

Title: Transition to University autonomy in Kazakhstan – The case of the TRUNAK project.

Name of authors:

Hugo Bragioni, TRUNAK project coordinator.

Anar Turmukhamebtova, Vice-Rector for Strategic Development and Internationalisation.

Institutional affiliation of authors: Karaganda Medical University, Kazakhstan.

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the case of a European Union project for system-level reform of the governance of the higher education sector in Kazakhstan. The project methodology is based on a bottom-up approach, with the aim of promoting dialogue between universities and government bodies, therefore, the project activities are designed to facilitate interaction between the parties. The decentralisation of governmental functions and responsibilities is considered globally as a key factor for a modern and efficient administration. In particular, for the governance of universities and research institutions, autonomy is considered of vital importance. Conceptually, in its pure form, autonomy means that institutions are governed according to their own laws and organisms, while in practice autonomy is granted to institutions in exchange for accountability. From the formulation phase of the project and later through the results obtained during the first and second year of project implementation, the topics discussed and analysed are the complexity of the relationship between the governing bodies and the universities and the degree of control exercised by the state depending on the national context and the circumstances. In a first report, the state of the play of university governance and recommendations for the reform process in Kazakhstan are presented, and the current situation of the four dimensions of Organizational, Financial, Staff and Academic university autonomy is analysed and compared with the university government systems of the EU countries. A second report summarizes the results of the discussions held by the members of the project consortium, that is, university leaders and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health, on concrete suggestions for reforms that will lead to a greater degree of autonomy. Future steps of project implementation are presented, including plans for the pilot implementation of reforms, dissemination and sustainability activities.

## PAPER STRUCTURE

<b>BACKGROUND</b> .....	<b>1</b>
TRUNAK CONSORTIUM .....	2
OBJECTIVES .....	3
METHODOLOGY .....	4
TRUNAK WORK PACKAGES, TASKS AND OUTCOMES .....	5
<b>RESULTS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	<b>12</b>

## Background

The background of the Erasmus+ TRUNAK project is partly the result of experiences gained by Medical Universities involved in the World Bank project “Kazakhstan Health Sector Technology Transfer and Institutional Reform Project”<sup>1</sup>. Health Education is one major issue in the reform of the Health sector of Kazakhstan. Experts from USA, Canada, Poland, Sweden and Italy were invited by the medical universities to participate in the World Bank project and recommended increased decentralisation of university governance, as a way for modernisation and achievement of excellence in education and research. For the experts, it was evident that the universities and the Ministry of Health Care had unclear insight about the complexity of transition to increased university autonomy. The situation is the same for the universities depending of the Ministry of Education and Science.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://projects.worldbank.org/P101928/health-sector-technology-transfer-institutional-reform?lang=en>

To address this challenge, Karaganda Medical University (at that time Karaganda State Medical University), decided to take the lead and submit a project proposal to EU in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 2 Capacity Building Higher Education, Structural Measures (E+CBHE-SM). The reason for choosing the EU Erasmus+ programme was the fact that Kazakhstan has been a full member of the Bologna Process / European Higher Education Area since 2010<sup>2</sup>. The political decision of the Kazakh Government of collaboration in frame of the EHEA has been followed by systematic steps towards the implementation of the strategic goals of the reform.

As preparation for the presentation to the project proposal, the study of articles and research about Kazakhstan's post-Soviet reform process contributed to address the core elements of the TRUNAK project, and to design the methodology and activities to apply. For example, a study from 2015 about education reform in Kazakhstan by Hartley, Gopaul, Sagintayeva<sup>3</sup>, concluded that “academic leaders in RK want greater autonomy. However, there is no clear consensus about what level of fiscal and academic autonomy is desirable and whether all institutions are prepared to manage themselves without Ministerial oversight. The roles of key constituents in academic governance have also not yet been clearly defined”.

### TRUNAK Consortium

The project consortium was formed having in mind the identified needs, having as frame of reference the EHEA. In short, these are:

- acquire perspective in the field of university autonomy;
- knowledge about systems of university governance in EU and how they are implemented;
- opportunities, challenges and risks connected to the different models of university governance;
- finding balance in the relationship with the Ministries;
- elaboration of feasible models of autonomy together and in consensus with Ministries.

