation of a new law on higher education in June 2003, the university was asked to amend its provisional statute, it fell into regressive patterns of thought. The redrafted statute turned out to be a convoluted, bureaucratic text, based on rather illiberal rules reminiscent of the old Serbian model. Not many innovative articles were added to the document that could be claimed as typically “kosovar”. At the request of both the Ministry and the Rectorate in Pristina – who disagree on the changes that would be needed to improve the text – a thorough review of the Statute has been made by the Magna Charta and the European University Association. My point is that the document prepared by the university does not give life to potential freedoms that could help promote liberties for staff and students; on the contrary, the draft reduces freedom to a rather formal chain of command while reintroducing censorship under the stiff authority of bureaucrats – rather than scholars – an organisational trap that has been denounced already. In effect, the University of Pristina, by its renewed statute, condemns itself *not* to play a *regional role*, not even for the Albanian population in Kosovo. This regional pres-

ence, however, represents one of the most evident correlates of academic freedom in so far as the institution “dares to be”: academic freedom then gives a *purpose* to institutional autonomy, a perspective that, for constant reference, should be written down in a *statement of mission*.

My second example comes from Serbia. In 2001, the first attempt to enlarge university autonomy was strongly supported by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sports. Under regulations replacing the dictatorial rules of 1998, universities were indeed asked to define their own roles. Belgrade University, the flagship of Serbian higher education, complied meticulously with the letter of the law by defining itself (once again) as an agent of the (socio-political) system, with all the limitations and self-restrictions linked to a communist past. The University of Novi Sad, on the contrary, tried to test new missions and agendas, extending its action in all areas not explicitly prohibited by law – and seemingly advantageous for the institution’s development. Those two approaches stimulated very different reactions within the universities themselves, thus provoking in each institution different conflicts and controversies. These examples point to key issues: the internal “constitution” of the university is the condition for its effective impact on academic freedom, science, student academic progress, the qualification of future researchers, or the community at large. Turned around, the argument reads: community demands should define the validity of a Statute as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of supportive legislation and higher education policy.

In economic terms, universities cannot simply stay on the “supply side”; they need not only to balance their offer with what is demanded but also to examine the way

they deliver services. Demand and capacity should be both critically reviewed rather than considered as granted. A clinical department of oncology, for instance, cannot be set up simply because there is one doctor with the appropriate degree; the matter should be discussed with the health authorities and other stakeholders, local or regional, to see how a research and development unit can be built, and at what costs in the long run: it could even prove wiser and more cost-effective to treat patients in foreign countries! In other words, when applied, academic freedom does not open the way to just any interesting initiatives On the contrary, it calls for a well-founded behaviour based

- on a critical appraisal of the potential and capacities of the institution,
- on a clear understanding of community needs,
- on a pro-active positioning of the institution as one committed agent of social development among many.

I started this essay speaking of SEE as a region. I now move to another connotation of the word, the region as the environment where a specific institution can have an impact. Academic freedom has influence on these two regional levels.

SEE shares a common past, indeed, characterised by traditions that have been merged under authoritarian rule by various political systems, some of them dictatorships, none of them democracies. The functions of higher education and science, of research, development and service, of qualification and training were all melted in the same pot, with no regard to their various origins. May I make a detour to illustrate the situation? The Balkans have not been part of the mainstream of European enlightenment in the way most western countries have. Moreover, the

interval period between the old empires or monarchies and the second World War – that was followed immediately by communist régimes – proved too short to plant strong seeds for enlightenment. The European University, however, when understood as a concept, cannot be discussed without taking into account the impact of enlightenment on an institution that either integrated or refused it. The Austro-Hungarian model was shaped by this tension. While, in the West, the ‘dialectics of enlightenment’ replaced a black-and-white perspective on modernity, SEE had to make two incongruent steps at the same time: on one side, it had to adopt the development and progress brought to other parts of Europe by rational approaches to modernity, and, on the other side, to answer the demands of a global market economy while facing, in the academic world, a kind of post-modern culture. All these perspectives were somewhat foreign to the region. As was the Magna Charta – whose concepts of academic freedom and autonomy are certainly derived from a European enlightenment now on the brink of re-evaluation because of the growth of globalisation and supra-national phenomena.

