



*Academic autonomy, Slovakia
Marek Šmid,
EUA Annual Conference, Bergen
2017*

*Trnava university, Slovakia:
connection between long-term experience and creativity*

HE in Slovakia

❑ Act No. 131/2002 CL on higher education institutions
(up today 35 legislative amendments)

❑ 7.000 study programs; 57% social sciences

❑ 350 fields of studies or science

❑ 159.000 students (last year decrease 10%)

❑ 21.000 employees – teachers (46%), researchers (8%) and administrative and technical (46%)

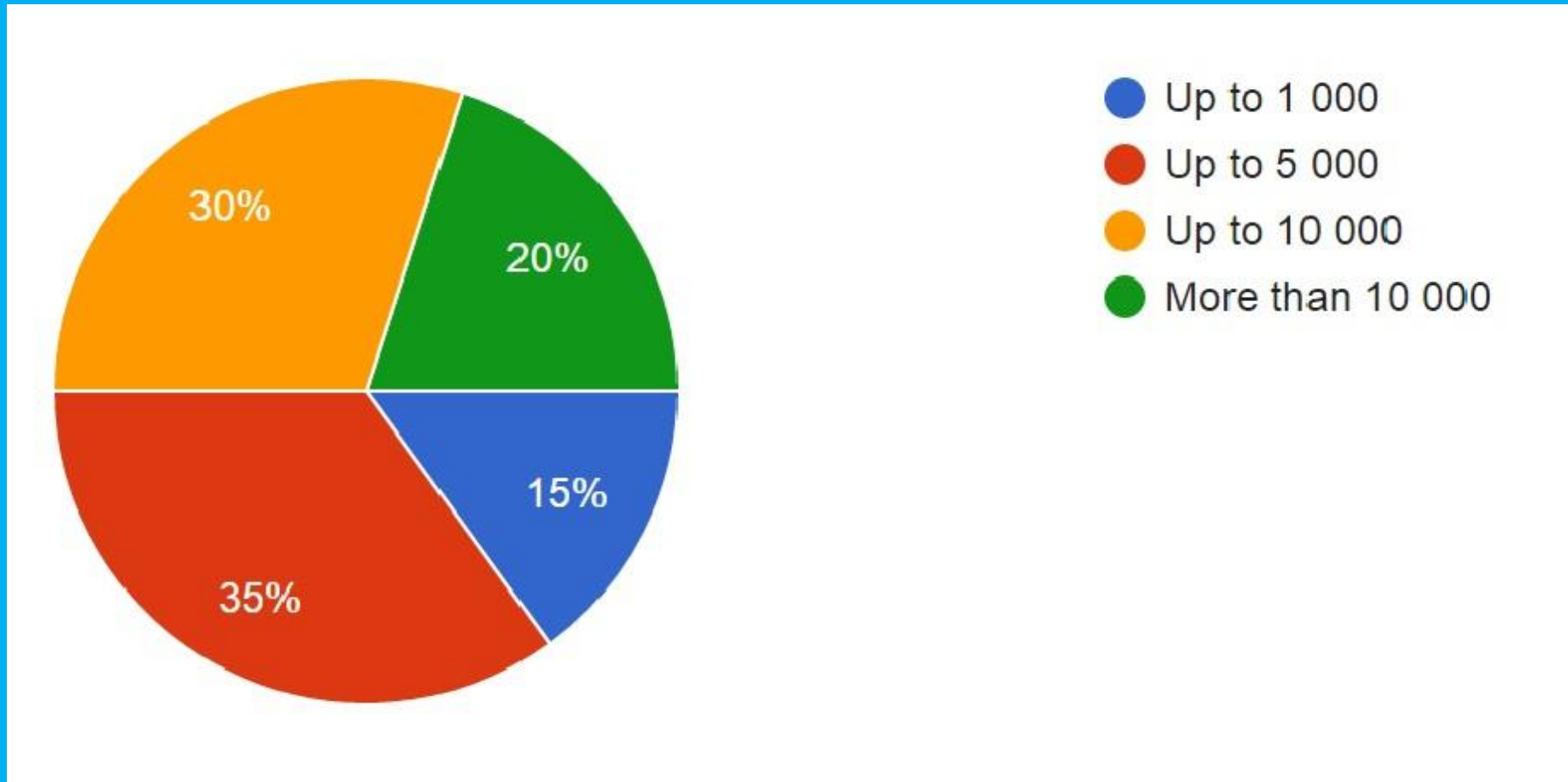
❑ at 35 higher education institutions:

✓ 20 public higher education institutions

✓ 3 State higher education institutions (Military, Police, Health)

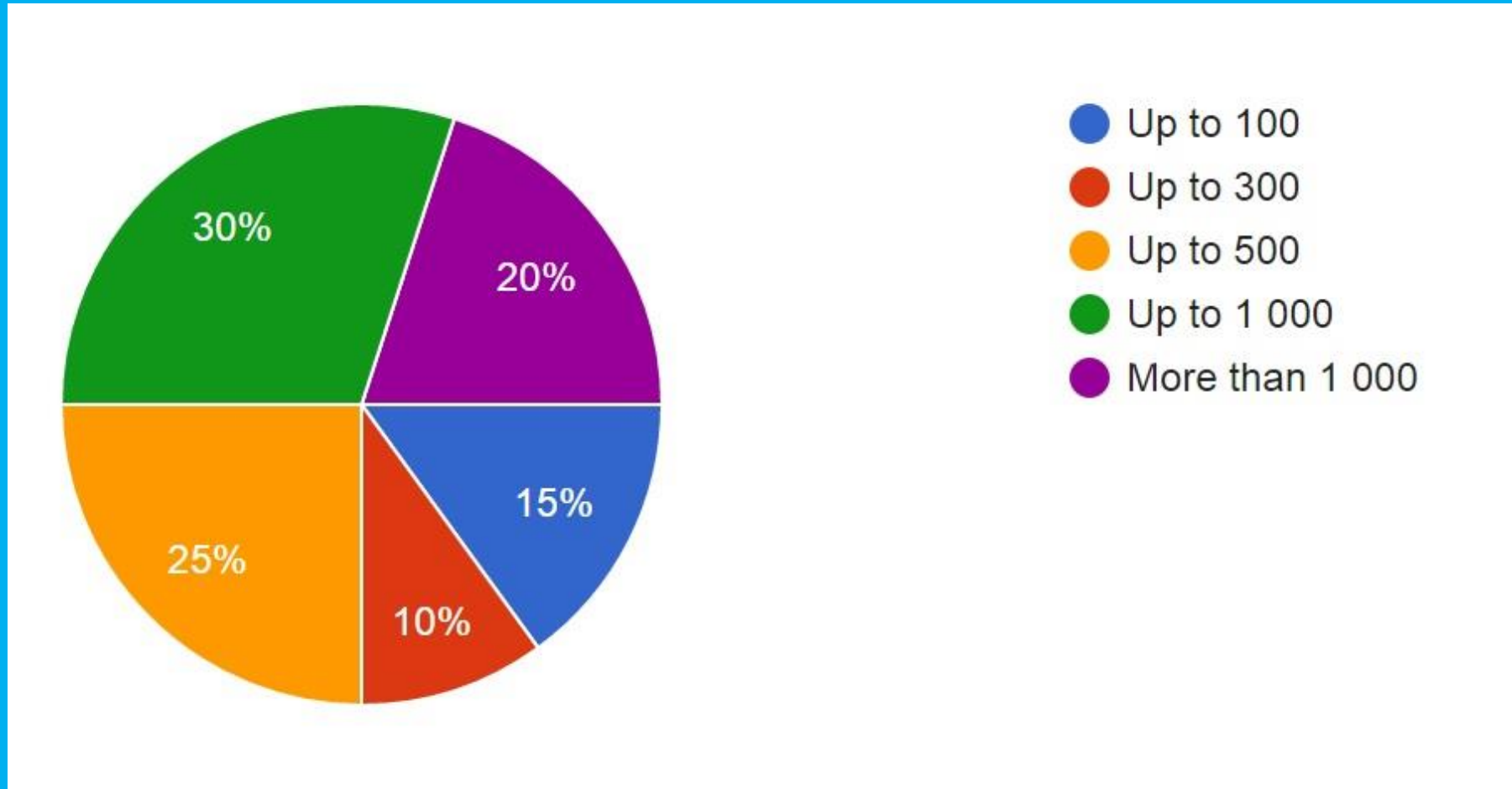
✓ 12 private higher education institutions

How many students do you have in total?