The composition of the consortium seeks to reflect the diversity of EU systems. For Kazakh decision-makers, it is relevant to observe that university autonomy in EU cannot be seen as a uniform body of governance regulations, on the contrary, the EU countries have very disparate systems, depending on the countries' historical, cultural and political context. For this reason, the consortium includes EU universities from countries that have implemented varying degrees of university autonomy. In line with this, the inclusion of the European University Association as project partner ensures that an holistic view of the state of the play on autonomy in EU is presented, at the same time as the experience, the methodology and the tool developed by the EUA for systematic study and follow-up of university autonomy are used for the case of Kazakhstan.<sup>4</sup>

On the Kazakh side, the members are universities representing the most frequent organisational forms that co-exists in the country, i.e. State university, Non-Commercial Joint-stock company, and Private university. The project underlying idea is that Kazakh academic leaders together with the governing bodies can observe and analyse different approaches to university autonomy, and evaluate alternative options, consequently, the Ministries of Education and Health are also members of the TRUNAK consortium.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://ehea.info/page-kazakhstan>

<sup>3</sup> Hartley, Matthew & Gopaul, Bryan & Sagintayeva, Aida & Apergenova, Renata. (2015). Learning autonomy: higher education reform in Kazakhstan. Higher Education. 72. 10.1007/s10734-015-9953-z.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.university-autonomy.eu/>

Members of the TRUNAK consortium:

*Universities and HE organisations:*

Karaganda Medical University, Kazakhstan. Project coordinator  
Astana Medical University, Kazakhstan.  
West Kazakhstan State Medical University, Kazakhstan.  
North Kazakhstan State University, Kazakhstan.  
Karaganda Economic University of Kazpotrebsouz, Kazakhstan.  
Atyrau State University, Kazakhstan.  
The European University Association, Belgium.  
Lund University, Sweden.  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.  
Lublin University of Technology, Poland.  
Savonia University of Applied Science, Finland  
The Aga Khan University in UK – ISMC, United Kingdom.  
Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy.

*Ministries:*

Ministry of Education and Science, Kazakhstan.  
Ministry of Health Care, Kazakhstan.

*Associated partners:*

Kazakhstan Medical Student Association, Kazakhstan.  
HTAcamp Association, Italy.

## Objectives

The objectives of the project are set to address the challenges of inducing effective changes in the regulatory system of higher education governance. As pointed out in the literature and research on university autonomy, there is a will from the governing bodies of the higher education system to introduce changes for modernisation. It has been the case of the creation of the Nazarbayev University in 2010 by a special law that grants the institution with a high degree of autonomy. The university has a governance structure similar to the universities in the USA. Another example is the political decision, also in 2010, of Kazakhstan to be member of the EU Higher Education Area and the Bologna system. These initiatives, decided by the top political level, are without doubt very important strategic steps, that have to be considered as the initiation of the process towards the transformation of the system of higher education of Kazakhstan. But merely top-down decisions are not enough for the effective implementation of reforms, for example, one of the conclusions drawn in the paper “Learning autonomy: higher education reform in Kazakhstan”<sup>5</sup> is that: “In sum, Kazakhstan will need to create an overarching effort aimed at helping institutional leaders learn autonomy. The building blocks of such a system are already in place.” In this context, the objectives of the TRUNAK project should be considered as a contribution to the effort to develop institutional learning about autonomy, that is, they are designed as bottom-up activities aimed at learning autonomy, for those responsible for university governance, who are represented in the project by the university leaders and the representatives of the ministries.

The objectives of the TRUNAK project are:

- To analyse the state of play and need for university autonomy in Kazakhstan and to give suggestions and recommendations for a model of university governance.
- To contribute to the definition of the roles of key stakeholders of academic governance.

---

<sup>5</sup> Op. Cit. Hartley, Matthew & Gopaul, Bryan & Sagintayeva, Aida & Apergenova, Renata. (2015). P 288.

- To engage the stakeholders in an in-depth debate on autonomy.
- To provide institutional perspective on autonomy by involving the university leadership, i.e. a bottom-up approach.
- To contribute to a constructive discussion together with the Ministries, about the model of governance to apply in Kazakh universities.
- To implement on a pilot basis a model of autonomy.
- To establish a Consulting Group for assistance to universities implementing governance reform.

