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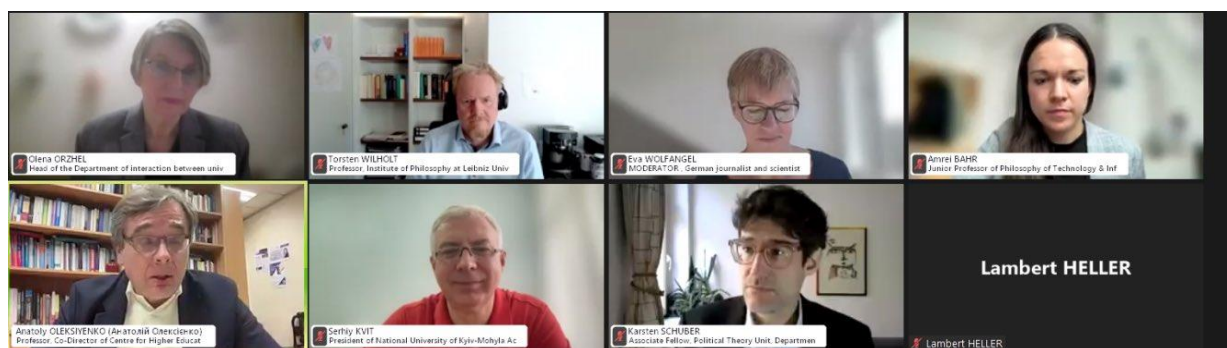
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International panel discussion of perspectives on Academic Freedom with insights from Germany and Ukraine (OSICU2024)

TIB - Leibniz Information Center for Science and Technology University Library organized a panel discussion “**Perspectives on Academic Freedom**”, which took place in the [3rd International Conference “Open Science and Innovation in Ukraine 2024”](#) (OSICU2024) as part of the [German Year of Science 2024 - Academic Freedom](#). The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research funded the panel. The conference was attended by 816 participants.

During the panel discussion, scientists from Ukraine and Germany discussed the role of academic freedom, its challenges, and its role in the development of science. The panel was moderated by German journalist Eva Wolfangel, and the speakers were: **Serhiy Kvit** (National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine), **Karsten Schubert** (Humboldt University Berlin, Germany), **Torsten Wilholt** (Institute of Philosophy at Leibniz Universität Hannover), **Amrei Bahr** (University of Stuttgart), **Anatoliy Oleksiyenko** (Centre for Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies), and **Olena Orzhel** (Institute of Higher Education of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine). A full recording of the panel discussion is available <https://doi.org/10.5446/69525>.



October 25, 2024 Speakers of the panel discussion “**Perspectives on Academic Freedom**” at the International Conference “**Open Science and Innovation in Ukraine 2024**” (online)

The panel discussion began with welcoming remarks from representatives of the **Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine** and the **Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany**, emphasizing the significance of academic freedom for innovation, education, and international collaboration.

Oksana Berezhna (General Director of the Innovation and Science Liaison with the Real Sector of the Economy Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine), underscored the critical importance of academic freedom for the development of intercultural dialogue and progress in science and education. She described Ukraine's efforts to strengthen academic freedom through strategic legislative changes and reforms. Among the ministry's initiatives, Berezhnaya mentioned the development of a new policy framework for prioritizing research and innovation, including experimental research. She expressed confidence that the panel discussions would provide a basis for the continued improvement of academic freedom both in Ukraine and Germany, as well as for the development of global cooperation through open science and innovation.

From the German side, **Florian Frank** (Head of Division of the BMBF Department “Cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe (excluding the EU), South Asia, Central Asia”), representing the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, reiterated Germany’s strong commitment to academic freedom and its essential role in facilitating creative and productive international partnerships. He pointed out that Germany has provided 100 million Euros for

bilateral scientific cooperation with Ukraine until 2029, reaffirming its continued support for Ukrainian scientists amid the ongoing war. Frank also touched on the importance of scientific diversity, noting that broadening participation in research is crucial to addressing pressing global challenges, including the climate crisis. He emphasized that promoting academic freedom, along with active scientific exchange, is fundamental to achieving innovative solutions and deepening cooperation between the two countries.

