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Minister László Palkovics
Ministry of Innovation and Technology
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1011 Budapest
Hungary

~Sent by Email only~

President

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Ref: Proposed amendment of the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Law on the 2019 state budget of Hungary

22 June 2018

Dear Minister Palkovics,

We have recently learned of the proposed amendment of the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Law on the 2019 state budget of Hungary and its implications on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which is a long-standing member of our European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities – ALLEA. We, in principle and in line with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Resolution of 15 June 2018, welcome any efforts by the Hungarian government to improve the Hungarian science system. As pointed out in this statement, glaring oversights in the design and consultation phase of this law, threaten the scientific autonomy and the quality of scientific output of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. We believe that if the autonomy and capacity of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences are diminished, the reputation of Hungary and Hungarian science abroad would be unnecessarily tarnished.

ALLEA currently brings together 58 academies in more than 40 countries from within the Council of Europe region. ALLEA's member academies are communities of leaders of scholarly inquiry in their respective countries and across all fields of natural as well as social sciences. Independent from political, commercial and ideological interest, ALLEA's policy work seeks to contribute to improving the framework conditions under which science and scholarship can excel.

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences has been a valued member of ALLEA ever since our foundation. The excellence of its researchers and the output of its interdisciplinary research centres, institutes and research groups are second to none in Hungary, and due to the autonomy of the institution it enjoys widespread trust among the Hungarian population and within the European scientific community. The professional administration and research funding schemes including the “Lendület” programme are often quoted among examples for best practice in EU13 member states, as well as its exceptional results in the region in retaining the grants of the European Research Council. Not least, the Academy facilities in Budapest rank highly among hubs for European science diplomacy meetings.

ALLEA feels strongly that the proposed amendment of the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Law on the 2019 state budget of Hungary withdraw the legal and financial guarantees of the regular functioning of the academy vis-à-vis decisions concerning personnel and research agendas, and ultimately also threaten the scientific autonomy of the academy as laid out in article X of the Fundamental Law of Hungary.

ALLEA strongly believes basic, curiosity-driven, and blue-sky research form the mainstay of the scientific endeavour and, while their immediate technological applications and economic value may not always be apparent, they are indispensable requirements for the innovation cycle of any functional and successful research and innovation system.

Furthermore, ALLEA stresses that the lack of a thorough and timely consultation of all relevant stakeholders, and in particular the lack of consent of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for the introduction of these fundamental changes threatens to result in a structure that will diminish the quality and scope of scientific output of Hungary while it fails to create any positive effects on the Hungarian research environment.

ALLEA fully supports the Hungarian Academy of Sciences’ demand to withdraw the proposed amendment of the Law on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Law on the 2019 state budget from voting in Parliament, to allow for a wider consultation on the effects of the law, ensuring that the academy’s autonomy remains untouched and that an appropriate role for basic and fundamental research is safeguarded.

ALLEA strives to protect the freedom of scientific research and the autonomy of scientific institutions and therefore endorses the Resolution of the Presidium of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences issued on 15 June 2018 to this effect.

We thank you for your consideration and would like to emphasise that ALLEA as the representative of European Academies of Sciences and Humanities is at all times open to engage in a constructive dialogue on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Antonio Loprieno
President of ALLEA