

SINAIA STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY, ROMANIA, 1992

1. The Sinaia International Conference on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy met at a moment of great change. All institutions of society, and especially universities, are affected by the social, political and economic upheavals surrounding them. Indeed, universities have a singular opportunity and obligation to contribute to the development of society and to play an active role in shaping the societies they serve.

History has shown that violations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy have high costs in intellectual regression, social alienation and economic stagnation. In light of profound social changes and new demands placed on universities, there is a need to forge a new understanding between universities and society. A reaffirmation and revitalization of the principles of academic freedom and university autonomy are imperative.

2. This is not the first time that universities have faced the challenges of social, political, economic and cultural transformations. Universities have proved themselves to be adaptable while at the same time honouring their historic commitment to scholarship and teaching. The ability of universities to maintain both their traditional vocation and their relevance to society in the 21st century will require that they view these changes as challenges to their imagination and resourcefulness and not as threats to their mission. The knowledge and know-how of universities will be crucial in tackling the many challenges society faces: cultural and national separatism, the protection of the environment, the development of human potential, to name but a few. These problems will not be easily resolved, nor, certainly, will they be resolved by universities alone. But universities can and should play a key role in the quest for solutions.

3. The defining characteristic of the university is its commitment to open and independent inquiry. This characteristic also distinguishes the nature of university research, which, unlike partisan research, seeks knowledge and understanding in a completely unrestricted manner. The same principles of unfettered inquiry apply to teaching and the dissemination of knowledge. This commitment to the pursuit of truth gives universities all over the world their universal values and enables them to embark on the important paths of regional and international co-operation, which are so important to the vitality of the modern university.

In affirming the value of academic freedom, the Conference participants recognize that universities themselves have a responsibility to nurture academic freedom within their own communities. Similarly, governments and the public must respect the rights of universities to serve as centres of completely free inquiry and of social criticism.

4. As part of this revitalised understanding with society, universities recognize their obligation to demonstrate to decision-makers and to the public at large the value of their enterprise. Specifically, universities must develop convincing mechanisms of evaluation which demonstrate their quality and effectiveness.

5. Universities have an obligation to speak out against all kinds of intolerant behaviour. This obligation takes on particular urgency in light of the forces recently unleashed in Europe and elsewhere in the world. To reaffirm the values of tolerance and the primacy of peaceful solutions is not to ignore the significance of different cultural traditions but to promote mutual understanding and co-operation. Without them, there can be no civilised life at all, let alone any role for the university.

RECOMMENDATION

The Sinaia International Conference on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy:

- aware of the increasing international importance attached to higher education and its impact on society;
- recognizing the concepts of academic freedom and university autonomy as essential elements for the fulfilment of the mission of universities;
- stressing the importance of the notion of the accountability and the social responsibility of universities;
- taking into account the efforts to develop an international understanding on academic freedom and university autonomy such as the Magna Charta of European Universities (Bologna, 1988) the Declarations of Lima (1988), Kampala (1988) and Dar-es-Salam (1990), and the outcome of several recent meetings of international academic organizations, urges UNESCO to give the matter of academic freedom and university autonomy its utmost attention and to prepare an international instrument for the protection and promotion of these values.

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