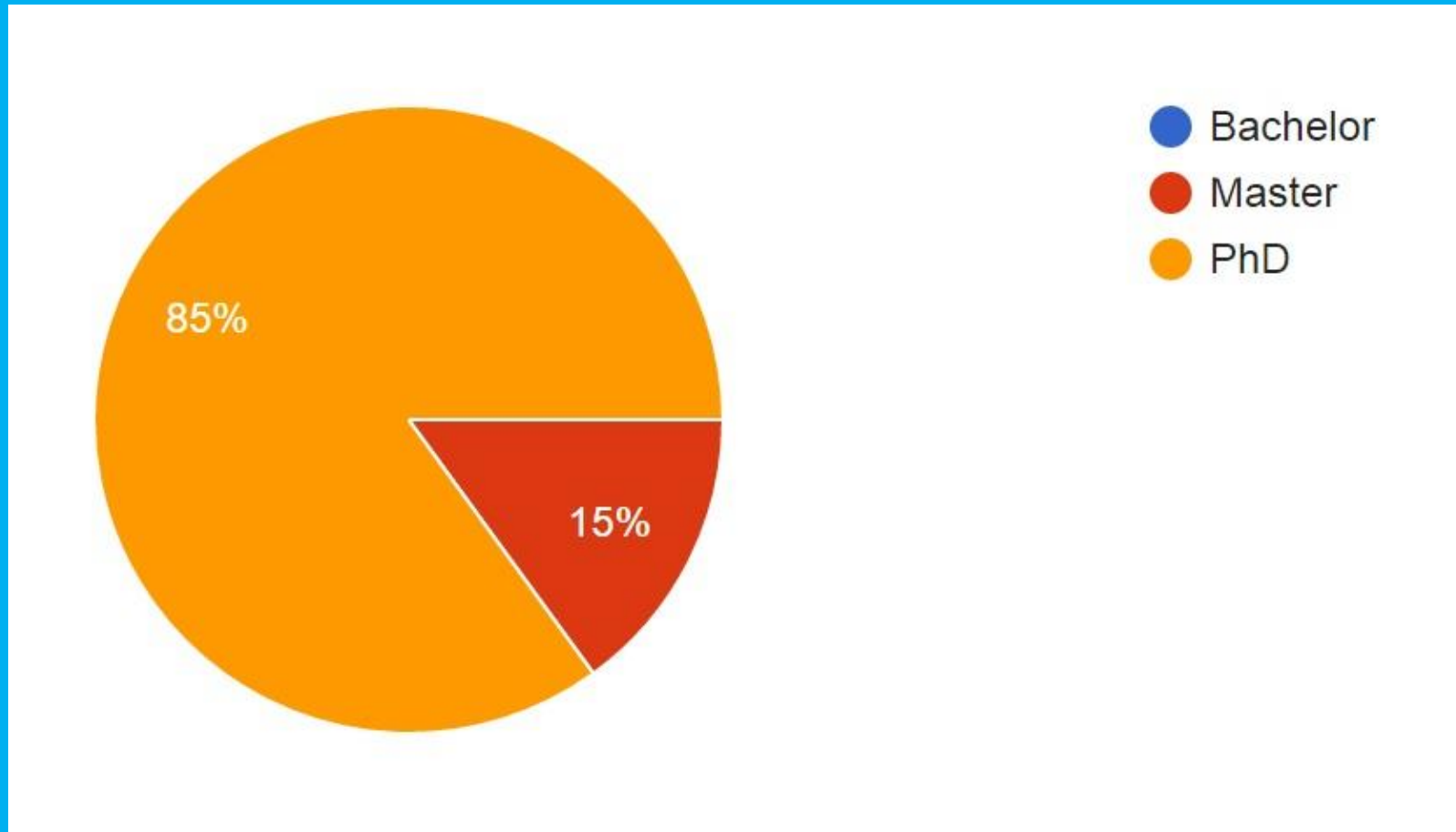
2017 Ministry of Education project SIHE – IQA on-line survey results provided for the academic and administrative staff at Slovak universities

How many staff do you have in total?



