

ATHENA project



# University Autonomy in Armenia: Analysis & Roadmap

Governance, Funding and Public Policy Development Unit

European University Association

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## Introduction

The focus of the ATHENA project, supported by the European Union's TEMPUS programme, is to contribute to the modernisation and restructuring of university governance by promoting and supporting greater university autonomy and financial sustainability in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Higher education stakeholders broadly agree on the considerable benefits and importance of university autonomy. In several declarations, the European University Association (EUA) has reaffirmed the crucial role of institutional autonomy for higher education institutions and society at large. While autonomy is not a goal in itself, it is a vital precondition for the success of Europe's universities.

It is clear that autonomy does not mean the absence of regulations. While acknowledging that there are many different models, EUA has identified the basic principles and conditions which are important for universities if they are to fulfill optimally their missions and tasks. The Autonomy Scorecard methodology was developed by EUA with the input of its collective members, the National Rectors' Conferences of 29 higher education systems in Europe, between 2009 and 2011. It offers a tool to benchmark national higher education frameworks in relation to autonomy, and enables the establishment of correlations between autonomy and other concepts, such as performance, funding, quality, access and retention (see [www.university-autonomy.eu](http://www.university-autonomy.eu)).

The scorecard has since been used in several European countries to support their higher education reform process. The scorecard methodology has thus been broadly acknowledged by the various higher education stakeholders in Europe as an adequate tool to use for reform process development. EUA is therefore making use of its unique position and expertise in the field of higher education research in Europe to the benefit of the ATHENA project.

This document is based on the work carried out in the policy analysis phase of the ATHENA project, in which the higher education systems of Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine have been assessed using the scorecard methodology during 2013-2014. More recent changes related to the legal status of several universities have been taken into account wherever possible and as far as relevant. This document presents the results of this analysis, and as such has informed the development of the corresponding Policy Roadmap, which goes on to identify ways in which the system can be reformed to bring about enhanced university autonomy. It is intended that the Policy Roadmap will play a key role in any future legislative reform process and its implementation as well as for further institutional development.

## University autonomy and funding

Many governments, the university sector and the European Commission have all recognised that increasing university autonomy represents a crucial step towards modernising higher education in the 21st century. EUA has monitored and analysed the development and impact of autonomy and governance reforms through a wide array of studies as well as through stakeholder debates, conferences and its Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP). With its study, *University Autonomy in Europe II – The Scorecard* (Estermann, Nokkala, Steinel 2011), EUA has provided data on institutional autonomy, which enables university practitioners and policymakers to compare systems more effectively across Europe. It ranks and rates higher education systems according to their degree of autonomy in four different dimensions (academic, financial, organisation and staffing autonomy) thereby helping to improve higher education systems. Following extensive consultancy in different European Higher Education systems in the last decade, EUA is now implementing the major Tempus project ATHENA<sup>1</sup>. This project aims to contribute to the development, reform and modernisation of higher education systems in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. As a structural measure, it is designed to support structural reform processes and the development of strategic frameworks at the national level. ATHENA ultimately aims to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education systems in the three partner countries. It fosters the transfer of good practices in order to promote efficient and effective governance and funding reforms and tries to build the capacities of universities in the partner countries to modernise the management of financial and human resources.

## Terminology

Perceptions and terminologies of institutional autonomy vary greatly across Europe, and separating the various components of autonomy to ensure that we are looking at like-for-like is a difficult process. There is a vast amount of literature on the topic, which has led to a wide range of definitions and concepts of university autonomy (see for example Clark (1998), Sporn (2001), Salmi (2007), Huisman (2007)).

The rules and conditions under which Europe's universities operate are characterised by a high degree of diversity. This variety reflects the multiple approaches to the ongoing search for a balance between autonomy and accountability in response to the demands of society and the changing understanding of public responsibility for higher education. Indeed, the relationship between the state and higher education institutions can take a variety of forms, and it should be stressed that an "ideal" or "one-size-fits-all" model does not exist. In this Policy Roadmap therefore, "institutional autonomy" refers to the constantly changing relations between the state and universities and the differing degree of control exerted by public authorities, which are dependent on particular national contexts and circumstances.

## Why do universities need autonomy?

There is broad agreement between stakeholders that institutional autonomy is important for modern universities. While this notion has been empirically substantiated in various studies, it should also be noted that autonomy alone is rarely enough. Though institutional autonomy is a crucial precondition that enables universities to achieve their missions in the best possible way, other elements are equally necessary to ensure real success.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.athena-tempus.eu/>

The relationship between university autonomy and performance has been widely discussed. For example, in their contribution “Higher Aspirations: an Agenda for Reforming European Universities”, Aghion et al. analyse the correlation between performance in rankings, the status of autonomy and levels of public funding. They found “that universities in high-performing countries typically enjoy some degree of autonomy, whether in hiring or in wage setting” and that “the level of budgetary autonomy and research are positively correlated” (Aghion et al. 2008: 5).

In addition, autonomy helps to improve quality standards. EUA’s Trends IV study found that “there is clear evidence that success in improving quality within institutions is directly correlated with the degree of institutional autonomy” (Reichert & Tauch 2005: 7). This correlation was confirmed by EUA’s most recent Trends VI study (Sursock & Smidt 2010).

Third, there is a link between autonomy and universities’ capacity to attract additional funding. The 2011 EUA study “Financially Sustainable Universities II: European universities diversifying income streams” found that a university’s ability to generate additional income relates to the degree of institutional autonomy granted by the regulatory framework in which it operates. This link was established for all dimensions of autonomy, including organisational, financial, staffing and academic autonomy. The data revealed that financial autonomy is most closely correlated with universities’ capacity to attract income from additional funding sources. Staffing autonomy, and particularly the freedom to recruit and set salary levels for academic and administrative staff, were also found to be positively linked to the degree of income diversification (Estermann & Bennetot Pruvot 2011). Finally, by mitigating the risks associated with an overdependence on any one particular funder, a diversified income structure may, in turn, contribute to the further enhancement of institutional autonomy.

It should be noted that policymakers tend to regard autonomy reforms as an important driver of university modernisation. And higher education institutions, too, consider the further improvement of university autonomy as a priority. According to EUA’s Trends VI report, 43% of university respondents viewed autonomy reform as one of the most important institutional developments in the past decade (Sursock & Smidt 2010: 18).

### **Scorecard methodology**

The data with which the situation of Armenia is compared was provided by the National Rectors’ Conferences of 26 European countries. The scoring system used by the University Autonomy Scorecard is based on deductions. Each restriction on university autonomy was assigned a deduction value based on how restrictive a particular rule or regulation was seen to be. A score of 100% indicates full institutional autonomy; a score of 0% means that an issue is entirely regulated by an external authority. In many cases, the law grants universities a limited amount of autonomy or prescribes negotiations between universities and the government. For instance, a system in which universities may determine tuition fees under a ceiling set by an external authority receives a score of 60% for that indicator.