## Methodology

At a first glance it seems unproblematic that universities should have autonomy. But university autonomy is not an unambiguous and one-dimensional concept. In addition, the systems of governing rules for the institutions must be seen as context-dependent, i.e. as part of a historical, cultural and socio-political environment. An obvious risk is that without a deeper understanding of what the concept stands for, try to adopt autonomy in a country replicating the system of another country or region. The advantage of discussing and experimenting with various systems and solutions together with European universities from different EU countries, is that those who are responsible for designing the national governance of higher education and those who have as the work to lead the universities will be able to gain perspective on that different national contexts in the EU have led to different models, with advantages and disadvantages, risks and opportunities, different degrees of trust between the governing and the university level, etc.

In the EU, the importance of education and research has been the focus since the emergence of the concept of "knowledge-based economy and society", which led to renewed debate on the relationship between the state and the universities. The European University Association started 2009 studies on university autonomy in Europe<sup>6</sup>, which resulted in a series of reports based on a methodology and a tool, the Autonomy Scorecard, for follow-up of development. For example, the tool provides a comparative analysis of the state of play of university autonomy in 29 higher education systems in Europe<sup>7</sup>. The reports address the question of university autonomy in organisational, financial, staffing and academic matters, and compares data for all indicators. Throughout the project, the TRUNAK activities are based on the methodology developed by EUA, i.e. the autonomy of universities in the four dimensions of organisational, financial, staffing and academic dimensions.

In a seminar hold at the EUA in Brussels the members of the consortium were trained in the Autonomy Scorecard methodology. This step was followed by a survey, performed by EUA with involvement of the Kazakh partners, on the state of the play on university autonomy in the country. The use by EUA of the autonomy scorecard tool allowed to describe the current situation in Kazakhstan in terms of the four dimensions, to compare with the EU developments, and to give suggestions and recommendations for change.

Next step was to organise working groups at each partner university, as preparation for workshops in Europe. The task of the groups was to analyse and discuss the findings in the EUA's survey, as point

---

<sup>6</sup> Report University Autonomy in Europe I - Exploratory Study. Thomas Estermann and Terhi Nokkala. 06 November 2009. <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/408:university-autonomy-in-europe-i-exploratory-study%C2%A0.html>

<sup>7</sup> 17 May 2017 | Report University Autonomy in Europe III: The Scorecard 2017 - Enora Bennetot Pruvot, Thomas Estermann - <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/350:university-autonomy%C2%A0in-europe-iii-%C2%A0the-scorecard-2017.html>  
<https://www.university-autonomy.eu/about/>

of departure for further discussions on the changes that would be necessary for the modernisation of the management of the institution. Three workshops organised in EU universities (Lund University, University of Ljubljana, and Lublin University of Technology) served as arena for the exchange of information, experiences, best-practices, etc. between the EU partners and the Kazakh partners. In other words, the method consisted in facilitating the interaction of the university leaders and the Ministries' representatives, that discussed the challenges presented in the EUA report, could compare with a sample of systems in EU countries, and tried to define together recommendations for concrete reforms for each autonomy dimension into the Kazakh national system.

As mentioned above, there is a risk when political and governing bodies of a country seek to adapt structures through the importing of systems that are seen as prestigious and successful in other parts of the World. It has been demonstrated that such behaviour only produces superficial changes, as the people does not participate in the decisions and does not feel ownership of the reforms. Therefore, in line with the general methodological bottom-up approach of the project, the recommendations for reforms generated through the discussions in the workshops in EU were presented and further commented in a seminar hold in the city of Atyrau, Kazakhstan. The objective of the seminar was to work together to decide on priorities and plan for pilot implementation of the reforms proposed by university leaders. Several objectives were pursued, among them:

- to propiciate trust between governing bodies and the universities;
- to raise university leaders' awarness on the new responsibilities and tasks deriving from more freedom of governance;
- to initiate the development a new relationship between the staff of Ministry and the staff of the universities, with the aim of promoting a culture of avoiding micro-management and control through the design of accountability mechanisms based on quality instead of control.

The activities for dissemination and exploitation of project results have been designed seeking to follow the bottom-up approach of the TRUNAK project. Having the institutional perspective as focus, the method is to share the knowledge and experiences gained by university leaders through participation in the activities and events of the project, with colleagues from other Kazakh universities. The instrument planned for the task is a consultancy group, i.e. a group of experts trained by TRUNAK on autonomy, that will be available for dissemination of knowledge on university autonomy in general and specific for the case of Kazakhstan.

