

MTA–ITM: where are we now? – Summary report 15 May 2019

The Academy’s research network – the basics

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences operates an extensive research network. The 39 research institutes of the network cover the full range of the scientific research spectrum from humanities through brain research to nuclear physics. The network employs 4000 people, including 2500 full-time researchers. Additionally, the MTA also finances 104 Lendület (Momentum) Research Groups each led by excellent young researchers, and also supports 89 additional research groups at universities and other institutions. The research network is primarily dedicated to basic research, but applied research and innovation are also present.

Efficiency compared to academies of the region and of Europe

In the EU13 region, the Academy’s research network is outstandingly successful concerning grants announced by the European Research Council. On average, 5 or 6 grants per year are won by Hungarians, and in the past 12 years, the research network has won 9-10 million euros through grant awards. Half of successful ERC grants were won by the MTA.

Concerning the proportion of resources, the Academy’s research network is the most efficient in Europe: compared to 100,000 euros of institute budget, the MTA’s research network produces the highest number of scientific articles published in renowned journals in Europe (i.e. articles published in the top 25% of journals in the relevant field).

Transparent and responsible operation up to international standards

In 2012, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences completed a major restructuring to enhance efficiency. Professional audits based on international standards conducted with the participation of international experts were conducted in 2016 on the MTA’s own initiative and in 2019 at the request of the Hungarian government. Both audits regarded the research network as excellent. Neither audit revealed problems that would require a major restructuring of the network.

The Academy submits an annual report on its work to the government, and reports to the parliament every second year. No critical remarks were sent to the Academy about these reports, the parliament accepted them in all cases with a grand majority.

Debate with the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM)

Following such a prelude, the executives of the Academy were taken aback by the letter from the Ministry of Innovation and Technology in June 2018, which allowed them 54 minutes overall to review the planned amendment to the law regarding the Academy. In essence, this amendment – which was later passed by the parliament – declared that the sources dedicated to the research network of the Academy will be transferred to the Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

A long series of talks started between the MTA and the ITM. The ministry set the following objectives: (i) to break up the research network, (ii) to restructure the management, (iii) to stop the system of basic funding, and finally (iv) to cut the whole research network off the Academy.

Unclear strategy of the ministry, clear opinion of the MTA

During negotiations, the ministry failed to deliver detailed plans concerning the future operation of the research network, while they suspended the financing of overhead costs of the network beginning from 1 January 2019. Later, these sources were reopened as a result of negotiations, although this guarantee expires at the end of May 2019. The ministry has not given up its opinion that in the future even the basic funding of the research network should be ensured through grants and tenders.

The Academy maintained its view in the course of negotiations that a prerequisite for effective operation is that basic funding should be ensured by the national budget just like in other countries. Furthermore, the best known solution for maintaining freedom and scientific performance is to keep the research network within the capacity of the Academy. The Academy's opinion was supported by the results of the audit launched in 2018 on the request of the government, which was conducted according to international standards, in cooperation with international experts and representatives of the ITM.

Support of the government's innovation objectives

In the course of negotiations, the Academy has always shown its dedication to the development of innovation. In the autumn of 2018, an innovation strategy was completed, on which the Eötvös 2020+ agenda was set up. According to the unanimous and professional opinion of the Academy's leadership, the Presidium, the researchers and other employees as well as the General Assembly, research and innovation objectives can only be met if the research network remains in the capacity of the Academy in the future as well. The Academy is however ready to change the management structure with respect to the government's needs.