The University Autonomy Scorecard uses weighted scores. The weighting factors are based on a survey conducted among EUA’s member National Rectors’ Conferences and thus reflect the views of the university sector in Europe. The results of the survey were translated into a numerical system, which evaluates the relative importance of the indicators within each of the autonomy dimensions.

For further information on the development of the scoring methodology and the weighting system, please refer to the full report: [University Autonomy in Europe II - The Scorecard](#).

## Country profile

The Armenian higher education system consists of 67 higher education institutions, of which the majority are private. However, of the 110,000 students, over 80% attend public universities. Courses typically have a duration of four years for a Bachelor's degree and two years for a Master's degree.

### Key statistics (2010/2011)<sup>2</sup>

Number of students	Total	
	111,003	
	Public HEIs	Private HEIs
	91,404	19,599
Number of HEIs	Public	Private
	26	41

Public universities in Armenia receive a block grant from central government based on student numbers. This amount of funding per student varies according to institution and level of study, but not according to subject area, even for the most expensive courses. However, public funding represents only a minority of the overall university income (on average 20 to 25% of the income structure of state universities<sup>3</sup>).

The rest of the universities' budgets essentially made up of income proceeding from tuition fees. State-funded places are allocated, per specialisation, on a merit basis. State universities are also required to provide partial fee-waivers to at least 10% of their registered students<sup>4</sup>. Declining public funding has led universities to increase the number of fee-paying students as well as the level of tuition fees, which they can decide on.<sup>5</sup>

The vast majority of research and development activity takes place outside of the university framework; therefore, the involvement of universities in this field remains minimal, with the exception of historically strong institutions. According to World Bank data (2011), only 0.27% of Gross Domestic Product is invested in research and development in Armenia, below that of the two other ATHENA partner countries, Moldova (0.40%) and Ukraine (0.74%) and significantly less than most European countries.<sup>6</sup> This trend is mirrored when public investment in tertiary education as a whole is considered.

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<sup>2</sup> TEMPUS Country Fiche "Higher Education in Armenia", Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), July 2012

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating\\_countries/overview/armenia\\_tempus\\_country\\_fiche\\_final.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/overview/armenia_tempus_country_fiche_final.pdf)

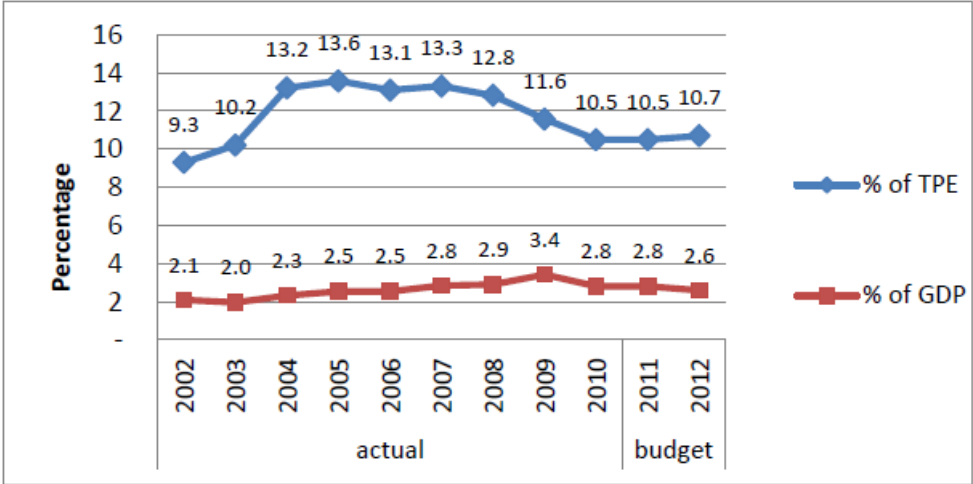
<sup>3</sup> Oral report by the Armenian delegation at ATHENA kick-off meeting, 7 December 2012

<sup>4</sup> TEMPUS Country Fiche "Higher Education in Armenia"

<sup>5</sup> World Bank report "Addressing governance at the center of Higher Education reforms in Armenia", January 2013

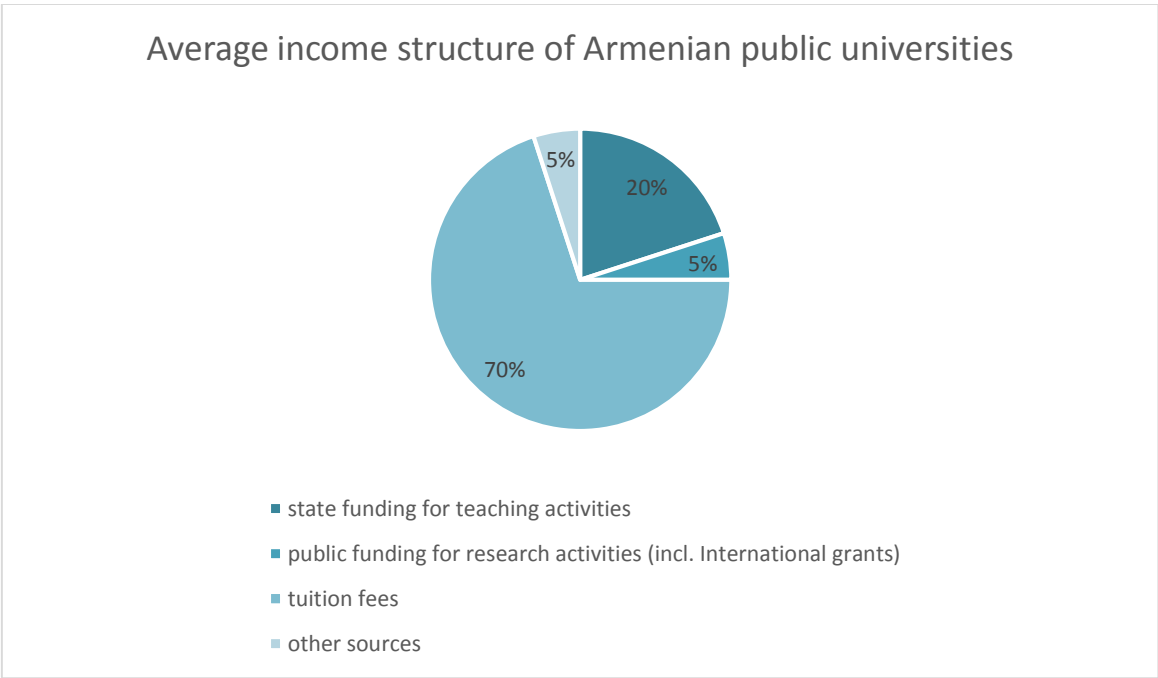
<sup>6</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS>