#### TRUNAK work packages, tasks and outcomes

Three work packages provide the structure for the organisation of the tasks:

1. Preparation
2. Development of the model of autonomy
3. Exploitation and dissemination of project results

The tasks are:

- 1.1 Training about University Autonomy Scorecard methodology.
- 1.2 Survey about state of the play and analysis.
- 1.3 Development of reccommendations/suggestions.
  
- 2.1 Discussion Group.
- 2.2 Development of Basic model of University governance. A basic Model of University Autonomy is laid down by the Ministries and the Partner Universities.
- 2.3 Pilot implementation.

- 2.4 Communication and information strategy.
- 2.5 Guidance material
- 2.6 Formation of the Autonomy Implementation Consulting Group.

Dissemination & exploitation activities:

National Conference on University Autonomy.

Marketing and launching of the Autonomy Implementation Consulting Group.

*Outcomes:*

The results are presented in reports that are used as inputs for other tasks. For example, the results of the Survey on the state of the play and the analysis are the basis of the EUA report on the development of recommendations and suggestions, which are then used in work package 2.1, etc. Together, the reports and the guidance materials compose the knowledge base that has been generated through the joint effort of the Kazakh participants with the support of the members of the universities of the EU and the EUA.

## Results

The EU selected the TRUNAK project proposal in 2017. The project started on October 15, 2017 and will end on October 15, 2020. Until today, the preparatory phase of the project was carried out, while in the development phase it was only completed task 2.1 and the task 2.2 has been partially carried out. Next, a description of the work and the results obtained are presented.

### PREPARATION PHASE

*Training seminar*

In order to form a unified basis on the terminology and method for the study of autonomy, all project members were invited to a training event at the European University Association in Brussels. Especially for Kazakh partners, training on the University Scorecard methodology was necessary for data collection and analysis of Kazakhstan's current regulatory system. The method is based on a four-dimensional model developed by the EUA, on what autonomy means with respect to organization, funding, academic and staffing aspects.

*Survey*

The EUA led the work, after deciding on a sample that was representative of the types of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. The sample included the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Health Care (responsible for medical universities). Karaganda Medical University acted as coordinator in Kazakhstan for the collection and unification of data. The questionnaires (in principle the same structure that EUA has used for the study of autonomy in EU) was translated into Russian. The survey questionnaire was sent to:

The ministries (5 surveys, to understand the regulatory framework for each type of university).

Nazarbayev University (a university with special status in Kazakhstan).

Three National universities.

Three State universities.

One Joint-stock company university.

One Private university.

*Report by EUA*

The data collected was analysed by the EUA, using the Autonomy Scorecard tool that the institution has developed for systematic study of autonomy development in Europe, and presented in a Report<sup>8</sup>. The report focuses on the state of the play of university autonomy and includes recommendations for the reform process. The table below shows an extract from the section on academic autonomy:

Autonomy indicator	Situation for Kazakh universities	Assessment	Commonly found situation in European universities
Design of programme content	The State Compulsory Educational Standard of the Republic of Kazakhstan prescribes roughly 30% of programme content.	Barrier to autonomy and diversification of the academic offer: accredited institutions should be competent to design the full content of programmes, in connection to the National Qualifications Framework.	In a large majority of systems, universities are free to determine the content of degrees other than for the regulated professions, such as medicine. Exceptions include Latvia and Lithuania, where authorities continue to prescribe some content. Universities perceive this as a considerable hindrance to diversification, innovation and competitiveness.

## DEVELOPMENT PHASE

The Development work package is the main instrument of the project for the materialisation of the bottom-up approach of the project, and the first two activities Discussion Group and Model of autonomy are key. For this reason, much effort has been devoted to ensuring the active participation of stakeholders from Kazakhstan, i.e. leaders and administrative staff of the universities, and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sciences and the Ministry of Health Care. In general, participation and commitment to the tasks have been good, especially by the universities, but the participation of the ministries, particularly the MES, was weak, reflecting in a certain sense the general lack of a participatory culture to face the challenges. This behaviour is in line with research findings about decentralisation in Central Asia, particularly in the case of the decentralisation of the higher education system<sup>9</sup>, a circumstance that justifies the value of initiatives such as the TRUNAK project that attempts to provide opportunities for the participation of the institutions and the governing bodies in the development of the administrative systems.

