

Call for Support

Dear Colleagues,

It is with genuine concern for the future of academic freedom in Hungary that I write to you to appeal for your help. As a staff member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, it has been my misfortune over the course of the past roughly one year to watch as the current government has taken concrete steps to assert its control over scholarly institutions in Hungary, thereby endangering academic freedom and open intellectual inquiry. I am appealing to you out of my firm conviction that, as scholars and educators, we share a commitment to the fundamental principle that the freedom of academic life from political interest is one of the pillars of a functioning democracy and vigorous intellectual inquiry. This principle is being seriously compromised right now in Hungary, and academic freedom is under imminent threat.

In May 2018, the Hungarian government created a new ministry, the so-called Ministry for Innovation and Technology. Then, in July 2018, 70 percent of the budget of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for 2019, was moved to this ministry. The budget provides normative funding for the network of research centres of the Academy, which have approximately 5,000 active staff members. The disbursement of the budget is now bound to a newly established system of short-term, topic-based tenders that are subject to several laws and academic decrees. On January 31, 2019, the National Office for Research, Development, and Innovation, which is controlled by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology, launched a so-called “program of excellence.” According to this new model, research centres must apply for their entire budget by submitting tenders which are assessed according to unclear (unspecified) evaluation procedures, allowing for arbitrary, politically motivated decisions. (For a more detailed presentation of the situation, see the attachment).

The opaque evaluation system of the project-based tenders, which also extends to public universities and state-controlled research centres, constitutes a break from standard practice and a violation of fundamental principles of academic freedom in the European Union. Basic research is being placed under governmental funding and direct political control.

The Hungarian Academy Staff Forum remains firm in its conviction that the independence of the Academy and the integrity of its research network can only be preserved if the Presidium of the Academy refuses to participate in the tender under the given conditions. For the future of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary’s oldest and most prominent scholarly and scientific institution, it is essential that it be able to continue to pursue its work as an independent body partly financed by state funds on a regular, non-partisan basis. We are confident that the international community of scholars agrees, and we appeal to you as our colleagues and as scholars committed to genuine, open intellectual endeavour to voice your support for us.

We therefore ask you please to send a letter of support for academic freedom in the name of your institution to the President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Prof. László Lovász. You can use the following email addresses:

elnokseg@titkarsag.mta.hu

balla.andrea@titkarsag.mta.hu

simon.tamas@titkarsag.mta.hu

We extend our sincerest thanks in advance for your support, and we trust that our common commitment to academic freedom will prevail.

With kind regards,

Hungarian Academy Staff Forum / Akadémiai Dolgozók Fóruma