

Letter of the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to members of Parliament

“Regardless of success or failure what matters is having a pure soul and pure intentions”

István Széchenyi, 1834

Dear Member of Parliament,

Concerning the draft bill to transform the structure and financing of the research, development and innovation system, no. T/6359 on the agenda of the Parliament, I kindly request you to consider the standpoint of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The MTA operates a research network¹ that is financed by the central state budget, employing almost 5000 researchers and auxiliary staff. The Academy operates transparently, submits a report to the government annually and to parliament biennially. The detailed scientific reports are available to anyone on the MTA’s homepage. The Academy is managed on the principle of self-governance and board governance. The 15-strong Council of Research Institutes helps and evaluates the work of the research network, and can also pass decisions on certain topics. The government delegates three members of the council with counselling rights “out of the senior colleagues of ministers responsible for education, RDI, the development of economy competitiveness policies, who can promote the effective management of the research network owing to their practice and experience in economy, management, research, management of academic affairs and public administration”.²

The research sites that operate with the above guarantees perform excellently in their own fields of science compared to other scientific organizations worldwide. Several researchers’ work is outstanding both in Europe and in the world.³ Independent bodies regularly evaluate the professional performance of the Academy, based on international standards. Both the Palace of the Academy and the research sites are open to all those interested in science. The Academy communicates high standard values, and our programs to popularize science are also open for the wider public.⁴

¹ The MTA operates 10 research centres, 5 independent research institutes, 96 research groups co-financed by the Academy at universities and public collections, as well as 93 Lendület (Momentum) research groups.

² Act on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – Subsection 5 of Section 17 of Act XL in year 1994 (MTAtv.).

³ Based on the number of H2020 grants, the MTA’s research network is among the most successful organizations in Hungary. Additionally, out of the 18 most successful organizations applying for ERC (European Research Council) grants, 11 belong to the MTA’s research network. Almost half of the Hungarian grants have been won by researchers of the MTA..

⁴ E.g. World Science Forum, the Festival of Hungarian Science, professional conferences.

Despite the fact that no critique or suggestion concerning the work of the Academy had been given to MTA after the evaluation of our reports, the Ministry of Innovation and Technology took over the budget for the research institutes based on the 2019 Budgetary Act, without any prior counselling with the MTA. Ever since, financing has become unpredictable, which has resulted in serious operational issues at the research facilities and makes it impossible for our researchers to win international grants.

The present draft bill plans to separate the research network from the Academy. No relating impact analysis⁵ has been sent to the MTA, therefore there is no information on the social, economic and budgetary effects of the proposed changes, the necessity of the present bill amendment and its further possible impacts. The most important point, however, is that **we do not understand the purpose of this draft bill amendment.**

Following is a list of our arguments against the present draft bill.

1. The Roland Eötvös Research Network (ELKH) that will be established based on the Academy's research network will be managed by the ELKH Secretariat, whose **only public service mission** is “to maintain and manage the institution network for research pursued inside an institutional framework”.⁶ **The necessary conditions will be provided by the MTA according to the draft bill amendment.**⁷ Therefore, there is no justification for the need and necessity of setting up a new organization. Furthermore, it is extremely risky to take out the research sites out of qualified professional supervision, as it threatens performance.

2. Despite the Academy's efforts, the representatives of the research network will not be included in the Managing Board (MB) of the new organization, which **stands in stark contrast to the well-established and justified principle of self-governance.**

3. The MTA's properties and assets has always been, and to this day is, in the service of Hungarian science. The Academy will maintain the properties even if it can only manage the research network through representatives. Similarly to the present system, the MTA, to the extent necessary, wishes to ensure the rights of their present institutes to use the Academy's properties through individual private contracts. The MTA does not wish to profit from the properties and assets that are in the service of research. **However, in order to be able to carry out the MTA's public tasks, it is necessary to ensure a regular governmental budget for the maintenance and development of the properties and assets.**

⁵ It is mandatory to prepare an impact analysis based on Subsections 1 and 2 of Section 17 of Act CXXX in 2010 on legislation.

⁶ Subsection 3 of Section 13/B of the draft law amendment.

⁷ Subsection 5 of Section 16/B of the draft law amendment.

If the proprietary right of the public body of the MTA differs from this, it may be in breach of Subsection 2 of Section XIII of the Fundamental Law of Hungary (the constitution), as it is restricting its property rights devoid of compensation.

4. The present draft bill does not discuss how the wages of employees of ELKH will be ensured **besides winning grants**. It is indispensable that the research sites involved in exploratory research employ researchers with unfixed term contracts, in a predictable and plannable manner, not for single projects. Otherwise, nothing can justify the permanent use of properties and assets for the research sites of ELKH.

5. The **General Assembly of the MTA has passed a resolution to keep the research network within the Academy. Furthermore, the General Assembly is ready to give the management of the research network to a body in which the government delegates representatives in the internationally accepted proportion**. This way, the internationally renowned MTA scientific brand can be upheld for the research sites. If the widely renowned brand and the synergies that characterize the MTA are lost, it would result in losing values affecting the whole of society.

6. Baron Roland Eötvös (1848-1919) was a physicist, university professor, late member and president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Numerous noteworthy Hungarian institutions bear his name, among them Roland Eötvös University (ELTE), one of Hungary's largest and most renowned higher education facilities. Hence, it is doubtful whether this choice of naming allows an adequate distinction between these two eminent institutions of the country.

I request You to consider carefully whether the present form of the draft bill should be passed by Parliament. I also wish to call your attention to what Minister László Palkovics said according to the authorized minutes of the 15 June 2018 meeting of the MTA's Presidium:

"...the Government does not wish to reduce the MTA's budget, does not wish to take away the research institutes or pass them on to the universities. It remains the autonomous decision of the Academy how to manage these institutes. The Government does not wish to force the Academy's institutes to deal only with scientific topics that belong to technology and innovation. The Government does not wish to separate the research institutes from the Academy, as it happened in other countries." The Minister also emphasized that the Hungarian Government considers the Academy and its institutes to be national treasures.

6 June 2019

László Lovász, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences