

Addressing the crisis of  
academic freedom in  
European higher education:  
The “Fundamental Values of  
Higher Education” Project

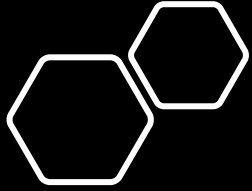
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# The “fundamental values” project

- One the most effective endeavors addressing the crisis of academic freedom in Europe.
- Although not how it intended to.
- A complex but convergent and effective **project**.



# The state of academic freedom in Europe

The state of academic freedom in Europe is one of **crisis**.

*Nature and origins of the crisis.*

*Is it a crisis?*

*Is “Europe” a valid unit of analysis? Given Brexit, EU/EHEA, Ukraine, globalization of HE, national variance within Europe.*

# Symptoms

Infringements in both East and West- a “crisis” of just challenges? From insidious to extreme.

Lex CEU - ECJ difficulties in ruling on the case (no shared, up to date, effective references/codification of academic freedom)

T. Karran’s studies on academics’ representation of academic freedom

Should Sciences Po cooperate with Fudan?

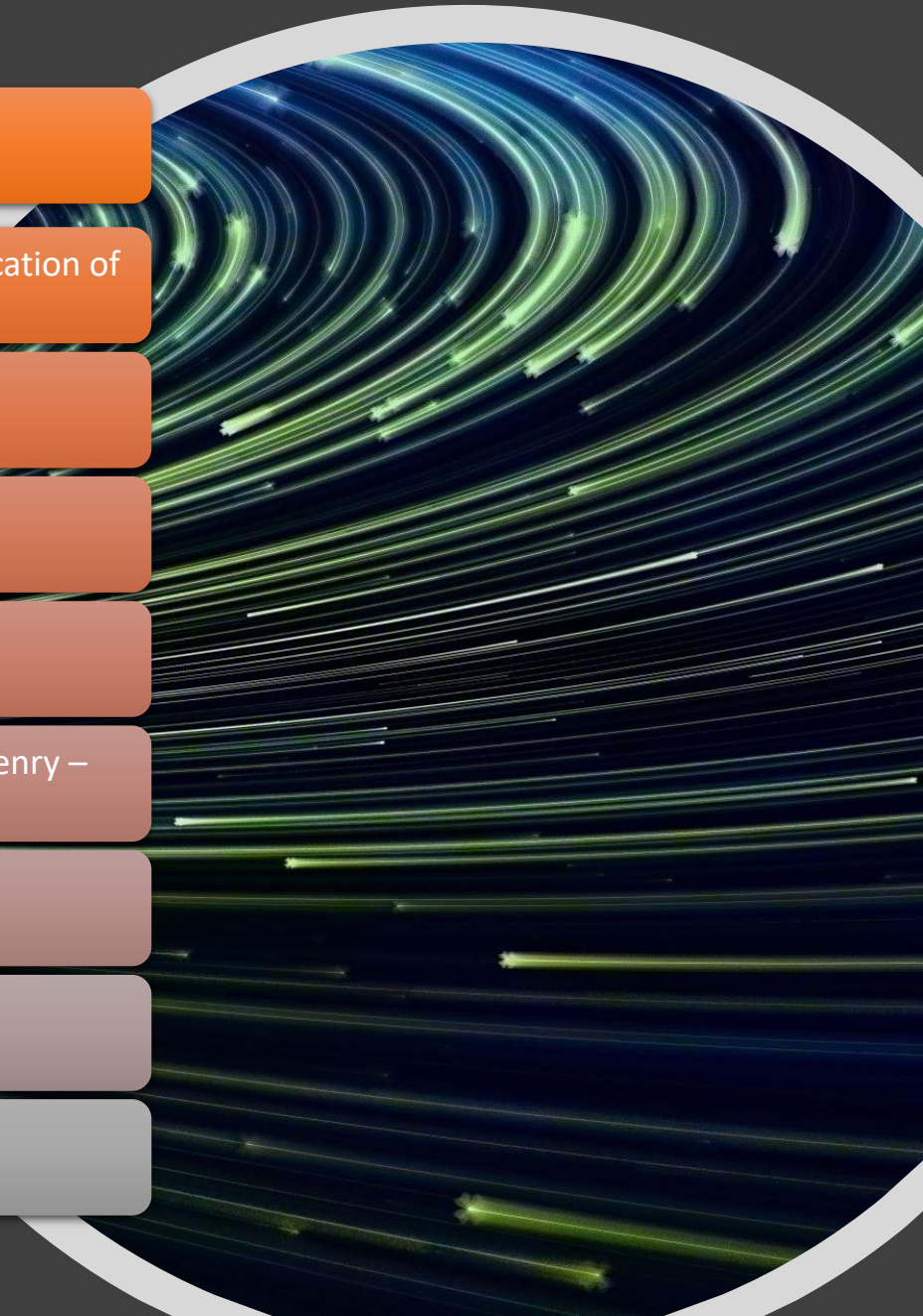
Turkey repression after the 2016 –does solidarity work?

Frédérique Vidal – freedom of research and teaching hurts universities themselves and the citizenry – unless redefined by the state.

