Autonomy and Governance of Public Agencies: A Comparative Overview of European Educational Public Bodies

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Abstract: This study proposes a comparative analysis of public agencies responsible for quality assurance in university education, across the 27 Member States of the European Union, as a central case study. The main objective is to evaluate the degree of institutional and political autonomy of these bodies, the structure and composition of their governing boards, appointment procedures and term duration, legal status, funding sources, as well as their alignment with European directives and recommendations concerning the independence of quality assurance agencies.

The research methodology is based on secondary data analysis and a systematic comparison of publicly available information gathered from official agency websites, founding documents, legislation, and governance frameworks. The analysis explores both formal and operational autonomy, the composition and professionalization of leadership structures, mechanisms of appointment and eligibility criteria, the extent of ministerial subordination, the existence of internal regulatory and ethical frameworks, transparency mechanisms, and budgetary independence.

The expected results aim to provide a comprehensive overview of how European public education agencies within the EU-27, manage to preserve their autonomy from political influence and operate as professional, independent entities. The study is grounded in the Principal–Agent Theory, which offers a useful lens for examining the relationship between governments and public agencies in the European education policy context.

Keywords: Principal-agent Theory, public agencies; public bodies; institutional autonomy; education policy; quality assurance, autonomy and gouvernance