

## Some points of reference to help interpret the Declarations published by the Hungarian Academy Staff Forum (HASF)

The Hungarian Academy Staff Forum – HASF (Akadémiai Dolgozók Fóruma – ADF) brought resolutions on *three issues*:

- 1) On the issue of the independence and autonomy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) and research institutes, research centres, and budgetary entities belonging to the MTA from government, in accord with the terms of Act XL of 1994 on the Academy of Sciences, and in broader terms, on the issue of the separation of the sciences from political power;
- 2) The issue of the core funding (block grant funding) of the research institutes, the research centres and the Academy, as well as the system of financing research (specifically the “Tématerületi Kiválósági Program” [Thematic-field Excellence Programme] announced by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology;
- 3) The issue of ensuring the working conditions and employment rights of the researchers and administrative workers working in the institutional network of the research institutes, research centres, and budgetary entities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and on preserving the unity of MTA in the face of the organizational restructuring forced upon it through financial means.

Issue 1 should not be confused with the issue of the freedom of the researcher, which concerns whether researchers can continue their work in line with their own scientific conscience and independently of political influence when the core funding required for the research, as well as financial and infrastructural conditions are given. The autonomy and independence of science from political power is a *precondition* of the freedom of the researcher. Because it is first the core funding, the general system of financial and infrastructural conditions that determine whether researchers can work at all, and which researchers in which fields of science are ensured block grant funding and the financial and infrastructural conditions that are required to do that work. If the scientific community does not decide such questions according to its best knowledge, qualification and rating system, the situation arising could easily mean that the research subjects, questions and facts do not even arise, on the basis of which in the light of broader social needs it could be decided what fields may require exceptional support. If we do not ensure the core (block grant) funding for the measurement of temperatures and the basic research related to the average temperature of the earth, and interpretation of the “temperature” of the earth, we cannot decide about whether research into climate change is justified or not. Therefore the issue of the separation of science and political power is just as fundamental, as the separation of the church and political power. Since Giordano Bruno, Galileo, and the birth of the institutional systems of the modern sciences this independence has been a fundamental principle for international science. This fundamental principle rests, among others, on the historical experience that there isn't, and has not been until now any guarantee that a political regime can bring a better decision in questions of basic research than the scientific community. Conversely, when political decisions were made on these questions independently of the positions of scientists, the consequences were catastrophic.

Issue 2, puts forward the Forum's position on the concrete current attempt to introduce a new system for the financing of science. This system principally affects the whole research network of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, that is, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as it exists on the basis

of Act XL of 1994. At the same time, however, it also affects the whole system of research financing in Hungary, and the role of the Academy within it. This financing regime first drew the whole annual budget of the MTA research network into the jurisdiction of the Ministry, and now intends to distribute it with the involvement of the government-founded institutional circle outside the purview of the Academy, according to its own supported “subject-field” quotas, preferences, and as yet unknown, but solely self-operated rating system. Rather than ensuring the funding of the relevant institutional circle, by this means it is funding the institutions of its own founding from the budget framework allocated to the MTA by the Academy Act, with its own chapter in the central budget, and approved by Parliament.

The MTA President protested against the withdrawal of these funds from the MTA leadership and the Academic bodies responsible for the tasks of the MTA being carried out, and the President did not sign the pertaining proposed legislation put before parliament. The reallocation of fiscal resources took place last year, without indication that the signature was missing, and irrespective of the MTA position. Thereby MTA was put in a position where the budgetary funding of required tasks was withdrawn from those who were responsible for completing them. In 2019, MTA no longer received the costs of maintaining its research network, and even where the wages of MTA employees are concerned, the Ministry only promised to cover them until the decisions on the bids for its “Thematic-Field Excellence Programme” announced within the framework of the new financing system it wishes to introduce. This stands in conflict with the Academy Act currently in effect, and the Fundamental Law of Hungary.

Issue 3 addresses the situation of the research and administrative staff working in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences network of research institutes, research centres, and the institutional network of its budgetary entities, and specifically their contractual positions as civil servants, the conditions required for them to carry out their tasks, the interests of the workers, and the organizational framework of their work. These workers currently fall within the scope of Act XXXIII of 1992 on the legal position of public servants. Their employer is the Director-General, appointed by the MTA leadership, yet the Ministry dispenses with the budget allocation for their wages currently. So if the Ministry does not transfer the funds to the research centres and budgetary entities of the Academy, employees can only sue their employer, MTA, and their research centre, which raises issues of legality going beyond the Public Servants Act, and creates existential uncertainty. The intended system of financing with an annual decision about wage allocations, for a maximum of a three-year period contradicts a significant proportion of the current (indefinite-term or tenure-type) employment contracts. If introduced, it will affect the currently valid employment contracts to the detriment of the employees. At the same time it divests the employers of the conditions for them to practice their rights as employers, that is, it eliminates all possibility of self-determination for MTA in respect of how it signed and respects its research and administrative staff contracts.

In the following we present the grounds on which we have reached our positions on these issues:

1. The distribution of the wages of civil servants through funding bids violates the law (Act XXXIII of 1992 on the legal position of public servants),  
as does
2. the distribution of the maintenance costs of the academic institutes in the manner planned by the Ministry. This is the case because the Budget Act stipulates an exclusive allocation of these funds, which the Ministry is required to disburse according to the terms of the Academy Act.

3. Provision of infrastructure and core (block grant) funding is independent of thematic research funding in every democratic state of the world. As property of MTA, the MTA research infrastructure is public property financed from public funds. Maintenance of these is to be ensured through the Academy Act and the Budget funding approved by Parliament.

