



Press conference

12 June 2019

Headquarters of

the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA),

Budapest

Hungarian Academy of Sciences

The learned society:

- 365 academicians + external and honorary members;
- Academy of Young Researchers;
- 17 000 members of the public body, electing 200 representatives to the General Assembly.

The research network:

- 15 research centers and about 150 research groups at universities;
- 5000 staff, 3000 of whom are researchers.
- Based on output/resources it is among Europe's finest.

Government plans on a „new” research network

- Separate all institutes from the learned society of MTA and create a new „Eötvös Loránd Research Network” (ELKH).
- Create a Governing Board with delegates of the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM) and the Academy in equal numbers (6+6) and a jointly selected president, all members to be appointed by the Prime Minister.
- Free use of existing properties of the Academy, a part of its existing central administration and its successful grants and fellowships to operate the „new” network.
- State support is maintained, but no guarantees for basic operational cost (staff and tenured researchers, etc.), previously guaranteed by the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Concerns over the government plans

- no valid reasoning
- tools for strong government control
- no guarantees for basic operational funding
- violation of the property rights of the Academy
- highly questionable methods of negotiation, no consensus, and erosion of trust

- a threat to academic freedom and the autonomy of research

No valid reasoning behind

- MTA has been successful in running its research network.
- MTA is responsive to new challenges, it has prepared several strategic documents that comply with government demands of boosting innovation.
- The Government has not produced any strategy that could underpin the separation.
- Low innovation performance will not be improved by putting a successful basic research network under government control.

Why should the network stay with the Academy?

- well established high level quality control;
- important synergies between research institutes and learned society;
- internationally recognized „brand“;
- extremely complicated legal situation arising from separation;

Why should the network be separated from the Academy?

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Government control

- The Governing Board has 50% Government representation, all decisions are made by simple majority voting. No representation is guaranteed for members of the research network.
- National RDI priorities are set by the Minister of Innovation and Technology advised by the National Science Policy Council all members of whom invited by the minister and only 1/3 of them are scientists.
- National RDI funding is distributed by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office under the control of the Minister of Innovation and Technology.

No guarantees for basic funding

- In contrast to the guarantees described in detail in the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences basic funding to cover the cost of permanent staff, long-term contracts, etc. is not set by the new law.
- The research network will be increasingly reliant on project-based funding available for government priorities.
- Long-term research agendas, blue sky research and any research beyond government priorities will be increasingly difficult to follow.

Highly questionable methods in the course of negotiations

- 54 minute deadline to give expert opinion on the amendments of the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2018;
- transfer of the research budget of the Academy to the ITM and several attempts to unlawfully withhold the release of funds;
- disregarding resolutions of joint ITM-Academy committees;
- disregarding the proposal of the General Assembly of the Academy providing more room for government involvement in the research network.

Summary

- Government plans are refused by the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian scientific community, some of the most excellent researchers have already left the country.
- The separation of the two missions of the Academy will inhibit the preservation of existing synergies.
- The new institutional and financing framework is against European principles of research funding and threatens academic freedom.
- A change in the name and government control will not increase the innovation capacity.
- Unbalanced role for government priorities and control in science may soon become an alarming example to be followed by other governments in the EU.



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