



PISM

POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

BULLETIN

No. 119 (1190), 31 August 2018 © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski • Bartosz Wiśniewski • Rafał Tarnogórski

Karolina Borońska-Hryniewiecka • Anna Maria Dynier • Aleksandra Gawlikowska-Fyk
Sebastian Płóciennik • Patrycja Sasnal • Justyna Szczudlik • Marcin Terlikowski • Tomasz Żornaczuk

Hungary's Science and Cultural Policy

Veronika Jóźwiak

After the last parliamentary elections in April, the Hungarian government began to reform science financing in the country. The changes consist of limiting the budgetary autonomy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) and determining the research areas considered priority. Funding for basic research is to be reduced, which in the long term might negatively affect the quality of science and the Hungarian economy's competitiveness. At the same time, ideological homogenisation is taking place in the cultural sphere. This may lead to limiting social development.

Science Policy. Since mid-June, a dispute has been taking place in Hungary between HAS and the government. It stems from disagreement over the principles of science financing but it also concerns a wider problem, namely the independence of academic research. The Hungarian authorities have taken control over spending on research conducted through HAS and seek to interfere in the scope and subject of the research. The state budget bill for 2019, approved in July, transfers 70% of the academy's budget to the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MIT), which will decide the allocation of resources to HAS research centres and institutes. The annual budget of HAS will not change (HUF 40 billion, about €125 million). However, until now the academy's funding had been a separate budget item, in line with the constitutional guarantee of scientific autonomy. The recent changes have forced a compromise between the academy's presidium and the ministry regarding the future management of HAS research institutes. The most likely outcome is a joint scientific committee of HAS and the government to manage the research network. However, according to scientists, this does not guarantee the independence of research.

The government justifies its changes with economic arguments, arguing that basic research (experimental or theoretical research conducted to acquire new knowledge) lacks social usefulness. Minister of Innovation and Technology László Palkovics announced support for scientific research that "serves the public interest", which will be defined by the ministry. At the same time, the system for research and innovation expenditures, which had been revised in recent years, will change again. The competences of the National Research, Innovation and Technology Office, established in 2015, which implements the government's research, development and innovation strategy, will be limited to supporting innovation. Funds for research projects will be taken over by MIT, which will limit funds for basic research in favour of applied research with direct commercial application. At the same time, in an orchestrated campaign against members of the academy in the pro-government press, for example, in the daily *Magyar Idők* or the weekly *Figyelő*, the ideological argument is crucial. They describe a "liberal-leftist" ideology in the humanities and social sciences and call for it to be eliminated.

The Hungarian authorities also interfere in the autonomy of higher education institutions. In the last seven years, Hungary has fallen in the university autonomy ranking by the European University Association (EUA), which compares 29 countries. The largest drop concerned financial autonomy: by 2016, Hungary ranked 28th, but in 2010 it was 6th. This deterioration was mainly driven by the introduction of a chancellor system to universities in 2014. The chancellor, appointed by the prime minister, approves all the financial decisions of the university authorities, which significantly limits discretion in the allocation of funds. The latest example

of undermining academic autonomy is a draft directive by the Ministry of Human Resources from August that would suspend all master's programmes in the area of gender studies. In 2016, that ministry extended accreditation of these studies based on an assessment by the statutory body, the state accreditation committee. The ministry explains its decision to suspend the programmes with the "economic unfeasibility" of maintaining such studies and the lack of demand for these graduates in the labour market.

The violation of academic autonomy and the independence of HAS have resulted in protests by the scientific community in the country and abroad. The presidents of the respective academies of science in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia expressed their support for their Hungarian counterparts in a joint statement. The Hungarian government's actions were condemned by the General Assembly of the Federation of All European Academies (ALLEA) and the EUA. Some members of a conservative body of professors (Professzorok Batthyány Köre), which have been part of the ruling camp Fidesz's intellectual background for over two decades, also expressed their objection. Hungarian scientists point out that basic research is not an abstraction isolated from social life but through universities it also affects the economy, higher education, and culture. In their opinion, so far the HAS bodies have adequately fulfilled their role of supervising the quality of research. Evidence of this is that Hungarian projects have received the most funds for basic research from European Research Council grants among research centres in Central Europe. In some areas, such as experimental medicine, Hungarians achieve globally outstanding results. Some researchers also emphasize that innovation, which constitutes the basis of a competitive economy, is only possible with a simultaneous high level of basic research. Although this research does not immediately provide solutions to current challenges, such as for industry, it lays the foundations for future innovation.

Cultural Policy. Culture has been a focus of the political and public debate in the country since the April parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated in a speech in July that there would be a "new ideological and cultural approach" to domestic politics and significant changes in cultural policy from September. Although the details of this programme have not been made public, statements by Fidesz politicians suggest it is about instrumentalising culture towards the masses. The country's stable political situation allows for settling debates on national identity matters, with culture constituting adequate space for this discussion. At the same time, the government has successively eliminated from cultural institutions artists considered by Fidesz as leftist and liberal. This has been possible, on the one hand, through political nominations and, on the other, through increased subsidies for selected entities. In addition, after the election, the pro-government press launched a campaign against some nominees of the ruling party, for example, Andy Vajna, the head of the film fund, Szilveszter Ókovács, director of the state opera, and Gergely Prőhle, director of the museum of literature and former Undersecretary of State, as too open to "incorrect" ideologies.

The politicisation of culture has been in progress since 2010. Fidesz has dominated the majority of artistic and cultural institutions in the country (including theatres and the National Cultural Fund, or NKA). The authorities filled key positions with people connected to the party or created new institutions for them. Founded in 2011 with the participation of conservative artists, the Hungarian Academy of Arts gained privileged status by enshrining its competences in the new constitution of the same year, among them, granting state awards to artists, and it has a significant impact on the distribution of funds by the NKA. In literature, most public funds go to an organisation of young writers established in 2016 (Kárpát-medencei Tehetséggondozó Nonprofit Kft.) while other associations that have been functioning for decades receive very modest subsidies.

Conclusions. A common feature of the measures taken by the Hungarian authorities in the spheres of science and culture is the attempt to put political ends above the freedom of scientific and artistic activity. This leads to a reduction of diversity and competition in these areas. Selective support for scientists and artists, as well as the dogmatic and utilitarian treatment of culture, may negatively affect the development of Hungarian society.

The centralisation of finances in science and interfering in academic independence may result in a further loss of trust among the scientific community in the government authorities. It also threatens the free development of scientific activities. It will also have a negative impact on the quality of higher education, in which autonomy is a basic condition of reliable knowledge transfer. These factors may lead the most outstanding scientists, whose knowledge is necessary for the state to provide good quality, modern public services, to leave the country. Meanwhile, the attempt to increase the level of innovation by transferring resources from the area of basic research to applied research may lead to a result contrary to the intention and ultimately make it difficult to increase the economy's competitiveness.