



## Visegrad Group Academies Forum 26-27 May 2022, Budapest MINUTES

### V<sub>4</sub>+ Academies Forum and

### “ERC workshop co-organized with the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA)” event hosted by the Annual Meeting of the V<sub>4</sub> Academies in Budapest

On 26-27 May 2022, the representatives of the Visegrad Group Academies gathered together again for their annual meeting after two years of postponement due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The meeting was hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest. Following the tradition of the recent years, the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts were also invited to the meeting. Due to other official engagements, the Austrian delegation could not attend the event this time.

The meeting was held in accordance with the adopted agenda (Annex 1). The list of participants is attached in Annex 2.

The two-day event began with an **ERC workshop co-organized with the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA)**, which preceded the Forum itself.

In her **opening remarks**, moderator **Prof. Éva Kondorosi, Member of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors of the European Commission and Former Vice-President of the European Research Council** welcomed the participants and gave a short outline of the initiatives and tools that had been introduced in the course of the ERC's 15 years of existence in order to tackle the problem of low performance at ERC calls by applicants based in one of the EU<sub>13</sub> Member States, among them the V<sub>4</sub> countries.

After the introduction, **Philippe Cupers, Head of Unit “Life Sciences” of ERCEA** outlined ERC funding opportunities in Horizon Europe and the V<sub>4</sub> countries' statistics in ERC calls. He also presented ERC's two main initiatives for increasing participation by “widening countries”, namely the “ERC Visiting Fellowship Programme” and the “ERC Mentoring Initiative”. Dr Cupers pointed out a problem with the success rate structure: the EU<sub>13</sub> success rate is much lower at Step 1 of the evaluation process than that of the EU<sub>15</sub>, while at Step 2 of the evaluation, the success rates across all countries are similar.

After Philippe Cupers' presentation, participants tried to find answers to the question of how research institutions of the region could support their young researchers/ERC applicants and grantees more efficiently in presenting their applications/managing their grants. The representatives of the V<sub>4</sub> Academies gave short presentations on institutional support strategies and best practices in their own countries, employed by their own academy or through the joined effort of the larger scientific community with a view to boosting performance at ERC calls and mentoring early-career researchers.



Finally, as a practical guidance on ERC applications to young researchers and research administrators alike, **Katalin Solymosi, Vice-Chair of the Young Academy of Europe (YAE)** gave a talk on YAE's mentoring activities related to ERC grant applications.

Closing discussions focused on career development strategies for early-career researchers. In a Q&A session, the participants touched upon the major issues which emerged from the presentations as most critical: a key priority was the poor performance of widening countries at Step 1 of the ERC evaluation process.

The participants in the workshop concluded that each of the measures, actions, tools and schemes mentioned in their discussion was worth considering (be it the use of search committees to find the best ERC applicants; the assistance provided by young academies, the Young Academy of Europe in particular; the help offered by ERC grantees and former panel members in the form of mentoring; the development of research infrastructure and offering the best possible administrative support; administrative flexibility at research institutions to make these places attractive for doing research; and the setting-up of organizational structures that encourage the independence of early-career researchers), as each had their own place in a successful strategy for a higher performance at ERC.

The event continued with the **traditional closed two-day meeting of the V4 Academies.**

In his **opening address**, **Prof. Tamás Freund**, as **President of the host Academy** expressed his pleasure to finally greet in person the V4+ Academies' delegations in Budapest after two consecutive postponements of the Forum due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. As he pointed out in his speech, these annual V4 meetings constitute a very important platform for all participating academies, of which personal interactions and informal discussions also form an indispensable part.

After a short **tour de table**, academy representatives presented the current activities of their institutions. The meeting focused on the leading role of regional academies in the fight against the coronavirus, the broadest possible involvement of young researchers in academic programmes, and the support provided by the national academies to researchers fleeing Ukraine and striving to preserve Ukrainian scientific and cultural values.

Upon the initiative of Professor Duszyński, President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the academy presidents decided to issue a **unanimous position statement** on the aggression against Ukraine and support for Ukrainian scientists. After careful deliberation, the Presidents of the five Academies endorsed the document called the *“Statement of Visegrad Group Academies Forum on the military aggression against Ukraine and the support for Ukrainian scientists”*. (Please see the final version of the statement in Annex 3.)

In the second part of the programme, the regional academy leaders and their guests from Hungary and the Czech Republic presented their initiatives as to how to make better use of large European research infrastructures, whereas the speakers invited by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts delivered valuable talks on the latest results and future perspectives in the application of advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs).



In line with the more than 20-year tradition of cooperation among the Visegrad academies, the annual meeting also hosted the V<sub>4</sub> academies' young researcher awards, which in year 2021 were open to young researchers from the Visegrad countries on the theme of "Prevention and treatment of health damage caused by the Covid-19 disease". The four winners, all outstanding young talents in their own fields, received their diploma from the president of their respective Academy, and briefly presented their work, scientific interests and future plans.

Through Zoom connection, Marianna Neupauerová, Deputy Executive Director of the **New International Visegrad Fund**, offered a short overview of funding opportunities in research and innovation that may be of interest to the stakeholders in the V<sub>4</sub> region.

In the last session of the programme, the goals of the recently launched **Academia Europaea Budapest Knowledge Hub** were presented, in particular its four thematic missions: ("Widening European Participation", "The Danube Region", "Methodology of Science Education" and "Urban Sustainability"). After the introduction, the delegations were invited to discuss and explore the possible forms of regional collaboration with the AE Budapest Hub.

At the end of the conference, upon President Duszyński's initiative, the Presidents of the four academies agreed **to take action together to achieve common goals between the annual meetings**, and Tamás Freund, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was asked to coordinate these actions and statements until the next meeting. President Freund was glad to accept the request and promised to prepare **the Statutes of the cooperation of the V<sub>4</sub> academies** for review and finalization (Annex 4.)

The detailed report of the meeting, the video recording of the ERC workshop and the PPT presentations of the academy delegates may be found on the webpage of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at the following link:

<https://mta.hu/english/sympathy-and-solidarity-presidents-of-visegrad-academies-issue-joint-declaration-at-budapest-meeting-in-support-of-ukrainian-people-scientists-and-science-condemning-russias-military-aggression-112206>

<https://mta.hu/english/strategies-to-boost-the-performance-of-v4-countries-in-the-grant-schemes-of-the-european-research-council-112225>