Figure 1 Public spending on education as percentage of total public expenditure and as percentage of GDP, 2002-2012 (taken from: World Bank report “Addressing governance at the center of Higher Education reforms in Armenia”, January 2013, p.19)



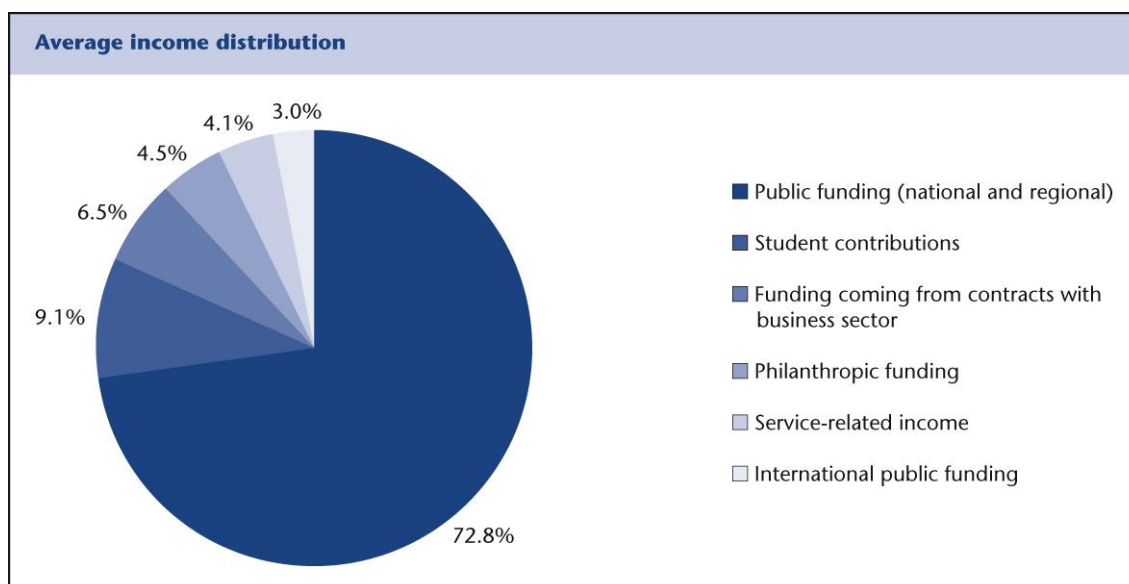
Sources: Armenia Education PERs 2008 & 2011; MOF.

The level of diversification of funding sources for Armenian universities varies highly, but most are dependent on student contributions for the vast majority of their income.



By comparison, data from EUA’s EUDIS project on income diversification<sup>7</sup> shows that on average, European universities receive almost three quarters of their funding from public sources, which guarantee a certain stability over the long term. They also tend to receive a greater proportion of their income from a variety of other sources (contractual research with industry and business, philanthropic income, research funding from international sources).

<sup>7</sup><http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/governance-autonomy-and-funding/eudis.aspx>



In the following section, the findings of EUA’s analysis of the state of autonomy in the Armenian higher education system are presented. These are explained for each of the four dimensions of autonomy addressed by EUA’s Autonomy Scorecard methodology; organisation, financial, staffing and academic autonomy.

## Part 1: Analysis of university autonomy in Armenia

### Organisational autonomy

#### 1. Analysis

The universities’ organisational autonomy is limited in Armenia. In all respects other than academic structures, there are varying levels of constriction on the capacity of publicly funded universities to decide on their internal organisation and processes. The fact that these restrictions are derived from different laws represents an additional layer of complication: laws on Education (1999), on Higher and Postgraduate Professional Education (2004) and on “Non-Commercial State Organisations” (NCSOs) (2001) apply to the sector, creating in some areas inconsistencies in the regulatory framework governing universities. This also creates a disparity between public and private universities, which are not considered as NCSOs.

There are a number of regulations for the selection of the leadership of the institution. University Boards conduct their own selection process when hiring a new Rector, but their choice requires the approval of the Armenian Government to take up their post. Furthermore, other stipulations for this position are stated in both the higher education law and the law regulating the functioning of NCSOs. Most notably, candidates may not be older than 65, their term of office is five years (renewable once), and the modalities for their selection are prescribed (open competition and secret ballot of the Board). Similarly, the process for the dismissal of a Rector is set down in primary law (NCSO law 2001).



The structure of University Boards is regulated in detail in the higher education law. Both the Armenian Government and Ministry of Education and Science are heavily represented, with each one providing 25% of the Board members. The Prime Minister directly proposes members to represent the former, while members of the scientific community and employers who work with universities propose individuals to represent the latter, though these are also confirmed by the Prime Minister. The remaining 50% of Board members represent the academic community and students. In effect, this means that any decision taken by the University Board requires the approval of the government and public authorities. University boards have formal responsibility for the election of the rector, approval of the rector's annual report, budget, and strategic plan and deciding on changes to the university statutes.

The one strand of autonomy in which universities have freedom is in setting their own academic structures. The higher education law explicitly states that universities are autonomous in this regard. Therefore, decisions relating to academic structures are taken by the Academic Council, which is made up of staff and students.

Universities may create their own legal entities, but, as set down in the law for NCSOs, this requires a decision by the Government. Likewise, universities may carry out commercial activities as prescribed by their own statutes, but the relevant statutes require Government approval.

Overall, it is clear that there is a high level of Government involvement in the organisation and decision making processes of Armenian universities, stemming from their strong participation in governing bodies. Informal practices, whereby ministry approval or consent is necessary, are not measured in the scorecard.

It is important to note that the legal status of universities is a long-standing issue that has been evolving over the timeframe of the ATHENA project. In 2012, the Armenian National Agrarian University was granted the status of foundation, governed by the law on Foundations (2002). This organisational status contributes to enhancing university autonomy, notably by opening possibilities to create legal entities and carry out commercial activities independently. Foundation universities also face less restrictions in the rector selection process (no limit on age nor mandate renewability). In 2014, four more universities based in Yerevan were granted this foundation status. While approximately half of the university students of Armenia now study in foundation universities, the majority of universities in Armenia are still NCSOs under the general legal framework governing public universities. The extent to which all universities are expected to switch to the foundation status remains to be clarified. Therefore, this development cannot be considered as a general increase of autonomy for the whole higher education system in Armenia and cannot be measured with the scorecard methodology. It should be highlighted nevertheless that it is a positive step in the right direction and that the experience and feedback from the universities operating under the foundation status should inform further developments in this area.