Where are we now? Resolutions of the General Assembly on 6 May 2019

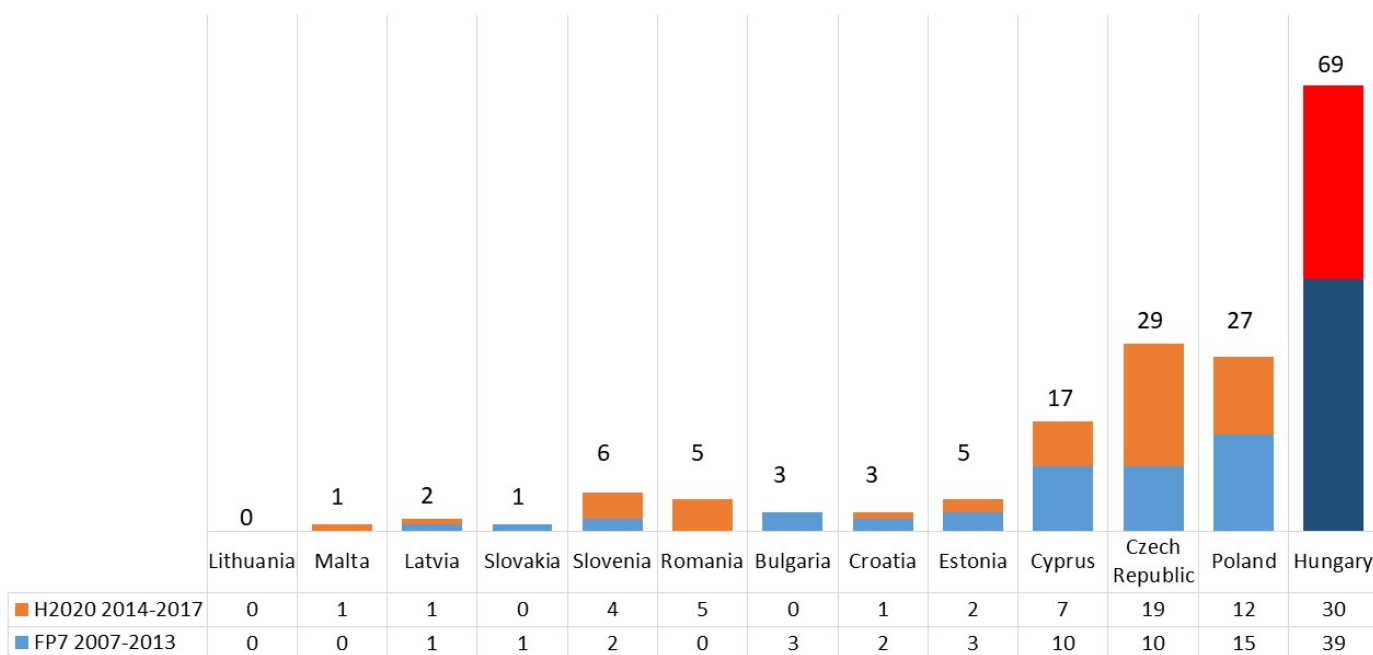
The main legislative body of the MTA, the annual General Assembly, [passed resolutions with a grand majority](#) to set up the framework in which the Academy can pursue further negotiations with the government.

- The General Assembly decided that the research network should remain within the capacity of the Academy in the future.
- In harmony with the Academy's earlier opinion, the General Assembly insists that the basic operational costs of the research network be provided by the national budget, in accordance with widely known international models.
- Finally, the General Assembly provided the possibility for the management structure of the Academy to be revised. However, the resolution passed stated that besides the President, the governing board should have an equal number of members delegated by the Academy, the government and the research network itself.