### *Discussion group*

In the original project proposal, a single workshop in Europe was planned. The idea was to join all participants in a large event dedicated to the discussion of autonomy. By the end of 2018, it was clear that it was not possible to organise a single workshop in EU, and the project coordinator, after approval by the Erasmusplus office in Brussels, decided to divide the event in three workshops in Lund University, University of Ljubljana and Lublin University of Technology. During the first project year, two initiatives led to activities not included in the original project proposal. The first one emerged during the training seminar at EUA in March 2018, where the participants proposed to organise a international conference in Kazakhstan on university autonomy, inviting Kazakh university stakeholders, including from the Ministries, and experts from the EU and other countries. Later, the coordinating institution of the TRUNAK project, Karaganda Medical University, proposed to create local groups in the Kazakh universities that are members of the project, with the aim of involving the managers of the universities in the study of the EUA report, as preparation for the workshops at the EU universities.

<sup>8</sup> Transition to University Autonomy in Kazakhstan. State of play of university governance and recommendations for the reform process. <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/810:transition-to-university-autonomy-in-kazakhstan.html>

<sup>9</sup> Bilyalov, Darkhan. (2016). University Governance Reforms in Kazakhstan. International Higher Education. 28. 10.6017/ihe.2016.85.9248.

These two initiatives showed to have a very positive impact. The conference “Transition to University Autonomy in Kazakhstan: Challenges and Perspectives”<sup>10</sup> was held 20-21 November 2018 in Karaganda, Kazakhstan. EUA representatives talked about the latest developments in university autonomy in Europe and the EUA TRUNAK Report on the state of the play in Kazakhstan was presented to an audience of more than five hundred attendants. Speeches were held by the Vice-Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan and by Prof. Serik Ormibaev, Rector of North Kazakhstan State University, and member of the network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs)<sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>. During the conference, four workshops were organised on each dimension of autonomy, in which the representatives of EU and Kazakh universities and Ministries exchanged ideas and experiences, which also greatly contributed to the dissemination of the first results of the project. The groups at the project partners, coordinated by North Kazakhstan State University, were assigned the task of study the EUA report on the current state of university autonomy and the recommendations. The task included to discuss about changes in the current regulations that, from their point of view, would be beneficial for the management of the institution and try to formulate alternatives. The results from each group were collected in a consolidated report that served later as point of departure for the work package 2.1 Development.

#### *Workshops at EU universities*

In the project proposal, the task of the Work package 2. Development is described as:

“The project aims to create a common space for the exchange of ideas and visions about university autonomy. With help of the survey results and the analysis performed in WP1, and the input provided by the EU partners about university autonomy models in EU, the Kazakh partners would contrast their expectations and the specific circumstances of the political process of governance reform in Kazakhstan. The EU perspective in the field can help to find feasible alternatives and to reach consensus about the basis for a model of university autonomy for Kazakhstan. The goal is to conduct constructive discussions between the universities and the Ministries of the different options. Opportunities and risks must be considered and the actual circumstances surrounding the implementation of concrete reform proposals must be analysed. The final objective is to agree upon a model of autonomy. The model can then be implemented on a pilot basis at the project partner universities. The partners will create a reference group to ensure sustainability of the results. The aim is to provide consulting to other universities during their implementation phase.”

The extract above reveals the key importance in the project of the sub-task 2.1 Discussion Group, as instrument for the materialisation of a bottom-up approach that ensures the participation of the universities in the process of designing the regulatory frame of university governance. But there is a deeper meaning in the effort of including the voice of the universities in the discussions on autonomy, which is to show that it is possible to work together to formulate answers to the challenges or, in other words, that in the dialog between the ministries and the universities, trust is a powerful instrument for the implementation of changes.

The groups met in Lund (Sweden), Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Lublin (Poland). From Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Education and Science sent a representative to the workshop in Ljubljana, and the Ministry of Health Care sent representatives to the workshops in Ljubljana and Lublin. From the Kazakh universities, rectors, vice-rectors, deans, heads of departments and university managers attended the meetings. From the EU partners participated student representatives, professors, former

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://trunak.eu/global-international-conference-transition-to-university-autonomy-in-kazakhstan-challenges-and-perspectives-on-20-21-november-2018/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://supportthere.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://supportthere.org/news/eua-outlines-path-towards-greater>



rectors, deans, head of departments, administrative managers and in one case (Ljubljana workshop) the former Minister for Science and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia 1993-1996. The EU representatives described the national university governing systems, the universities internal management systems, the universities way of dealing with the constraints in regulations and law, etc. Advantages and dis-advantages of the various systems were presented and discussed. At the end of each workshop a presentation and a report were delivered giving suggestions for reform. The three reports were later consolidated in a final report.