4. The aim of thematic funding and subject field financing everywhere is to ensure the costs, in a given research area, arising *beyond* the core costs, and to ensure the involvement of those experts in the research who are not participating *ex officio*, or as employees paid from public funds, or those who undertake the work beyond the duties required in their position. This is the same as in the case of research conducted at the state maintained institutions financed by the American National Science Foundation, Max Planck Gesellschaft, or the Swedish Royal Academy.

5. Similarly, it is international scientific practice that the leading scientific institutions, along with many other institutions serving scientific excellence, the vanguard of scientific research like the MTA (as in the case of even the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft cited by the Ministry, which supports applied, rather than core research) and adjudicate the distribution of resources intended for research subjects and themes according to their own criteria, procedures, and through their own supervisory bodies, ensuring the *balanced development* of each area of science.

6. A comparison of the stipulated conditions for funding, the themes of the calls, and the funds allocated to them with current public maintenance and wage costs lands many institutes in a position where even if the institutes of the Academy win the whole allocation available for their area, the funds would still only cover a fragment of the maintenance and wage costs, threatening their existence and the core research they conduct. Holding on to researchers becomes impossible, and dependent on the funding decisions of the Ministry.

7. Our position is that the only way to achieve government priorities in scientific policy is to ensure resources for thematic research *over and above the core funding*. Determination of the quotas and proportions of the funds distributed as core funding has always been the competency solely of MTA, even in the darkest of times, even when, in certain periods, party political considerations had a say along what lines the distribution was carried out.

8. Even if the MTA would enter a single, unified bid for the announced tender, this would change nothing with regards to decisions being based on quotas and neglecting professional considerations, the external pressure on academic institutions to restructure their internal organizations, and the practice of eliminating permanent positions depending on the theme of their research.

9. For the moment it is against the law to withhold the wages of civil servants while they perform their duties based on valid employment contracts, and so is making their payment dependent on considerations of funding distributions. Making the *whole budget* of scientific institutions dependent on allocations of thematic funding bids judged intermittently by the Ministry is an unequivocal and direct exertion of control on their subsistence, which results in the liquidation of the professional independence of scientific research and researcher existences.

10. It creates such insecurity that once it is established it would only increase outward migration and the number of career leavers even if the allocated funds would be increased. Whole research areas can fall victim to the politically directed decisions of the Ministry, in the making of which they do not even attempt to get a grasp of the professional issues, and do not consult with researchers of the concerned field.

11. The elimination of current research positions at MTA institutions is not possible without institutional restructuring on professional grounds, and employers in leading positions at MTA cannot undertake such an action based on funding quotas decided by the Ministry because this would lead to a complete lack of independence at the research institutes and in research.

12. The Ministry plans to redistribute the funds that it oversees after they were withdrawn from the MTA, by making the funds available in tenders for bids to other government institutions, the institutions of higher education that are already core financed, as well as any government foundation that meets the application criteria, though lacking a scientific tradition such as that of the MTA. It is thereby withdrawing the funds required by law for the *maintenance of MTA* and distributing it elsewhere.

13. A system of ranking applications in which the criteria of the decisions, *the mode of evaluation of the applications* is unknown, also raises legal concerns.

14. For this reason the system for financing the sciences that would be realized by the “Thematic-Field Excellence Programme” must be rejected *on the grounds of principle*, because once the selection cloaked in application criteria begins, this will break the funding down to institutions and individuals, and from then on can never be stopped. Sooner or later it will impact every institution and all concerned.

15. The attempt to introduce this procedure for the financing of the sciences is a precedent, its significance reaches far beyond Hungary, and ought to be brought to the attention of the international scientific world and Hungarian public opinion as if it were the Max Planck Gesellschaft, the French or Polish Academy of Sciences where we could see the *government attempt to dominate* scientific policy, and determine the fields of research and their theme through the withdrawal and redistribution of their operational budget. We are speaking about the introduction of a system that makes the financing of the institutions of science, researchers, and research subjects dependent *as a whole* on case-by-case decisions of the government. This is a further step along the road to the removal of the separation and independence of the branches of power that will threaten, if it becomes a practice, the international fundamental principles of modern science.

16. The Extraordinary MTA General Assembly held on 6 December 2018 brought a resolution with regard to the Ministry’s efforts. This resolution is in effect. Therefore a request ought to be addressed to every leader of the Academy, every member of the Academy, member of the Presidium, and employee, to respect the spirit of the resolution by rejecting the chance to participate in this application for funding.

17. Acceptance of this funding regime and participating in it would create a precedent, where the leadership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and leaders of individual research institutes as employers, are not acting in line with the resolutions of the General Assembly.

18. It would divide the members of the Presidium, and instead of competing scientific problems and solutions, researchers would be pitted against each other on the basis of government thematic preferences.

19. Only standing by the obligations accepted in the resolutions brought by the Extraordinary MTA General Assembly on 18 December 2018 can bolster a position that offers a chance for a unified

stance and unified action, while decreasing the possibility of division being sown among scientists in Hungary.

20. Only a few years ago the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was the most popular public institution in Hungary, which means that it enjoyed support across political lines. Maintaining and preserving this still prevalent assessment is a professional obligation of every scientific researcher of the Academy irrespective of their political views.

21. Therefore we submit that for reasons both of principle and legality, *MTA and its academic institutes must not enter bids* in the announced “Thematic-Field Excellence Programme”, with its conditions and applicant circle determined by the Ministry.

This sets a situation that clarifies that it is the Ministry’s legal responsibility to make provisions for the core funding of MTA from the resources it has drawn to itself, and that a structural and organizational reform of the scientific activity relying on this core funding is only possible in the way set out by the Resolution of the Extraordinary MTA General Assembly on 6 December 2018, grounded in professional considerations preserving the independence of scientific research.