## 2. European comparison

Rank	System	Score
1	United Kingdom	100%
2	Denmark	94%
3	Finland	93%
4	Estonia	87%
5	North Rhine-Westphalia	84%
6	Ireland	81%
7	Portugal	80%
8	Austria	78%
	Hesse	78%
	Norway	78%
11	Flanders	76%
12	Lithuania	75%
13	Netherlands	69%
14	Poland	67%
15	Latvia	61%
16	Brandenburg	60%
17	France	59%
	Hungary	59%
19	Italy	56%
20	Sweden	55%
	Spain	55%
	Switzerland	55%
23	Czech Republic	54%
24	Cyprus	50%
25	Iceland	49%
<b>26</b>	<b>ARMENIA</b>	<b>47%</b>
27	Slovakia	45%
28	Greece	43%
29	Turkey	33%
30	Luxembourg	31%

For organisational autonomy, Armenia ranks in the ‘medium low’ cluster of systems, scoring between 60% and 41%. Should the foundation status be generalised to all universities, leading to the ability for all institutions to create legal entities without government approval, this score would increase.

In comparison with most other systems, the Armenian higher education sector is subject to a high level of government interference in organisational matters. The one stand-out aspect in Armenia is the requirement that 50% of the university board is composed of Government and Ministry representatives, effectively giving them veto rights on decisions taken in this governing body.

This provides a contrast with other European systems, where the focus is on allowing external members to be freely chosen by universities. Other systems where external members, freely selected by the universities, have been involved in governing bodies for several years have a very positive experience of the impact that this practice has on the development of institutions. In systems where this practice is most developed, external members tend to be selected in a strategic way, often through search committees. Once selected, these external members also get a broad training to get accustomed to the specificities of the academic environment.

### **European trends in organisational autonomy**

Although higher education institutions in Europe almost invariably operate in the context of an external regulatory framework, the extent and detail of these regulations vary significantly where universities' organisational autonomy is concerned. In the majority of countries, institutions are relatively free to decide on their administrative structures. Their capacity to shape their internal academic structures within this legal framework is more restricted.

In addition, there is a trend towards the inclusion of external members in the institutional decision-making processes, especially where universities have dual governance structures. While this is seen as an important accountability measure, it also clearly serves other, more strategic, purposes. Indeed, external members in university governing bodies are frequently selected to foster links with industry and other sectors.

As far as leadership is concerned, the shift towards more corporate, CEO-type rectors in a number of Western European countries goes hand in hand with greater autonomy in management and the capacity for universities to design their own organisational structures. On the other hand, more traditional models still exist, in particular in Southern and Eastern Europe, in which the rector is a "primus inter pares" who is selected by and comes from the internal academic community.

Finally, dual governance structures – with some type of division of power between bodies, and usually comprising a board or council and a senate – as opposed to unitary structures, are on the rise.

### **Comparison with ATHENA partner countries**

<b>Organisational autonomy</b>	
Armenia	47%
Ukraine	44%
Moldova	42%

Higher education systems in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine are characterised by a low degree of organisational autonomy, as demonstrated in the table above. In all three systems, universities are subject to high levels of government control over their governing body and the setting of organisational processes. While Armenia scores marginally higher than Moldova and Ukraine in this dimension, there still remains a lot to be done in order to meet the level of organisational autonomy present in most European higher education systems. Envisaged reform steps in the other countries would lead to an improvement of their own position; it is therefore important that Armenian higher education stakeholders consider further improvements in this particular dimension of university autonomy.

## Financial Autonomy

### *1. Analysis*

While Armenian universities formally have a higher degree of autonomy with respect to managing their own finances, this must be viewed in the light of a very low level of overall funding for universities, of which only around 20% emanates from public sources (see country profile in the introduction). In this context, even small limitations in the way that universities may manage their finances can have a highly detrimental impact.

Public funding for teaching is delivered via an annual block grant, which is determined by student numbers. This is more heavily weighted for doctoral candidates than for Bachelor's and Master's students, which are funded at the same level. There is no distinction between different fields of study, but different HEIs do receive different rates. The block grant is wholly directed to teaching activities; all research funding is delivered on a competitive basis. However, it is clear that increased core funding for research is necessary if Armenian universities are to develop this part of their academic offer.

With respect to tuition fees, Armenian universities have autonomy to set their own rates. However, the government is considering implementing a cap on fee levels in an effort to widen access. Given that the large majority of university funding comes from tuition fees, any change in this respect needs to be combined with substitutions from higher public funding to ensure universities' financial sustainability. Universities have some freedom over the financial management of their real estate which they have come to acquire by their own means, but most of the university property is owned by the state, must be exclusively used for the completion of the main missions of the university, and may not be sold or rented without Government authorisation. Furthermore, universities have no financial control over property that has been "given" by the State.

The status of Armenian universities as non-commercial state organisations means that it is prohibited for them to borrow or raise money on the financial markets. In addition they have to abide by the procurement rules that are perceived by the universities as very cumbersome and complex.

Universities are not permitted to keep potential surpluses made from public funding; where there is a budget surplus arising from a particular programme, the next year's funding for this programme is decreased by the same amount, or returned to the government if the course is discontinued. This does not create the adequate incentive for efficient and effective management of resources.

Finally, as previously mentioned, institutions are unable to freely enter into commercial activities because the relevant statutes require explicit Government approval, thus restricting their ability to diversify their income streams.

Even though Armenian universities have a relatively high degree of financial autonomy through the freedom to set fees, the imbalance in the levels of public and private funding poses a threat to financial sustainability. Furthermore, the weighting criteria for the block grant do not come close to the real costs of education, as there is no distinction between different programmes that, in reality, vary significantly in terms of cost. In addition, the particularly low level of core funding for research activities hinders the development of a modern, research-embedded higher education sector.

As referred to above in relation to organisational autonomy, in 2012 and 2014 several universities in Armenia have been granted foundation status with the approval of the government (Armenian State Agrarian University in 2012; Yerevan State University, National Polytechnic University of Armenia, Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction and Yerevan State Medical University in 2014). This also gives them more autonomy with regard to financial matters which is considered as a positive development. In particular, it is understood that they are able to carry out commercial activities without needing state approval. Foundation universities are allowed to borrow money with government approval by using building as collaterals. Furthermore they are allowed to freely create legal entities. However, as it provides an opportunity only for some institutions and that the change of legal status is decided by the government on a case by case basis, this development cannot be measured with the scorecard methodology.