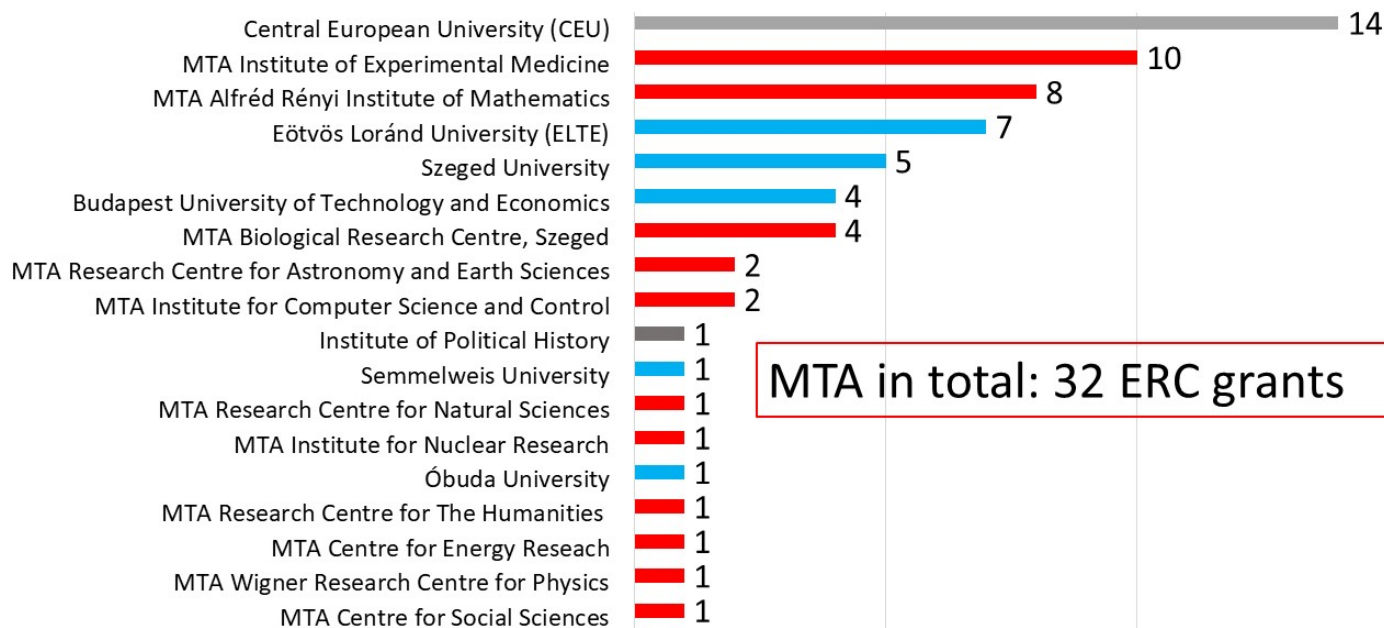
This is the Academy's final standpoint, which was accepted by the General Assembly. However, according to Minister László Palkovics, this decision is unacceptable for the government, and he insists on cutting the research network off the Academy without any professional reason. The specific amendments of laws have to be passed by the parliament.

Figures:

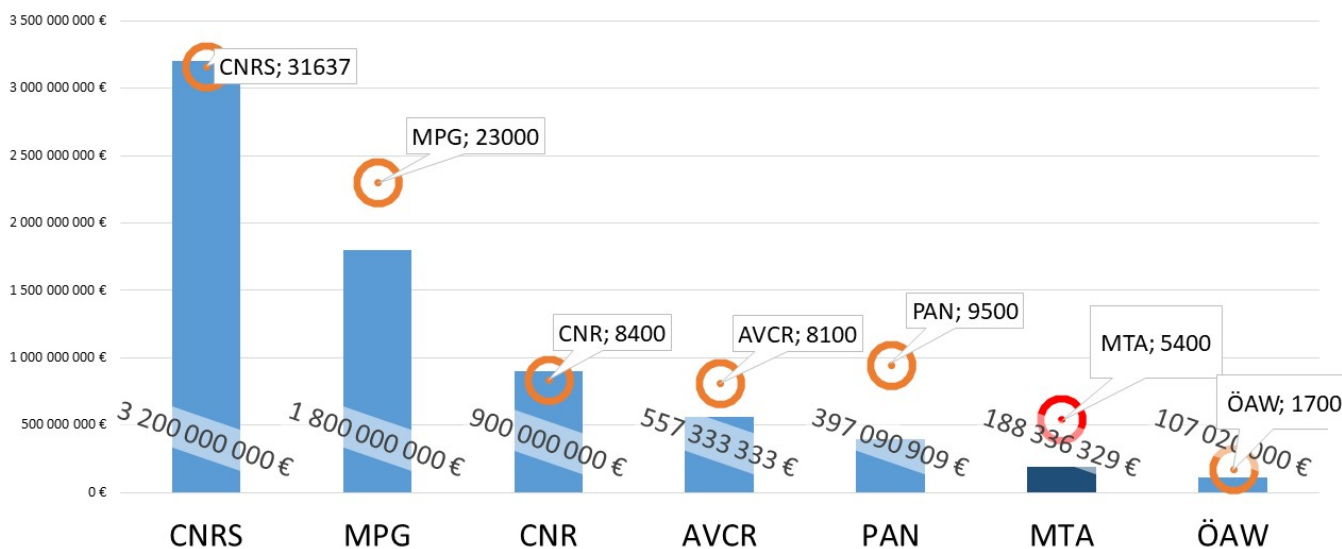
Number of ERC grants won by EU13 member states (2007-2017)