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Which is the highest level which your institution educates students to?



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Student numbers (present legal state)

HEIs

- Statutes of HEIs set out the framework for admission
- conformity with long-term strategy of the HEI
- faculties set out the number of enrolled students in its study programs
- faculties set out specific admissions criteria at Bachelor, Master's and PhD levels
- HEIs decide on tuition fees only in case of admission to external study and within the limits of law; full-time study is paid entirely by State

Ministry of Education

- can decide to limit the year-on-year increase of the number of full-time students in connection with financing from the State budget for individual fields of studies for next year (a percentage indication for all HEIs in the same field of study)

New study programs or its changes (present legal state)

- HEIs **can freely suggest new study programs** or their changes, design their content and to choose the language of instruction (to negotiate in the Academic Senate of a faculty and to approve in the Scientific Council of the faculty; proposed by Dean to Rector of the HEI); in accordance to the content of the State descriptions of study fields, decided by Ministry of education and published
- HEIs ask for **accreditation of new study programs** or their changes the Accreditation Commission; final decision is made by the Ministry of education
- HEIs **can freely terminate study programs** on their own (providing for the continuation in studies at other HEIs)
- **comprehensive accreditation** are realized in cycles by each HEI every six years, EI (as a result is a definition of the university or different status of HEIs, decisions on the accreditation of all study programs, personal, performance criteria, research and education; in all grades, levels, forms)

Quality of education (present legal state)

- HEIs have legal obligation to prove their internal quality assurance system (**IQA**), implemented and adapted to the conditions of HEIs and their elements
- IQA is regulated by internal norms which includes **policy and procedures**

Policy includes:

- tools for achieving the main goal of an IQA,
- relationship between education and research,
- organization of an IQA,
- division of responsibilities of HEI bodies in the sphere of quality assurance,
- characteristics of the inclusion of students in the IQA,
- ways of implementing, using, monitoring and re-evaluating the principles of a HEI quality assurance.

Procedures in the following spheres:

- creation, approval, monitoring and regular evaluation of study programs,
- criteria and rules of evaluating students,
- quality assurance of university teachers,
- ensuring resources to support the education of students, corresponding to study programs,
- collection, analysis and usage of information for the effective management of study programs,
- publication of information on study programs and their attenders.

Deficiencies in the internal quality system (present legal state)

- on the proposal of the Accreditation Commission, Ministry determines a period of time for their elimination,
- if this failed, the Ministry, following the statement of the Accreditation Commission, submits to the Government a **bill to cancel** the given HEI

Failure to fulfil the criteria of the status of a university (present legal state)

- HEI may be **re-designated** as a higher education institution or a professional higher education institution (requires legal change in Parliament)

Autonomy - the capacity to select QA mechanisms and providers is limited by / only by:

- legally designed IQA system / ESG
- accreditation criteria for QA during a comprehensive accreditation
- sanctions in case of violation of these standards

Main instruments of current 2017 reform of higher education in Slovakia

- The **National program** of education and instruction (including higher education); based on the theses of Government program
- Amendment (150 drafted changes and additions) to the **Act** No. 131/2002 CL on HEIs
- New Act** on the quality assurance in higher education (based on actual ESG principles)

Fields of national reforms with the highest importance for institutions

How important have national reform initiatives on the following issues been for your institution? Answer option: "High importance":

▶ Quality assurance	73 %
▶ Internationalization	70 %
▶ Bologna degree structure	68 %
▶ Research policy	64 %
▶ Learning and teaching generally	62 %
▶ Implementation of learning outcomes	60 %
▶ Institutional funding	58 %
▶ Governance and autonomy	53 %
▶ Student recruitment	51 %
▶ Widening access and participation	40 %
▶ Lifelong learning	39 %
▶ Tuition fees	34 %
▶ Other	5 %

Basic elements of 2017 reforms of Slovak HE - accreditation

- establishment of a **new independent accreditation agency**
 - registered in EQAR
 - responsible for accreditation standards (proposed by the Agency, approved by the Ministry)

- responsibility and **final decision making competence of Accreditation agency** will be enacted instead of former ministerial one

- **targets** of accreditation process:
 - ✓ internal quality assurance system,
 - ✓ study programs,
 - ✓ habilitation and inauguration proceedings.