Major studies have shown these dilemma, as confronted both by Europe and SEE. I am afraid that these analyses all lack a component that has more than symbolic importance for university stakeholders and members, i.e., the tension between the integration of the demands of the time *inside* the institution, in order to create a climate of freedom and open initiatives, and the transformation required to become, towards the *outside*, an agency of reform of societies in transition. The enlightened university must thus successfully combine functions with both external and internal dimensions, such as *servi*

personal development (through learning, competence acquisition, ethics or aesthetic judgment), *adapting to the market* (from blue sky research to practical application of knowledge), or *granting degrees* (with supposes the authority to examine and certify), not to mention *acting as a critical adviser* by fighting the superficiality of common sense – especially when it does not make sense! Meeting the needs of these various functions, inside and outside, is the purpose of the universities' practical organisation. This can be reached through permanent reform processes – as was the case in most western countries where universities, as 'loosely coupled systems', could cope over time with the appearance of many successive obstacles: the "stronger" parts of the institution, endowed with some autonomy of their own, were supporting the defective or weaker elements.

In SEE, this process has not been possible. At best, the universities coped with the difficulties just to maintain some functionality and legitimacy, or they adapted to system structures which they could not really influence – either by subservience or by sheer negligence! To ascertain personal responsibility vis-à-vis institutional accountability in SEE would require some kind of "commissions on truth", like those set up in South Africa where the examination of the past was based not so much on goodwill than on strong outside pressures. This could help get rid of excuses of self-righteousness in the political and in the academic spheres. Values cannot be mixed up. A lousy scientist may have become a powerful Dean by enslaving to the system; so might also have done a very good scholar! In turn, this means that not all the brave members of resistance and opposition are automatically good scientists or students. Indeed, it was hard for me when I was in charge of Kosovo education to make clear that

“freedom fighters” would not get examination bonuses when returning to their studies – even if, after 1945, soldiers did benefit from special access conditions, also in the West. My refusal to take into account battle field experience was justified by the need to align with the enlightened framework of Reason which the universities in SEE need to engage so much.

In short, all the points mentioned above should form the texture of any Statute that would combine moral integrity – rather than witch hunts – with the service to the community, a service expressed by activities needed in the wider market of knowledge, a market requiring integrated training, qualifications and competencies as well as values that transcend it, so that an educated and democratic élite can replace, step by step, the old structures of power and government.

14. *Individuals and ‘corporate freedom’*

The 20th and 21st centuries have been saturated with “BillGatisms”, i.e., the pidgin of Microsoft and international organisations combined with the slang of British accountants and plenty of Anglo-American neologisms supposed to encapsulate the phenomenon of globalisation. This is certainly a normal evolution for English as a *lingua franca*. In the 19th century, diplomats spoke French, and the language of higher education was German. And moving from one culture to the other was never an easy task. For instance, “Bildung” can only be translated by complicated periphrases, and “Akademische Korporation” certainly does not equate with academic corporation, corporate university or corporate academia. Giving words a similar connotation thus becomes a central feature of the development of meaning in advanced western

systems of higher education: using indeed the same signs and significance informs the dispute between the rights of the individuals to academic freedom and the right to autonomy of corporate academia in institutions. The latter is denied by the hardliners among the “individualists”, or made relative by the “softer factions”. Of course, no one does question individual rights! However, what does risk to happen when individual and institutional rights do not concur – or even oppose each other? The Magna Charta Observatory has discussed an example of a potential conflict of that kind when the State, through legislation, binds individuals to limits that could restrict their constitutionally guaranteed academic freedom⁸. That case – about the Mecklenburg law of higher education passed in 2003 – discusses the right of the State to induce value-based obligations that would force all staff to meet societal goals or government-fixed objectives. Professors contested the constitutional validity of article 5 of that law, asking it to be annulled even if there had not been any infringement of academic freedom yet. The case was never decided as the Parliament, without waiting for the Court, decided to amend the litigious article; the defendants then withdrew although the new wording did not satisfy them completely. Indeed, opinions were deeply divided about the limits of State authority and of academic liability.