The work of the discussion Group was organised following the methodology of the University Autonomy Scorecard. The challenges identified by EUA in the Survey were used as point of departure for the discussions. Challenges at system and institutional level for each dimension of university autonomy were analysed by the groups. The task was to propose recommendations for reforms, the degree of consensus on the proposals, the description of regulatory mechanisms that should be changed, the accountability measures that would replace the top-down control system with other quality assurance mechanism, and a justification of the changes proposed. In the table below, an extract from the consolidated report shows one example of the work of the Discussion Group, in this case, the groups analysed one of the challenges in Academic Autonomy dimension: “Remove provisions prescribing mandatory study content in curricula”.

ACADEMIC AUTONOMY						
Challenge (as identified in the EUA Report)	Recommendations of three groups at system level	Recommendations of the three groups at institutional level	Degree of consensus (+, ++, +++)	Mechanisms (what regulations to change)	Ways of accountability	Justification of changes
<p><u>System:</u> Remove provisions prescribing mandatory study content in curricula and pass complete control to universities.</p> <p><u>Institutional</u> Plan for transfer of increased responsibility over academic course planning. Review content of study programmes</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exclude the regulation “in accordance with the Model/standard Rules” and / or “in accordance with the procedure established by the authorized body” in laws and regulations.</li> <li>2. Exclude all rules regulating academic activities in the Model Rules of Higher Education Institutions.</li> <li>3. Review the structure and content of State Compulsory Educational Standard (SCES), excluding the detailed regulation of the educational process, SCES should be given a framework context.</li> <li>4. Reduce the scope of the comprehensive disciplines till 15% of the total degree programmes, at the same time determining the list of comprehensive disciplines, delegating the content of curricula to university (cancel Model Curricula).</li> <li>5. Determinate the ratio of the scope of disciplines’ cycles of the base disciplines and major disciplines and transfer it to the competence of university.</li> <li>6. Terms of study on degree programmes should be determined by the scope of mastered academic credits.</li> <li>7. Fully delegate the award of degrees, including PhD to the university.</li> <li>8. The rules for granting academic leaves, the procedure of academic transfers and readmission shall be fully transferred to the competence of university.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The university independently determines the content and design of the study program based on the structure of the SCES.</li> <li>2. The university independently opens and closes the study program in accordance with the license for the direction of training.</li> <li>3. The university is responsible for the quality of the study program through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- developing a system of internal quality assurance, without which institutional accreditation is not possible;</li> <li>- the creation of academic committees involved in the development of content and design of the study program;</li> <li>- systematic monitoring and evaluation of the quality of educational programs, educational achievements of students, conducting progressive testing, materials and results of which are provided to independent experts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Universities independently award degrees, including PhD</li> <li>5. In academic policy, universities determine the procedure for granting academic leave, transfer and recovery procedures.</li> </ol>	++	<p><u>System level</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MES RK excludes from the laws and regulations the edition of the norms “in accordance with the Model Rules” and / or “in the manner established by the authorized body”</li> <li>2. MES RK excludes from the Model Rules of the Organization of Higher and Postgraduate Education all the norms governing academic activities.</li> <li>3. MES RK reviews the structure and content of the SCES, standards for the regulation of the cycle of the comprehensive disciplines, base disciplines and major disciplines.</li> <li>4. Amendment of the Law on Education, the Rules for the award of degrees (1-3 years). Cancel the actions of the laws and regulations with the exception of the SCES, Model Rules, Model Rules for admission. Change the approach to licensing training - move to institutional licensing</li> </ol> <p><u>At the university level</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University determine the requirements for the content and design of the study program in the internal regulatory documents.</li> </ol>	<p><u>System level</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study programs rankings.</li> <li>2. Accreditation.</li> </ol> <p><u>University level</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Academic Council. Registry of study program. External examination of study program.</li> <li>2. Monitoring of Education and Science. Monitoring Committee of awarding PhD.</li> <li>3. Monitoring of contingent of students.</li> </ol>	<p>The lack of legal consolidation of the concept of university autonomy contributes to the fact that the MES, despite the provision of academic autonomy, seeks to strictly regulate the activities of universities at the level of secondary legislation, which leads to contradictions in the laws and regulations and limits the academic autonomy of universities. In this regard, there is a need to implement these proposals, aimed at removing the “checks” in the implementation of academic autonomy of universities, and increase the level of responsibility of universities, transferring the planning of their own activities, taking into account the profitability factors of educational programs and the Quality Policy.</p>