GPPi Index of Academic Freedom

Diverging paths –university autonomy and academic freedom.

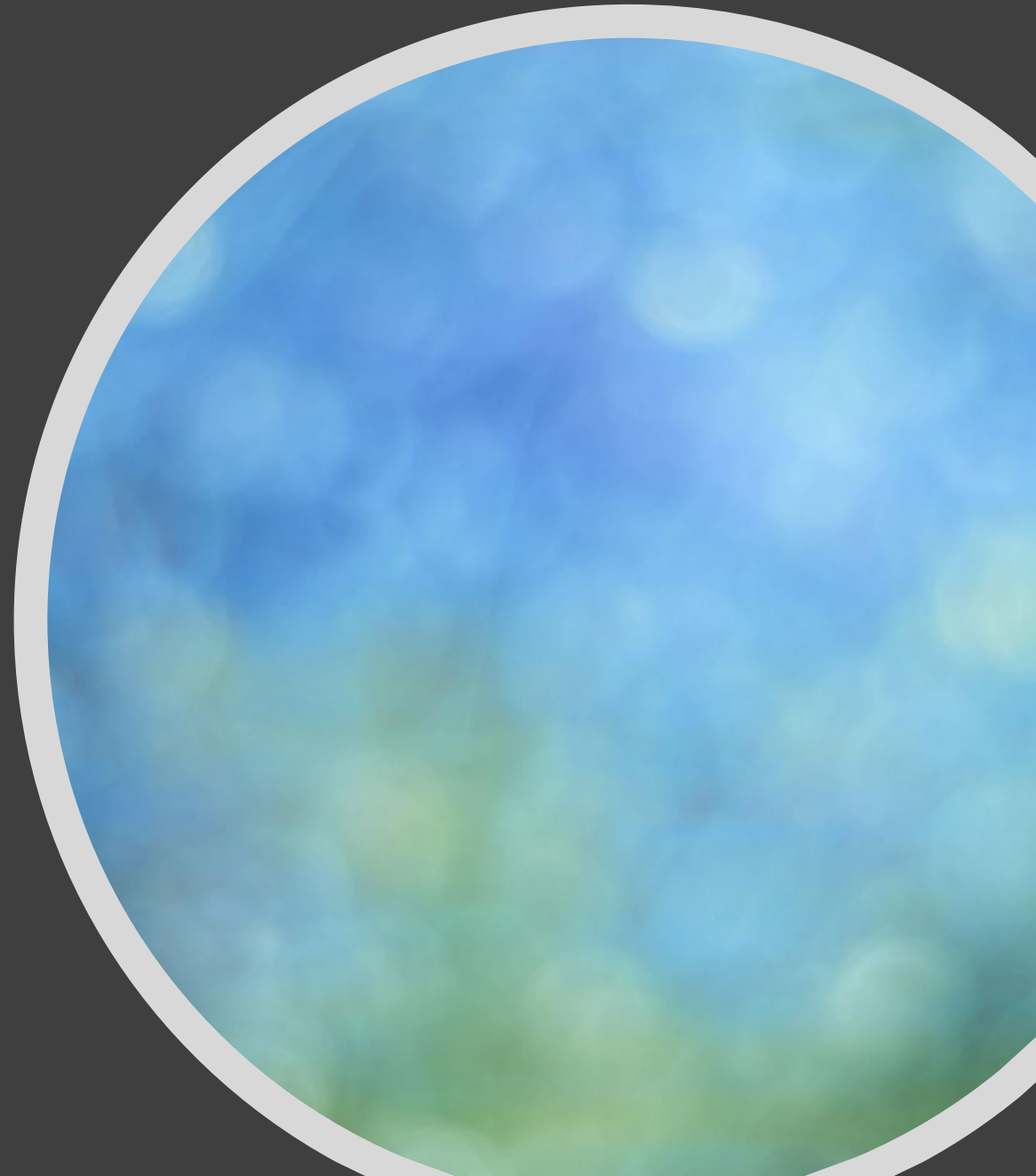
Etc.



# Nature/origin of the crisis

- Empirical (regulatory, political)  
and intellectual

European, not global (if true, it implies that a European solution is needed, not national or global?)





**Empirical**  
(regulatory,  
political)  
**and**  
**intellectual**  
crisis

Infringements, restriction, repression - empirical

Academic freedom - taken for granted until recently;  
intellectual neglect.

**Need to reconceptualize, codify anew AF.**

**Need for a shared, adapted and effective European  
reference for academic freedom**

Current references: missing, outdated, ineffective:  
outdated epistemology, not adapted to current  
realities in the economy, society, politics and HE itself.

# Charting a course for academic freedom out of the crisis



Charting a course – plotting a course by the aircraft pilot or a ship captain:

**manual/technical**

and

**intellectual endeavor**

A project? Or a process?

**“Fundamental values” offered a moral and intellectual framework, also a tactically suitable approach**

# A way out of the crisis

- **A European reference for academic freedom: shared, up to date effective**
- **Instruments** (monitoring, enforcing promoting, protecting)
- **Institutions?** (e.g. ESG-EQAR)



# Underpinning a new course for AF: what tactical approach might work best?

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- New legislation?
- Old legislation plus advocacy? Jurisprudence?
- Education?
- Political pressure and funding conditionalities?
- New intellectual/policy elaboration?