## 2. European comparison

Rank	System	Score
1	Luxembourg	91%
2	Estonia	90%
3	United Kingdom	89%
4	Latvia	80%
5	Netherlands	77%
6	Hungary	71%
7	Flanders	70%
	Italy	70%
	Portugal	70%
	Slovakia	70%
11	Denmark	69%
<b>12</b>	<b>ARMENIA</b>	<b>66%</b>
	Ireland	66%
14	Switzerland	65%
15	Austria	59%
16	North Rhine-Westphalia	58%
17	Finland	56%
	Sweden	56%
19	Spain	55%
20	Poland	54%
21	Lithuania	51%
22	Norway	48%
23	Czech Republic	46%
24	France	45%
	Turkey	45%
26	Brandenburg	44%
27	Iceland	43%
28	Greece	36%
29	Hesse	35%
30	Cyprus	23%

The Armenian system falls into the 'medium high' cluster for financial autonomy. Should the change of legal status be generalised to all universities in Armenia, this score would likely increase.

In a majority of European countries, universities receive their funding in the form of real block grants. Only in very few systems, line-item budgets are still used, and institutions are thus unable to shift funds between budget lines. This is mainly the case in certain Eastern European and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Universities in most European countries can keep their surplus from public funding as well as self-generated revenue.

### **European trends in financial autonomy**

While universities in most systems are allowed to borrow money, laws specify certain restrictions, especially in Northern Europe: they may prescribe the maximum available amount, or require the authorisation by an external authority.

Only in half of the surveyed European countries are universities able to own their buildings. Even those who do own their facilities are not automatically able to decide on investing their real estate, nor are they necessarily free to sell their assets. Restrictions range from requiring the approval of an external authority to complete inability to sell.

In many European systems, universities can collect tuition fees or administrative charges from at least a part of the student population. Nevertheless, this does not mean that these fees reflect a significant contribution to the costs of education or an important form of income. In most cases, additional limitations are placed on the ability of universities to set fees as a means of generating income. In particular in Northern European systems where universities have less freedom to collect fees, levels of public funding are very high.

When all aspects of financial autonomy are taken together, Western European countries seem to benefit from greater freedom than their Eastern European counterparts. In general, universities in Western Europe are more autonomous in how they use the public funding they receive, but less so with regards to raising tuition fees. Eastern European countries tend to be less autonomous in the use of their public budgets, but are often able to decide on privately-funded study places and use the fees the latter generate.

The classification of Armenia into the 'medium high' cluster for financial autonomy represents the fact that tuition fees are set at their own discretion, though it should not obscure other notable restrictions on Armenian universities' capacity to manage their own financial affairs. Reforms that would allow them to borrow money on the financial markets and freely manage their own property would increase this score further. It should be noted that some of these restrictions arise from requirements of their status as NCSOs. Moreover, this result hides the fact that Armenian universities have a very low level of public funding, in addition to a significant imbalance between public and private sources of income, which limits their ability to benefit from the financial autonomy that they currently have.

## Comparison with ATHENA partner countries

Financial autonomy	
Armenia	66%
Moldova	49%
Ukraine	46%

Armenia ranks above Moldova and Ukraine with respect to financial autonomy, primarily because Armenian universities may set their own tuition fees. However, this gives only a partial impression of financial autonomy, given that universities are so dependent on this source of funding. Without more diversified income streams, Armenian universities cannot truly benefit from the level of financial autonomy. There is still a lot that could be done in all three systems to improve the level of financial autonomy.

## Staffing Autonomy

### *1. Analysis*

Compared with the other dimensions of autonomy, staffing is one area in which Armenian universities operate with a relatively high degree of freedom. Most notably, university staff are employed by the institutions themselves and thus do not hold civil servant status. However, as with financial autonomy, in practice the freedom to recruit and promote staff is limited by the scarcity of funds available.

The law on higher education states that universities are free to recruit academic and teaching staff in accordance with their own statutes. A limitation set down in law is the stipulation that academic staff contracts must be concluded for a period of no more than five years (renewable). The perception of the Armenian partners is however that this mechanism is a quality instrument more than a restriction. Additionally, the contract may be renewed once up to five years without competition on the basis of the evaluation of the staff member's work. Institutions hold absolute freedom over salaries and may set these at their own discretion, provided that they exceed the minimum wage. However, the potential to use this freedom to enhance institutions' attractiveness to scholars is limited by the scarcity of funding.

The status of employees at public universities is laid down in Armenian labour law, and universities are free to dismiss staff within this framework. Universities can create academic and administrative positions. Academic staff may be promoted through open competition as stipulated in the law.

In its own right, staffing autonomy stands at a high level in a European context. However, due to restrictions upon other dimensions of university autonomy, especially organisational autonomy, and low funding levels, in practice it is difficult for universities to reap the full benefit of this.



## 2. European comparison

Rank	System	Score
1	Estonia	100%
2	United Kingdom	96%
3	Czech Republic	95%
	Sweden	95%
	Switzerland	95%
6	ARMENIA	93%
7	Finland	92%
	Latvia	92%
9	Luxembourg	87%
10	Denmark	86%
11	Lithuania	83%
12	Ireland	82%
13	Poland	80%
14	Austria	73%
	Netherlands	73%
16	Iceland	68%
17	Norway	67%
18	Hungary	66%
19	Portugal	62%
20	Hesse	61%
	North Rhine-Westphalia	61%
22	Turkey	60%
23	Flanders	59%
24	Brandenburg	55%
25	Slovakia	54%
26	Italy	49%
27	Cyprus	48%
	Spain	48%
29	France	43%
30	Greece	14%

When staffing autonomy is considered, Armenia falls into the 'high' category of higher education systems.

In Armenia, universities can as well directly employ their own staff (i.e. university staff are not civil servants) and have in theory freedom over salaries. In practice however, as with financial autonomy, the low level of overall funding represents a barrier to real staffing autonomy, as universities cannot afford to use salaries as a tool for increasing institutional attractiveness. Likewise, there is a lack of career development opportunities and career paths are not well defined, further hindering universities' ability to attract the best staff.

As a result of these limitations, universities are unable to realise their potential in terms of international competitiveness because they are in a weaker position to compete with universities in other countries for academic staff.

**European trends in staffing autonomy**

In many European countries, universities have a greater flexibility in dealing with staffing issues, as staff are being paid and/or employed directly by the university rather than by the government. However, the decisions on individual salaries are often regulated. In almost half of the European countries studied, all or a majority of staff has civil servant status. The analysis also shows that there are significant differences in the recruitment of staff, ranging from a considerable degree of freedom to formalised procedures that entail an external approval, sometimes by the country’s highest authorities. Some Mediterranean countries have very little freedom with regards to staffing matters, as they are unable to determine the number of staff they recruit and hence lack control over overall salary costs. Even individual salary levels are determined by national authorities. In a number of European countries, in particular Northern and Western Europe universities have very transparent recruitment procedures in place and developed competitive career policies.