Most successful ERC host institutions in Hungary



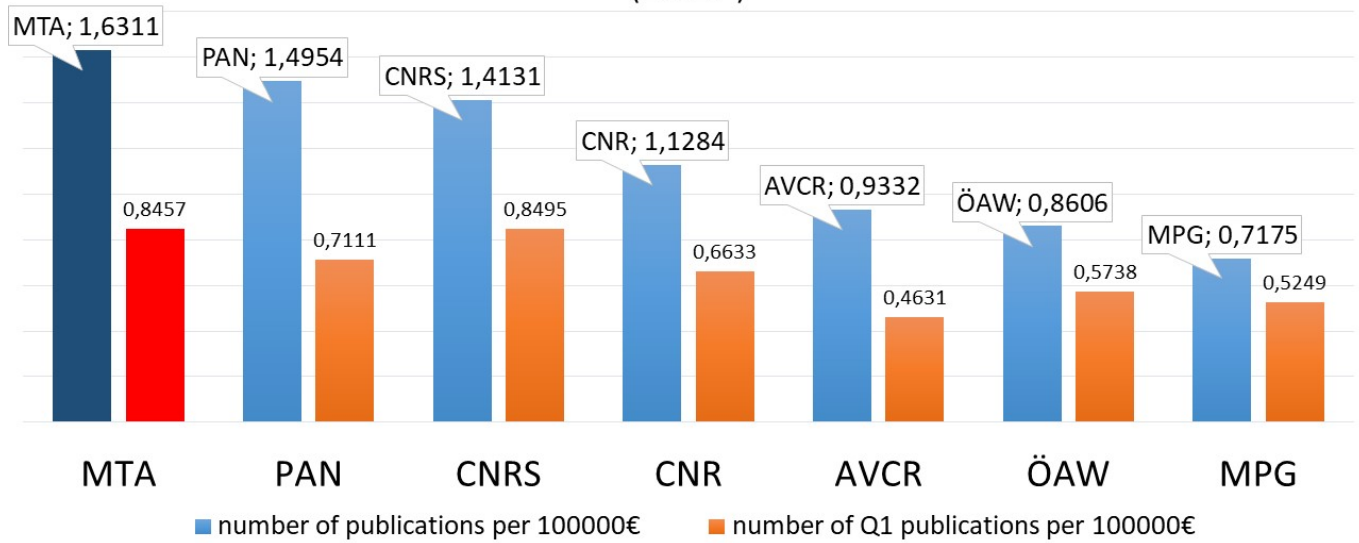
Annual budget and number of employees at MTA and other European research organizations (2017)



AVCR: Czech Academy of Sciences (CZ); CNR: National Research Council (IT); CNRS: National Centre for Scientific Research (FR); MPG: Max Planck Society (DE); ÖAW: Austrian Academy of Sciences (AT); PAN: Polish Academy of Sciences (PL)

Source: MTA, 2017

Number of publications and Q1 publications per 100 000 € institutional budget in case of MTA and similar European research organizations (2017)



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Source: MTA, 2017