Of course, for the Magna Charta, the State should not curtail individual academic freedom. But is the State – representing public good – really forbidden to impose its

⁸ Magna Charta Observatory, *Academic freedom and university institutional responsibility in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern*, Bonna University Press, 2003

core values and purposes to the higher education public system? The question is of greater relevance in systems of Humboldtian tradition than in Napoleonic ones – where, like in France, academic freedom would not be considered as contradictory to the general purposes of the nation. In post-communist countries, the problem has another dimension: communism has never accepted the division between State and society: the old legal system brought together solidarity, social protection and common responsibilities; and people felt protected, included and respected. In such a community, the university approach of academic freedom defended in Mecklenburg made little sense as roles were confused. The issue is important as the recent separation of functions now prevailing in transition countries has deflated in particular the past social position of officials and university staff. Moreover, it seems that positions, pensions and dignity are all going their own legal ways in the present market economy, a new society that breeds unusual complexity. The terms of the debate have changed, too the worse for many as far as their personal entitlements are concerned. However, the new differentiation of the social actors' rights and obligations makes it also possible to discuss academic freedom and institutional autonomy, a highly controversial matter since the definition of such rights could lead to redesigning the academic pecking order. In such a context, indeed, the question of the overriding role of the university as an institution vis-à-vis initiatives taken by staff as persons – employed by the university – has not yet gained the importance it has reached among western academics and researchers.

In SEE, this also mirrors the reduced importance of citizenship, at least as a tool of democracy. There is little

“republican” spirit (*res publica*, i.e., public good) and little sense of community ownership by individual members of society. Too often, for instance, the *right to publish* is reduced by “corporate” procedures – that simply mean possible control over the expression of scientific opinions by members of the institution. Personally, when working for Kosovo, I lost many battles against this type of censorship inside the University of Pristina. Indeed, the position of the individual towards his or her institution, and the position of the two vis-à-vis constitutional rights, are quite different from western tradition. On one side, the authority of officials and decision-making bodies is less questioned even in matters of opinion and freedom of expression, irrespective of whether these civil servants of public authorities have been appointed or elected in an acceptable and democratic way. On the other side, subservience to the power structure – at the cost of free will – reflects in SEE countries the little success of dissent in academia, contrary to what happened on the cultural scene in general. We should note, however, that the internalisation of power structures by individuals has helped protect the “autonomy” of the institution, when governments or parties tightened their grips on the intelligentsia. In short, the relationship between inclusive procedures (an integrated institution *inside*) and the claim for democratic leadership by the universities (a university speaking with one voice towards the *outside*) needs further exploration.

If the de-politicised “economical” approach of a market-oriented and entrepreneurial university is to be the immediate successor of the “political” arrangements of institutions considered as state-governed agencies of the ruling ideology, then there is a good chance that the

“re-engineering” of post-communist operational routines into the “new grammar” of metamorphosed structures of action will not occur. As a result, patterns of the past will emerge again – in a different guise, however, as they will use the latest references of power (the “new vocabulary”). This could lead to modern – and even efficient – programmes in teaching and research. The risk, however, is that they will not meet purposes other than those of the market, thus marginalising key objectives of personal and community growth born out of the possible reorganisation of civil structures in society. Paradoxically, the officials of former times will find it easier to regain strength in the “neutral” market economy than the old liberals – who want to stay liberal, today also, thus refusing the “alienation of money” after that of power. The latter claim that all social debates need grounding in transparency, inclusion and dialogue – values that also fuel the spirit of academic freedom. Indeed, for the Magna Charta, these are basic constraints for the management of institutional autonomy, in the Balkans and beyond. This means considering man as a multi-faceted actor of social culture rather than a one-dimensional producer of tradable goods and services. And this is the final objective of the *universitas*, everywhere.

C. *Conclusion*

As a person, I am rather pessimistic about SEE societies’ capacity to support and sustain a change in their “grammar” if higher education institutions are unable to take the lead in the debate and in the transformation. This essay, like the Magna Charta, is a bet placed on the university’s and academia’s ability to turn to social advantage the difficult situation from which the Balkans – or

other unfortunate parts of the world – are facing the challenges of the new century.

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Finito di stampare
Nel mese di giugno 2004
Presso le Grafiche MDM S.p.A.