**Comparison with ATHENA partner countries**

Staffing autonomy	
Armenia	93%
Ukraine	80%
Moldova	59%

The three ATHENA partner countries rank more highly in staffing autonomy than in the other three dimensions, and amongst them Armenia ranks highest. This is principally down to the fact that Armenian university staff do not have civil servant status and thus they are free to apply their own human resources practices. However, the low level of funding in Armenia means that universities find it difficult to fully benefit from this autonomy by attracting international academic talent. Like all ATHENA partner countries, the relatively low level of organisational autonomy also has an impact on the level of staffing autonomy.

**Academic Autonomy**

*1. Analysis*

Armenian universities are subject to significant external control in academic matters, with government influence stretching across the spectrum of academic matters.

At each study level, universities may only offer licensed programmes that have been approved by the Ministry, of which there are around 200. The number of fee-waived places for each university is set directly by the government; the universities then allocate the fee-waived places among their programmes and present the distribution to the government for approval. The government also has a high level of control over the entrance exams, approving content and overseeing the process centrally.

Universities must also negotiate with the Ministry for the allocation of privately-funded places, which is set for individual programmes. It should be noted that the universities depending on international agreements, such as the French University or the Armenian-Russian Slavonic University, are not subject to this limitation. There is more freedom for selecting master's students, but these make up only a small proportion of the total number of students in the Armenian higher education system.

Universities may decide to introduce new programmes as long as they feature on the Government's list of approved specialties; if the new programme does not feature on that list, it is very difficult to obtain approval. Furthermore, public authorities also intervene in the matters of student dismissal, re-admission, student mobility between programmes and universities, and final degree attestation.

With respect to the language of tuition, primary law states that universities must conduct all teaching for resident or local students in Armenian, with the exception of separate courses for international students. The French, American and Russian universities in Yerevan are exempted from this. The fact that only dedicated 'international' courses may be delivered in a language other than Armenian not only limits the ability of Armenian universities to pursue an internationalisation strategy, but also places a restriction on student choice.

Also with regard to course content, Armenian universities face restrictions as public authorities prescribe 5% of mandatory course content for all undergraduate programmes through a list of compulsory modules that must be included in all bachelor level study programmes. In international comparison and in line with the indicators developed through the autonomy scorecard methodology, this can be considered a significant restriction of academic autonomy, although it is not perceived as such by the Armenian universities involved in the analysis through the ATHENA project.

Unusually, while universities are obliged to undergo an institutional accreditation procedure, there is no obligation to seek accreditation for individual programmes. Universities are free to choose which institutional and programme accreditation scheme they follow: either the Armenian National Quality Assurance Centre, or an international quality assurance agency listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education.

The pervasive influence of the Armenian government in universities' academic affairs not only restricts academic autonomy, but has a knock-on effect on elements such as internationalisation strategies. Of particular concern is the limited freedom to introduce study programmes, plan course content and select students.

## 2. European comparison

Rank	System	Score
1	Ireland	100%
2	Norway	97%
3	United Kingdom	94%
4	Estonia	92%
5	Finland	90%
6	Iceland	89%
7	Cyprus	77%
8	Luxembourg	74%
9	Austria	72%
	Switzerland	72%
11	Hesse	69%
	North Rhine-Westphalia	69%
13	Brandenburg	67%
14	Sweden	66%
15	Poland	63%
16	Italy	57%
	Spain	57%
18	Denmark	56%
	Slovakia	56%
20	Latvia	55%
21	Portugal	54%
22	Czech Republic	52%
23	Netherlands	48%
24	Hungary	47%
25	Turkey	46%
27	Lithuania	42%
28	Flanders	40%
	Greece	40%
<b>29</b>	<b>ARMENIA</b>	<b>38%</b>
30	France	37%

With respect to academic autonomy, Armenia's score puts it in the 'low' cluster of higher education systems.

Armenia has in comparison strict limitations which are placed on universities by the government and ministry when it comes to setting student numbers, selecting students, introducing new programmes, planning course content and deciding on the language of tuition. In Armenia, the influence of government and public authorities is high in this dimension of autonomy, and so wide-ranging reform would be required to improve its score.

### **European trends in academic autonomy**

In a majority of European countries, universities are essentially free to develop their academic profile, although restrictions remain in other areas of academic autonomy. The introduction of new programmes usually requires some form of approval by the relevant ministry or by another public authority and is often tied to budget negotiations, which demonstrates the interdependence of different dimensions of autonomy. Universities are generally free to close programmes independently; only in a small number of systems does this matter have to be negotiated with the pertinent ministry.

In most countries, admission to higher education institutions tends to be unrestricted for all students that meet the basic entry-level requirements (usually a secondary education qualification and/or a national matriculation exam). On the other hand only in a minority of countries are universities free to decide on the overall number of students. In most cases, overall numbers are either determined by the relevant public authorities or decided jointly by the public authority and the university. This restriction on the other hand reflects in most systems the high percentage of public funding in the overall funding. In a third of the countries analysed, universities can freely decide on the number of study places per discipline. However, the allocation in some fields may be subject to negotiations with an external authority, or set within the accreditation procedure.

### **Comparison with ATHENA partner countries**

<b>Academic autonomy</b>	
Moldova	51%
Ukraine	51%
Armenia	38%

Armenia performs marginally below Moldova and Ukraine with respect to academic autonomy, but a great deal remains to be done in all three systems in order to achieve greater academic autonomy. All three systems must contend with excessive government involvement in the setting of course content and the organisation of academic affairs, which needs to be addressed. A specific issue that Armenian universities have to deal with is the imposition of Armenian as the sole language of tuition, which limits the participation of foreign students and therefore affects the institutions' ability to pursue an effective strategy of internationalisation.

## Summary: ATHENA country comparison

Organisational autonomy		Financial autonomy	
Armenia	47%	Armenia	66%
Ukraine	44%	Moldova	49%
Moldova	42%	Ukraine	46%
Staffing autonomy		Academic autonomy	
Armenia	93%	Moldova	51%
Ukraine	80%	Ukraine	51%
Moldova	59%	Armenia	38%

When the comparisons between the ATHENA countries are taken together, Armenia appears to perform relatively well. However, this should not mask the facts that, firstly, in organisational, financial and academic autonomy all three systems receive low scores, and secondly, the adverse funding conditions mean that in reality, universities cannot benefit in practice from the degree of autonomy that they have in theory.

Higher education systems in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine are characterised by a low degree of **organisational autonomy**, as demonstrated in the table above. In all three systems, universities are subject to high levels of government control over their governing body and the setting of organisational processes. While Armenia scores marginally higher than Moldova and Ukraine in this dimension, there still remains a lot to be done in order to meet the level of organisational autonomy present in most European higher education systems. Envisaged reform steps in the other countries would lead to an improvement of their own position; it is therefore important that Armenian higher education stakeholders consider further improvements in this particular dimension of university autonomy.

