

WU Arbitration Proceedings: Arbitration Committee confirms that WU is drastically underfunded



The Committee calls the massive discrepancy between the university's obligations and the available funding unconstitutional, and demands either restricted admission policies or a dramatic increase in funding.

In its decision, the Arbitration Committee supports WU's position that the government will have to drastically increase the budget for Austria's universities. Should this not happen, the Committee demands admission restrictions for the most heavily attended programs. Otherwise the universities will have to start reducing the services they perform. Providing adequate funding to enable universities to perform the duties required of them is not only the government's political obligation, but also a constitutional requirement, the Committee finds.

"The recently published decision of the Arbitration Committee provides us with confirmation from an objective panel that WU is drastically underfunded", explains WU Rector Christoph Badelt. In its decision, the Committee maintains that not only would WU be entitled to a great deal more money, but also that the government's policy of assigning responsibilities to universities without providing adequate funding is unconstitutional. According to the Committee's decision, new regulations restricting admissions to the most heavily attended programs will be unavoidable if no way is found to drastically increase the universities' budgets. "This decision proves that instituting these arbitration proceedings, the first of their kind in Austrian history, was the right thing to do and an important step. The Committee's decision is a landmark decision for all Austrian universities and for future performance agreements", states Badelt.

Decision will affect future performance agreement negotiations

The Committee's decision will have significant effects on the upcoming performance agreement negotiations held between all Austrian universities and the government. For the universities, this means no longer agreeing to perform more services than they can afford with the available funding. The Arbitration Committee sees the number of students as a crucial factor in this equation. It states explicitly that optimal teaching and learning conditions can only be achieved if the government provides increased funding for the universities, especially in the programs with the highest enrollment. According to the Committee, this is the government's constitutional duty. The Committee also states that the public universities' role as research institutions must be maintained, meaning that not all of a university's budget can be invested in teaching. If the universities' budget is not drastically raised in the future, the Committee strongly recommends that universities be permitted to introduce individual admission restrictions or tuition fees.

Six million euro to improve studying conditions

Rector Badelt was surprised that the Arbitration Committee strictly limited its own options for action, as it felt obligated to restrict itself to the remaining budget available to the Ministry for Science and Research at the time the decision was published. For this reason, the € 6 million awarded to WU by the Committee will suffice only to ease some of the most acute problems faced by WU students. WU is planning to use the money to increase the resources available to the bachelor programs. "A true improvement will, however, only be possible if the coming

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performance agreement period brings a significant increase in funding. Otherwise this one-time payment will be used up all too quickly”, warns the Rector.



“The real significance of this decision, however, is not the financial support awarded by the court, but the fact that the Committee makes it clear that it considers Austria’s current university policy questionable under constitutional law, and that in future performance agreements with the government a decision will have to be made between either entrance restrictions for students OR a drastic increase in budgetary allocations”, summarizes Badelt.

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