# If new intellectual elaboration...

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What kind of concept, entity is academic freedom anyway?

- Human Right?
- Fundamental Right?
- Legal right (national legislation)?
- Informal norm (tradition -good or bad)?
- Governance principle/model (e.g. Autonomy Scorecard)?
- Value?

# The “Fundamental Values of Higher Education” Project

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- Why “project”? What kind of project? Better term? Framing?
- One or several projects? *E.g: MCO Living Values Project; EHEA Fundamental Values*
- New or not quite? “Transgression(s)”, “diversion” (tactical approach)?
- Who is in the project?
- Rationale/ambitions, dimensions (intellectual, political, regulatory) , action lines/paths.
- Impact to date and ways forwards.



- Approx. 2015-2020 – with a prior history and continuing
- A formal project, labeled as such
- Declared objective: Help define university values; engage with values within HEIs, “live” values effectively; *help universities understand, organize and identify themselves and communicate their mission to stakeholders with reference to values/fundamental values of higher education*
- Values:
  - fundamental (institutional autonomy, academic freedom, social responsibility)
  - Specific to particular institutional missions/institutions
- Guidelines; resources

# Magna Charta Observatory - Living Values project

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# MCO Living Values project (cont)

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- Project –in the title; well circumscribed in scope (a definite number of institutions from several countries, timeline, objectives, task force/resources; practical guidelines for member universities/HEIs in general; work plan
- A project for HEIs themselves. Focus on the institutions not HE/public policy
- No legal aspirations
- “Transgression” – for external stakeholders as well, in the end, for policy makers, for authorities – became clear in the EHEA project; from fundamental values more generally, to AF
- Language of axiology but motivations are broader: intellectual, regulatory, political
- Contribute to a new regulatory framework from within? Or not at all?



# EHEA fundamental values project

- Direct continuation/expansion of MCO Living Values? Different? Same language and formal continuity or just *zeitgeist*?
- BFUG -a WG on Fundamental Values. Mandate: *define indicators to monitor, implement and assess and the shared European definition of academic freedom; prepare a proposal for Tirana 2024*
- There was no group on WG on fundamental values earlier
- Already: Rome 2020 – **Annex on Academic Freedom to the Communiqué** –a remarkable document



Statement on Academic Freedom



# EHEA fundamental values project –save/safeguard Academic Freedom

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- A “shared” European reference for academic freedom (common reference) –achieved, at least partially and nominally
- AF: a “fundamental value”; precondition for teaching research (knowledge as a public good) but also a democratic right
- *EHEA/Bologna Process approach: not internal guidelines for universities but primarily an obligation for authorities; a better, more permissive, supportive regulatory framework to counteract the crisis of AF/governance in HE*
- Different from MCO – focuses on public policy/regulatory frameworks not internal action and reflection (“transgression”: from institutional to policy framework; from fundamental values to AF only/mainly) in addressing the crisis of governance

EHEA  
fundamental  
values in  
general or AF  
project only?

- Academic freedom defined as a value but not the only one; the “project” is fundamentally about AF, while the talk/headings are more general about fundamental values?



# Why project? What kind of project?

- A European project?
- A higher education "project" with multiple rationales, ambitions, and actors.
- A loosely coordinated endeavor or just concomitant action?
- Tactical approach – talk about fundamental values, not about AF only, and not about AF as a right, let alone a privilege
- An organized endeavor, with declared objectives, timelines, resource allocation, etc.
- A real project or a metaphor?

# One or several projects?

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- MCO
- EHEA
- CoE
- EU
- EUA
- Etc.

It is becoming one convergent project, although it was not planned so. An interesting phenomenon to study. And effective.

## Who is in the project. "Demography"

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- MCO - members and partners
- CoE –longstanding promoter of the discourse and policies/regulations on fundamental values (**2012 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy "universal values"**) ; focus on democracy; major contributions, enough to analyze separately; new initiatives on the way (AF and QA, new convention?)
- EU – less forcefully engaged in a project on fundamental values although it does talk a lot about values, including values in education and higher education; AF not listed as a European value in EU Council recommendation 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching; European Parliament.
- EUA –commitment to uphold fundamental values in HE; partnership in MCO and EHEA; a different list of fundamental values, it include AF but also sustainability
- Other organizations as well

Rationale/ambitions,  
dimensions, action  
lines/paths

dimensions: intellectual, political,  
regulatory/legal

- Increasing awareness of the European (non-national) nature of the problem (the crisis of AF/governance) and possible solutions
- Real work and results already (e.g. Rome Statement on Academic freedom).
- Beginning of a new understanding of academic freedom, although not assued as such; elements in place of a new regulatory framework, as projections/proposals if not implemented already
- Buy in from HEIs, intermediary organizations and public authorities?
- A project with a trajectory that is not defined in advance. Still ongoing/emerging

# Impact to date and ways forward

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We  
shall  
overcome



Best wishes to all!



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