Armenia ranks above Moldova and Ukraine with respect to **financial autonomy**, primarily because Armenian universities may set their own tuition fees. However, this gives only a partial impression of financial autonomy, given that universities are so dependent on this source of funding. Without more diversified streams of income, Armenian universities cannot truly benefit from the level of financial autonomy. There is still a lot that could be done in all three systems to improve the level of financial autonomy.

The three ATHENA partner countries rank more highly in **staffing autonomy** than in the other three dimensions, and amongst them Armenia ranks highest. This is principally down to the fact that Armenian university staff do not have civil servant status and thus they are free to apply their own human resources practices. However, the low levels of funding in Armenia means that universities find it difficult to fully benefit from this autonomy by attracting international academic talent. Like all ATHENA partner countries, the relatively low level of organisation autonomy also has an impact on the level of staffing autonomy.

Armenia performs marginally below Moldova and Ukraine with respect to **academic autonomy**, but a great deal remains to be done in all three systems in order to achieve greater academic autonomy. All three systems must contend with excessive government involvement in the setting of course content and the organisation of academic affairs, which needs to be addressed.

A specific issue that Armenian universities have to deal with is the imposition of Armenian as the sole language of tuition, which limits the participation of foreign students and therefore affects the institutions' ability to pursue an effective strategy of internationalisation.

## Part 2: Policy Roadmap

### Methodology

This Policy Roadmap has been produced as part of the ATHENA project, which is supported by the European Union's TEMPUS programme, and aims to contribute to the modernisation and restructuring of university governance by promoting and supporting greater university autonomy and financial sustainability in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine.

It has been in conjunction with the ATHENA Country Analysis and both documents should be read in tandem. The Roadmap has been developed following initial liaison with Armenian partners at the Site Visit and Country Workshop. On this basis EUA set up a list of priority challenges and actions to consider, which was then submitted to the partners for comments. Their feedback was analysed and subsequently discussed at a bilateral meeting with representatives of all the Armenian partner institutions.

In the following tables, the challenges identified by EUA and by the different members of the National Policy Taskforce ("NPT" – all ATHENA partner institutions including the National Rectors' Conference) are presented under the headings of each dimension of university autonomy, complemented by cross-cutting challenges. **The challenges have been prioritised on a scale of a 1 (top priority) to 3 (lower priority) on the basis of feedback from Armenian partners.** Partners were also asked to assess the feasibility and timescale required for the suggested actions. These particular elements are here left blank as a consolidated approach needs to be found between the Armenian Ministry and higher education institutions.

This roadmap proposes in its last section a list of priorities and plan for the next steps to be taken in the reform process.

### Priority challenges and actions

Two main issues arise from the discussions of the Armenian national policy taskforce. The first one relates to organisational autonomy and is directly linked to the legal status of universities in Armenia. The sector demands clarification in this regard as well as the creation of a level playing field, in which all higher education institutions benefit from increased autonomy to in turn boost their attractiveness towards staff and students. Reforming the legal status of universities would also require redefining the relationship, in practical terms, between university management level and public authorities, in particular as regards the representation of state authorities in the universities' governing bodies.

The taskforce agreed that the impact of such a change needs to be assessed, and that transparency and accountability mechanisms should be further developed as a response. The change of legal status of five universities so far, in 2012 and in 2014, is a positive step in that direction.

The second question that should be given top priority is that of the lack of financial autonomy of universities in Armenia, with a focus on enabling universities to manage independently their private income, which represents a large part of their financial structure. The public funding system is also under review, with the objective to incorporate performance-based elements, which requires consultation of the sector to develop indicators and modalities in a way that reinforces the autonomous strategic development of universities. While the latter concern is formally outside of the scope of the ATHENA project, EUA can provide advice based on the European comparative analysis it has carried out on public funding modalities and performance-based funding to universities.

Alongside the two primary issues detailed above, which the national policy taskforce agreed should be focused on, the question of human resources development should be also taken up in priority. The ATHENA project shows that strategic people management is essential to organisational success, in particular in a context of enhanced autonomy, and that therefore it is necessary to invest in support structures and processes.

The following tables detail the different priority areas and corresponding actions that were identified by EUA on the basis of the analysis developed in the ATHENA project.



## 1. Organisational autonomy

### Action plan

Organisational autonomy							
Challenge	Priority level	System-level			Institution-level		
		Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe <sup>8</sup>	Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe
Complex and burdensome combination of legal statuses	1	Review NCSO legal status for public universities	1	2	Provide feedback from the sector to the Ministry on most pressing issues and limitations stemming from the NCSO status	1	1
		Amend NCSO status to remove most burdensome regulatory elements <sup>9</sup>	3	2			
Universities unable to create their own legal entities or undertake commercial activities without state approval	2	Permit universities to adopt statutes establishing legal entities and commercial activities without requiring government/ministry approval	1	2	Make use of more flexible structures for fundraising activities and spin offs, etc.	2	2
Excessive state representation on governing bodies	2	Remove requirement for government/ministry representative on governing bodies	1	2	Develop a strategic selection process with search committees, clear profiles and induction training for external members	3	3
		Reduce level of representation required from 25% each for government/ministry	1	2			
		Widen the participation in governing bodies to include more representatives of civil society and business	2	1			
Universities must follow provisions in primary law when recruiting a new rector	2	Remove the legal requirement for government approval of new rector	1	1	Set up a transparent process with clear criteria detailed in the university statutes	1	1
		Remove the legal upper age limit for rector candidates	1	1			
		Remove the legal limits on renewing rectors' terms of office	3	3			

<sup>8</sup> According to the following logic : 1 – short term ; 2 – medium term ; 3 – long term

<sup>9</sup> This action has to be considered in the context of the change of status of several HEIs from NCSO to Foundation.