Presentation Serhiy Kvit *"The University as a Media: Academic Freedom in Ukraine"*
<https://doi.org/10.5446/69534>

Serhiy Kvit, President of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, opened the discussion with his presentation ***"The University as a Media: Academic Freedom in Ukraine"***. In his presentation, Kvit provided the historical context of academic freedom in Ukraine, focusing on the legacy of Soviet-era centralized control that severely limited the autonomy of universities. He explained that following Ukraine's independence, the country initiated significant reforms to bring the higher education system in line with European standards, including participation in the Bologna Process and granting universities stronger autonomy. However, the ongoing war in Ukraine has posed serious challenges to these efforts. Despite these challenges, Kvit emphasized the persistence of Ukrainian universities and their commitment to continue educational and research activities.

[00:18:09] ***"And what we can say about the prospects of academic freedoms in Ukraine, what is the whole task for Ukrainians? First of all, we need to implement the concept of comprehensive university autonomy, especially in terms of financial autonomy. I talked about that and I think it's crucial"*** - Kvit

He also emphasized the importance of structural reform and the need to grant universities comprehensive autonomy, especially in financial matters. According to Kvit, achieving this autonomy is critical for Ukrainian universities to fully realize their potential as independent institutions and to strengthen their internal cultures.

Presentation Karsten Schubert *"Two Concepts of Academic Freedom"*
<https://doi.org/10.5446/69535>

Schubert in his presentation ***"Two Concepts of Academic Freedom"***, analyzed the contemporary debates surrounding academic freedom in Germany, which have been shaped by discussions on identity politics, cancel culture, and state intervention. Schubert presented an in-depth analysis of the philosophical and legal foundations of academic freedom in Germany, focusing on two concepts of academic freedom: the "negative" concept, which focuses on freedom from interference, and the "critical" concept, which recognizes the importance of including marginalized voices and addressing systemic power imbalances within academia. He followed the origins of academic freedom in Germany to the Humboldtian model of higher education established in the 19th century, which emphasizes the unity of teaching and research and the autonomy of universities.

Schubert emphasized the key role of academic freedom in developing innovation and maintaining democracy, and described periods when it was suppressed, such as during the Nazi regime. He noted that the post-war restoration of academic autonomy played an important role in shaping modern German higher education. However, he also pointed to contemporary challenges facing universities, including political polarization, societal expectations and the increasing commercialization of research. He also emphasized the importance of international dialogue and open science as tools to protect academic freedom on a global scale.

[00:34:18] ***"Academic freedom can be justified both on epistemological grounds - that free academia does a better job in producing relevant knowledge - and on political grounds, as free academia is necessary for democracy because it provides citizens with knowledge they need to develop informed political positions"*** - Schubert

He further explored how debates around academic freedom in Germany have evolved, from concerns about internal challenges such as "cancel culture" to more serious allegations of state interference, exemplified by recent controversies involving the federal education ministry. Schubert cautioned against using flawed concepts of academic freedom to justify political agendas, noting that this could inadvertently create new threats to the very freedom they aim to protect.

The panel discussion opened with **Olena Orzhel**, who began her remarks by emphasizing the pressing need for Ukrainian universities to "reimagine, restart, and retransform" themselves to address the challenges of post-Soviet paternalistic traditions, self-censorship, and a lack of resources. Reflecting on the absence of pluralism and open discourse in Ukrainian academia, she called for a cultural shift to foster academic freedom and responsibility.

"We lack many things like institutional environment, funding, and resources. We need, as Karsten said, an ethos for open discussion. We do not have the plurality - social, epistemological, or political - in our academic discourse" - Orzhel

Orzhel also urged universities to take on a stronger public role, arguing that they must become more vocal and active participants in shaping society alongside Ukraine's strong civil society and media. She concluded by stressing that academic freedom must come with a sense of responsibility, encouraging universities to lead meaningful societal transformation.

