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Threats to academic freedom and autonomy of universities in Europe

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Ms Katrín JAKOBSDÓTTIR and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions are cornerstones of democratic and pluralist societies. Universities should be entitled to determine, without undue restrictions, their academic curricula and degrees, student admissions, research, administrative organisation, financing and staff employment. Teachers and students should be free to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference, institutional regulations, or public pressure.

Universities are competing in the global landscape, both for teachers, students and funding. After the economic crisis, competition for funding has become even harder and job security in the academia has dwindled, which might have an adverse effect on both academic freedom and autonomy of universities. This is the case in particular when they are highly dependent on public funding and regimes in place are tempted to offset any dissenting voices.

Indeed, academic freedom and autonomy of universities are threats to authoritarian regimes. Even in Europe, universities have increasingly become the target of political scrutiny. In Russia, the European University in St Petersburg has endured repeated attempts to shut it down. In Turkey, the government is closing campuses and jailing students and teachers. The Hungarian government has introduced a bill that would effectively abolish the freedom of Central European University, which has been granting American and Hungarian-accredited degrees for over 20 years. Arguments advanced to justify these decisions are far from being convincing.

The Parliamentary Assembly must stand firm on the principles of academic freedom and autonomy of universities and it should look deeper into the aspects of the funding of universities, job security of academic personnel, legislation on academic freedom and political discourse on universities and academics, to identify risks and encourage good practices which uphold these principles.

Signed (see overleaf)



*Signed*¹:

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EC: European Conservatives Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialist Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left