Basic elements of 2017 reforms of Slovak HE – HEIs status

- HEIs should define their own profile from the point of view of HEIs main goals and strategy in education, research and social missions and its quality, sustainability and accountability
 - in long-term strategy document of HEI
 - division to three types of HEIs by the decision of Ministry will be canceled

- a new status of research university will be enacted, as not obligatory way for HEIs, on the basis of periodical evaluation of creative activity of research teams and individuals

Basic elements of 2017 reforms of Slovak HE – IQA system

- ❑ IQA is based strictly on the **ESG** that is possible to apply and develop in the environment of effective autonomy (primary responsibility of HEIs for quality, diversity of programs, students, quality culture, expectation of students, etc.)
- ❑ IQA system will be **focused on outcomes of education instead of its inputs**
- ❑ considering the ESG 2015, **IQA system adopted by a HEI will entirely regulate internal approval process of study programs** including appropriate competences of academic bodies, instead of legal rules

IQA: a set of rules, criteria and procedures regulating processes in all activities of a university and its departments in sector of education, research, management and social mission

Basic elements of 2017 reforms of Slovak HE – IQA system


- ❑ enactment conditions and criteria for a new way concerning creation and changes of study programs: **institutional accreditation** as the right of particular HEI
- ❑ the right will be resulting from the decision of the Accreditation Agency whether concrete internal quality assurance system as well as its implementation at the HEI are in the conformity with accreditation standards

Basic elements of 2017 reforms of Slovak HE – IQA system


- Starting points or facts to be considered for such a decision:
 - internal quality assurance system at the HEI (internal rules of the HEI)
 - self-evaluation report of a HEI in the field of the implementation of its internal quality assurance system
 - assessment report of the working group of Accreditation Agency (or body registered in EQAR and recognized by Ministry of education)
 - opinion of the HEI to the assessment report

- Autonomy consisting of the capacity to select QA mechanisms and providers is limited by / only by:
 - legally designed IQA system / ESG
 - Ministerial evaluation standards leading to an institutional accreditation
 - sanctions in case of violation of these standards

Elements acting on the status of academic autonomy

- **legislation** (rules of accreditation, financing, governance...)
 - **external accreditation** activity
 - **real financial** expectations
 - **other circumstances:** labor market, demography, international mobility, approach, expectations of students to study course and outcomes, cultural background, regional factors, political and financial interests
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In conclusion – why to speak so much on quality in relation to academic autonomy

- ❑ quality, as a real positive impact and a personal value of teaching, research and social mission at HEIs, create the space of thinking where growing autonomy of HEIs become consequently more and more natural and requested; with the promotion the sense for accountability and sustainability
 - ❑ a concrete level, intensity of State / international control over HEIs activity depends on the real necessity / conviction or expectations of the State to regulate their processes towards quality
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Moreover in conclusion...

- ❑ academic autonomy means sufficiently wide space of opportunity where HEI should decide and regulate its own affairs independently, with own responsibility, accountability, skills and creativity and to develop its own internal specific potential
- ❑ HEIs, all, but those operating in the fields of social sciences and humanities particularly, should create thorough foundation of arguments promoting academic autonomy, with the emphasis to the bilateral partnership utility of such a concept. It is very appreciated the topic chosen this year to the EUA Conference...

Moreover in conclusion...

- ❑ State should provide adequate material and legal conditions for this challenge; being not too afraid of results but to expect and to ask a just evidence concerning outcomes – quality of HEIs activity
- ❑ In the State – HEIs relations must not lack mutual trust connected with some piece of risk; such a risk of a freedom as used to be given to the good artist painting a picture: universities always were and also today are special and good artists of life, educating and seeking truth and knowledge...