The same procedure was applied for all challenges identified by EUA, seeking to arrive to a set of concrete reform proposals, aiming to the design a basic model of autonomy.

*Model of autonomy*

Following the project plan, a seminar was organised in Atyrau, Kazakhstan, in May 2019. The goal of the meeting was to go through the proposed reforms and together with the ministries study the feasibility of establishing a list of priorities and a road-map for implementation. Two representatives of the Ministry of Health Care attended the seminar, but the representative of the Ministry of Education and Science did not assist. All Kazak partner universities sent representatives. From EU participated the European University Association and three project partner universities.

The Seminar resulted in a list of concrete reforms to include in the basic model of autonomy. The representatives of the Ministry of Health Care showed great engagement and willingness to find constructive options to the challenges. The absence of staff from the Ministry of Education and Sciences led to renewed initiatives by the universities, who are now planning to organise a new meeting with the ministries this year in Astana, to further discuss the plans for pilot implementation of reforms at three TRUNAK partner universities. The example below shows an extract of the results obtained.

EUA identified challenges	Proposals for reforms to include in the basic model of university autonomy	Priority given by:		
		MES	MoH	Universities
<b>General reforms</b>				
The regulatory framework applicable to Kazakh universities is complex, dense and highly detailed.	Inclusion in the Law on Education of the concept of “ <b>university autonomy</b> ” (proposed by the initiative of the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan). Introduction of criteria for academic, organizational, financial and staffing autonomy to Model rules of university. Inclusion of recommendations on autonomy of universities in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the long term (proposed by the initiative of the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan).	-	High	High

After the decisions about the proposals for reform to include in a basic model of autonomy, the discussions on a road-map for pilot implementation led to the analysis of the impact of the reforms on the institutions. At this point, one of the recommendations in the EUA report (op. cit., page 40) is of high relevance. The EUA stresses in the recommendations the importance of building up the capacities of universities: “moving towards more autonomy requires that the leadership is trained according to its new tasks”, which is motivated by the fact that university leaders today must fulfil more complex roles. It is also recommended to work for the development of a modern intermediate level of management at central level, as means of helping the leadership level to take evidence-based decisions.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the task 2.2 has only partially been carried out. At this stage, the design of the road-map is in its initial phase, but the participants in the seminar have drafted the plans for future steps:

- Prepare a questionnaire for a survey for assessment of the degree of acceptance of Kazakh universities for implementation of the proposed reforms.
- Submit all information on the autonomy project, including the list of recommendations, to the Council of Rectors of Kazakhstan.

- Selection of the Karaganda Medical University, Astana Medical University and Karaganda Economic University as pilots for implementation of the recommendations of the seminar.
- Develop a methodology for evaluation of pilot implementation, which can be done as a simulation/case in the pilot institutions, as preparation for the introduction of the reforms. The task will be assigned to a work group in each pilot.
- Hold a working meeting with ministers, representatives of the project working group and EU experts (October, November 2019).

#### *Future project activities*

During the remaining life of the project (today - 10/15/2020), pilot implementation and the formation of a group of experts on university autonomy are planned. The objective is to initiate a process of reforms of the university governance system based on a participatory culture of trust between government bodies and institutions. The group of experts will serve as a permanent source of knowledge on the developments in the field of university governance, that universities and stakeholders can consult. Finally, a conference on university autonomy at the end of the project is planned for national and regional dissemination of the results.

## Conclusions

The project is halfway through his life and, therefore, it is too early to draw conclusions about achieving the goal of implementing reforms in the pilot universities. However, the first results of the project are useful contributions to understand the current situation and serve as evidence that the institutions are mature for active participation in the design of the reform process and are ready to be protagonists of the implementation.