

Academic freedom and institutional autonomy

ALLEA, EUA and Science Europe call to protect academic freedom and safeguard institutional autonomy by providing and honouring sound regulatory frameworks

Berlin/Brussels, 10 April 2019. The European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities ([ALLEA](#)), the European University Association (EUA) and Science Europe issued a joint statement today on the urgent need to back commitments to academic freedom and university autonomy with solid actions. The three partners, representing a vast section of Europe's research and higher education system, maintain that academic freedom and institutional autonomy are of fundamental importance and value to society.

"Our knowledge-based societies are dependent on scientific progress, but the fragility of the core principles of academic life, freedom and autonomy, are often disregarded. Only with them can science best serve society", said Antonio Loprieno, President of ALLEA. "Recent developments in Europe with growing political pressure in certain countries have made us painfully aware of the need to protect these values at all costs. It is time for scientists, but also society at large, to stand up against unjustified infringements and to call for stronger safeguards."

The statement calls on governments and public authorities to protect academic freedom and safeguard institutional autonomy by providing sound regulatory frameworks and refraining from interference in the internal affairs of higher education and research institutions. It also urges them to guarantee scholars and students the rights that constitute academic freedom, such as freedom of expression, opinion and thought.

Furthermore, the three organisations call on universities, funding agencies, academies and other research organisations to foster a culture in which free expression and the open exchange of opinion are valued and the academic freedom of researchers, teachers and students is safeguarded.

Universities and academies have recently been the target of increased political pressures. The European Parliament triggered a disciplinary procedure to determine if democratic values, including academic freedom, have been undermined in Hungary. In 2018, the government banned the teaching of gender studies and forced the Central Europe University to relocate most of its activities outside the country. Following a lengthy dispute over budget matters with the Hungarian government, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, recently had to begrudgingly agree to a reform of its research institutes, which places the institutes under a new governing body made up of both academicians and scientists, but chaired by an appointee of the prime minister. In Turkey, the academic sector has come under increased pressure after the 2016 coup attempt, with thousands of public employees being dismissed from their jobs, including academics from ALLEA membership and higher education administrators.

ALLEA has intervened with a range of actions, including mediation, statements and open letters, in support of academic institutions under threat over recent years. The present statement, and the partnership with EUA and Science Europe, is a call to action and reflects the organisations' shared concern that academic freedom and institutional autonomy are no longer self-evident in Europe and around the world, with grave consequences for scholars, science and society.