

## Shortcuts and long journeys

{The CPU thinks that "remettre sur le chantier le projet de révision du décret de 1984 [sur le statut des enseignants-chercheurs] est aujourd'hui indispensable", elle "exprime de fortes réserves sur la nature et la durée de la médiation proposée, qui ne répondent pas à l'urgence de la situation".}

In a time where the French higher education is in the turmoil of rapid changes, let us look at an example from abroad, Japan, to see how the Incorporation of national universities has been conducted there.

In 1996, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP: the conservative party in power for more than 50 years) made a campaign pledge to incorporate or 'agentify' many public services. After their re-election, the Hashimoto Administration set up a Council for Administrative Reform, chaired by the Prime Minister. As a result, a new organizational structure was created to comply with the agentification process, the Independent Administrative Institutions (IAI), a structure created with relative autonomy from the government. During the discussions, the Ministry of Education defended the view that national museums and training centres for the youth should be transformed into IAIs, but that national universities should remain under the Ministry's jurisdiction. This was a sensible move as the budget for national universities amount to ¥270 billion, compared to ¥5.5 B for national museums. It can be assumed that the Ministry had a preference to maximize or at least preserve its budget and its realm of power. The university reform was halted.

In April 1999, a cabinet meeting decision made the transformation of national universities into independent administrative institution an urgent matter, again. In July 2000, the Ministry established a focus team concerning the transformation of national universities into IAIs. The Ministry of Education led the reform process. The team was composed of members from academia, business people, and experts. The majority of the team members were from national universities.

The inauguration of the Koizumi Cabinet (LDP) in 2001 caused the Ministry to lose the leadership: the Prime Minister asked the Minister for Higher Education, Ms. Toyama, to hasten the university reform process. This was part of Koizumi's actions to reform the public sector. In parallel, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry called for greater flexibility in university management, and recommended the restructuring of the university system. This led to the *Toyama Plan*, officially entitled "The Policy of Structural Reform of University". The main points of the plan are the following:

- The plan recommended that national universities should be transformed into national university corporations, a legally separate institution from the government.
- Universities should prepare mid-term plans (6 years) to be submitted to the Minister.
- Universities should be evaluated by an independent institution, the National University Evaluation Committee.
- Personnel matters should be carried out independently and autonomously by the university itself.

Following these lines, in April 2004, the Japanese government incorporated the national universities as

"independent administrative entities." We can comprehend this move as double-edged; on one side appears the rhetoric for reform of the public sector coupled with downsizing elements, and on the other side this reveals a move toward more autonomy of the universities in order to achieve excellence and favours internationally competitive universities.

The reforms have just been enacted, and it is still to be seen how exactly it will affect university governance. However, some voices have already been rising for more changes. The Abe Government (LDP) wanted to push for new reforms of the university system. The Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) on its fourth meeting (Feb. 27th 2007) has enacted a plan to boost productivity in Japan by 50% within 5 years. The idea is to enhance the Japanese growth

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potential. This should be done in three ways: developing growth areas, increasing venture capital, and through university reform. According to experts of the CEFP, Japanese universities have been left far behind in global academia. In order to improve the university system they favour three reform paths. First, universities should concentrate on selected research areas. Second, funding should focus on the selected research areas. Finally, the CEFP is proposing to increase the proportion of competitive funds and reform rules concerning allocation of administrative expense subsidies for national university corporations.

This example shows us that the Japanese reform has been a rather long process, starting in 1996, based mainly on consensus, and discussions between the stakeholders of the process. It could be an example to emulate in other countries that are reshaping their higher education system.