## 2. Financial Autonomy

### Action plan

Financial autonomy							
Challenge	Priority level Sector/Ministry	System-level			Institution-level		
		Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe	Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe
Unbalanced income sources for universities with excessive reliance on student contributions as a stream of income	1	Introduce tax incentives to encourage business investment	1	1	Develop a strategy for diversification	2	2
		Provide incentives to institutions to attract income from other sources	1	1	Recruit or train staff to develop capacities for this	2	2
		Support staff development to increase capacity for fundraising	2	2			
Restricted ability of universities to manage their own assets and financial affairs	2	Transfer ownership of all property to universities	3	3	Recruit or train staff to develop capacities for this	2	2
		Give universities full control over renting and selling property	3	3			
		Provide funding for staff development in facility management	2	3			
		Permit universities to raise and borrow money on the financial markets	2	2			
		Permit universities to keep surpluses	2	2	Develop a long term planning for investment	2	2

Inadequate funding modalities	2	Amend the student cost weightings to take different disciplines into account	1	1	Provide information on real costs of education per discipline area and study level	1	1
		Amend student weightings to distinguish more accurately between different study levels	1	1			
		Create a level playing field for institutions by allocating funding on the basis of institutional equality	1	1			
		Consider incorporating output-related criteria into calculation of block grant	1	2	Get engaged in a dialogue on the selection of criteria to ensure fitness for purpose		
		Permit universities to internally allocate block grant without restrictions	1	1	Set up a transparent and planned budgeting process and allocation model with principles on allocation, formulae and sums available		
Inefficient procurement regulations	2	Amend regulations to give universities more freedom in procurement	3	3	Develop less bureaucratic internal procurement procedures train users	1	1
Lack of comprehensive financial management services at universities	2	Allocate targeted funding to develop more sophisticated financial management functions at universities	2	2	Develop transition plan to make use of this funding and establish this function	3	3

### 3. Staffing Autonomy

#### Action plan

Staffing autonomy							
Challenge	Priority level	System-level			Institution-level		
		Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe	Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe
Lack of effective career progression	2				Develop clear career development paths for university staff	2	2
					Develop succession planning strategies	2	2
Lack of a comprehensive middle management means academics are burdened with excessive administrative duties	2	Allocate targeted funding to develop administrative skills across university sector	3	3	Develop strategic plan for the institution	1	1
					Recruit and train staff to develop capacities	2	3

## 4. Academic Autonomy

### Action plan

Academic autonomy							
Challenge	Priority level	System-level			Institution-level		
		Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe	Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe
Excessive government influence and control over academic affairs	1	Remove government-mandated study content	2	2	Review content of study programmes	1	1
		Permit teaching in different languages	2	2			
		Remove list of approved study courses	2	2			
		Give universities control over student selection and remove government approval of selection exams	2	2			

## 5. Cross-cutting challenges

### Action plan

Cross-cutting							
Challenge	Priority level	System-level			Institution-level		
		Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe	Action proposed	Feasibility level	Timeframe
Critically low level of public funding for higher education	1	Develop a long term plan for investment in higher education	3	3	Engage in diversification activities	2	3
		Set up tax incentives fostering investments in higher education from the private sector & favourable tax policy for HEIs	3	2			
Lack of sufficient funding for research for universities	1	Set up specific schemes for funding for research for universities	2	2	Further develop research capacity and demonstrate value	2	2
Weak position of Armenian National Rectors' Conference as a stakeholder in the higher education sector	2	Include status and areas of activities in law	1	2	Involve all members in activities and engage into visible activities	1	1
Significant disparity between legislative autonomy and autonomy in practice	2	Set up evaluation of reform processes with independent international participation	2	2	Reform internal regulations and processes that hinder the use of autonomy in practice	2	2
Lack of long term strategic planning both at system and institutional level	1	Develop and engage in a dialogue with the stakeholders on a long term strategy for the development of the Higher Education system	1	1	Engage in a dialogue with the ministry on a long term strategy for the development of the Higher Education system	2	2
		Implement ATHENA project recommendations	2	2	Implement ATHENA project recommendations	2	2

### Part 3: Recommendations for the reform process

Based on the priorities identified in the previous sections, this final section aims to provide concrete steps to be taken by the project partners in order to stimulate reform in the Armenian higher education system.

- The first part of this section presents actions that should be seen as pre-requisites for the reform process. These are actions that revolve around building mutual trust and establishing an atmosphere of cooperation in order to ensure that all stakeholders are committed to the process.
- The second part identifies key steps EUA believes require particular attention both at system as well as at institutional levels in order to improve and develop university autonomy. These recommendations also draw from EUA’s experience in advising public authorities and universities on higher education governance reform. In addition, it responds to the specific needs of Armenian stakeholders as identified through the DEFINE project policy analysis.

**I. Pre-requisites for the process**

Through the policy analysis and development phases of the ATHENA project, it has become clear that before any reform can be undertaken, steps need to be taken to create the conditions necessary for drawing up an effective and comprehensive reform agenda.

- Establishing a climate of mutual trust and regular dialogue and consultation to ensure that decisions meet the requirements of all stakeholders
- Ensuring that there is transparency in policy discussions
- Drawing up a plan with clear steps to be taken and a timeframe for this process

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graph TD; U[Universities] --> O[Other stakeholders  
(employers, students,  
society at large)]; O --> F[Funding bodies]; F --> R[Relevant public  
authorities]; R --> U;
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## II. EUA recommendations: actions and objectives

### a) **Actions and objectives on a system-wide level**

The following actions are proposed by EUA as primary objectives for any future reform programme:

- 1) Streamlining and simplifying rules and procedures for universities
  - a) A single legal status and legal code to govern higher education institutions
  - b) Less bureaucratic and restrictive procurement processes
- 2) Updating the modalities through which public funding is dispensed by introducing a modern cost weighting system for different subject areas and output criteria (e.g. degree completion)
- 3) Raising the level of public investment in higher education, particularly in research activities
- 4) Creating incentives to stimulate diversification of income sources and create a higher education policy climate in which businesses are welcomed as investors and partners
- 5) Reducing the prominence of the role of public authorities in the running of universities by dropping the stipulation that 50% of university boards must represent the government and ministry
- 6) Removing government approval and control of student selection, and relaxing restrictions on courses
- 7) Giving universities the freedom to decide on the language of tuition and dropping mandatory course content
- 8) Providing support to institutional human resource development through specific funding and supporting the establishment of “training academies”
- 9) Evaluating the agreed reform plans with the inclusion of independent international experts

### b) **Actions and objectives at an institutional level**

Work is also required at institutional level to help ensure that universities themselves can benefit from future reforms. This is supported by the ATHENA project Training Seminars on financial management, governance reforms and human resources development. Best practices and practical recommendations for each of these topics are gathered into thematic ATHENA toolkits.

- 1) Developing and building institutional capacity and human resources:
  - a) Introduce a more strategic approach to university management
  - b) Build leadership and managerial skills, including middle management level
  - c) Develop the finance function to address also strategic aspects of financial planning
  - d) Create better defined career paths with a focus on fostering young talent
  - e) Develop a long term succession planning and create an environment to encourage young staff to get involved in management and governance
- 2) Adopting full costing as a principle for financial planning
- 3) Improving internal allocation models
- 4) Balancing centralisation with decentralisation
- 5) Developing a network at different levels with other institutions to exchange expertise and implement agreed actions from ATHENA
- 6) Making a concrete action plan for change including an evaluation of its success



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## **ATHENA partners**

### **Armenian National Policy Taskforce**

- Yerevan State University
- Gavar State University
- National Polytechnic University of Armenia (formerly State Engineering University of Armenia)
- State Universities Rectors' Council
- Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia

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