The panel discussion continued with presentations by other speakers who developed the themes presented by Kvit and Schubert. **Anatoliy Oleksiyenko** focused on the lingering effects of the Soviet legacy on Ukrainian academia and how they inhibit change. He described how the authoritarian structures of the past are still evident in the physical and institutional design of universities.

"The Soviet legacy is not just a memory of the past - it is embedded in the structures of our universities, from the architecture to the administrative systems. These structures sustain an authoritarian mindset that is difficult to overcome" - Oleksiyenko

Oleksiyenko also emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of honesty and critical self-reflection within academia, noting that academic freedom is not just about challenging those in power but also about being truthful to one's community.

"Academic freedom is about telling the truth - not just to power but to ourselves and our community. We must be willing to address sensitive issues openly if we are to create a new academic culture" - Oleksiyenko

He concluded by questioning the role of academic freedom and the purpose it serves, calling for a deeper integration of academic values into society rather than limiting them to universities.

"What is academic freedom for? It must be connected to society and the democratic development of an inclusive environment. Academic freedom cannot stay confined within university walls" - Oleksiyenko

On the German side, **Amrei Bahr** discussed how systemic issues in academia, particularly in Germany, threaten academic freedom. She emphasized the challenges posed by precarious working conditions, noting that the widespread use of fixed-term contracts creates dependencies that discourage young academics from openly expressing criticism or participating in political debates.

"In Germany, 92% of researchers under the age of 45 who do not hold a professor position are on fixed-term contracts. These short contracts make you heavily dependent on certain people in the system, and if they are unhappy with you, your entire career might end before you even finish your PhD" - Bahr

Bahr also criticized the "publish or perish" culture and the reliance on grant-based funding, which she argued forces researchers to prioritize securing funding over pursuing genuine scientific inquiry. She called for increased core funding for universities as a necessary step to improve working conditions and reduce bureaucracy, ultimately creating an environment more conducive to academic freedom.

Thorsten Wilholt explored the philosophical and structural complexities of academic freedom, emphasizing its many dimensions, including freedom "to" conduct research, freedom "from" interference, and the balance between individual and institutional needs.

"Academic freedom is not one thing - it is many things. Freedom to do what? Freedom from what? And who is the subject of this freedom: the individual researcher, the institution, or the research field itself?" - Wilholt

Wilholt criticized the "negative" conception of academic freedom, which narrowly focuses on the absence of interference while overlooking systemic issues such as unequal funding and resource allocation. He highlighted the essential role of universities in fostering democratic culture by combining teaching and research, ensuring students develop critical thinking skills and the ability to challenge societal norms.

The discussion among the panelists touched on key themes such as the funding crisis in academia, the persistence of outdated traditions, and the importance of creating a culture of open dialogue and debate. Orzhel and Bahr both emphasized the need for democracy within universities, with Bahr noting the damaging effects of hierarchical power structures and Orzhel calling for a culture of debate where junior researchers can challenge their supervisors.

"We cannot move forward if research simply repeats patterns from 50 or 70 years ago," - Orzhel
"Freedom of research is restricted when young academics feel they cannot critique their colleagues or supervisors" - Bahr

Oleksiyenko raised the issue of academic integrity and the dangers of using funding without accountability, noting that money alone is not enough to create meaningful change. Thorsten Wilholt echoed these concerns, stating: ***"The debates about academic freedom often overlook the systemic inequalities in funding and resource allocation, which limit the potential for truly innovative and independent research."***

The panel also debated the role of academic freedom in addressing societal challenges. Wilholt highlighted the epistemic and democratic justifications for academic freedom, arguing that it is essential not only for generating knowledge but also for supporting democratic societies. Oleksiyenko questioned how academic freedom could be more effectively linked to societal needs, while Orzhel emphasized the need for universities to engage more actively with civil society.

The panel shows the power of international collaboration and dialogue in addressing the complex challenges facing academia today. By sharing experiences and perspectives, scholars from Ukraine and Germany underscored the importance of solidarity in defending academic freedom and promoting open science in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: AcademicFreedom, OpenScience, ScienceYearFreedom, Freedom