

Eurodoc statement on Academic Freedom in Slovenia

The European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers ([Eurodoc](#)), a grassroots federation of 29 national associations of early-career researchers (ECRs) from 26 countries across Europe, as a representative of doctoral candidates and junior researchers at the European level, strongly expresses its commitment to defend Academic Freedom in Europe.

Academic Freedom is defined and ensured in legal and institutional documents, and is ensured by the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU](#) as follows: “Article 13: Freedom of the arts and sciences. - The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.” Further, academic freedom is included through freedom of speech in [Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights](#). Unrestricted access to quality education (including doctoral training) is considered a basic right and a pillar of democracy by the Council of Europe as described in their [vision on quality education](#) and the [right of education for all](#). Regarding employment in academia, the [EU Social Charter](#) defines [the right to work](#). Many international organisations already prepared their statements according to Academic Freedom, while many countries have included Academic Freedom as a right within their laws.

Eurodoc follows with vigilance the evolution of the situation at the European level. We are concerned about the recent recurring governmental intervention in higher education and research institutions in Slovenia affecting Academic Freedom and autonomy, a *sine qua non* for the proper functioning of modern universities.

Thus we found very concerning all the signals reported of the interference by the authorities in Academic Freedom, as listed below:

1. Defunding of public established and independent universities protected by laws on Academic Freedom.
2. Implementation of national administrative measures that force an extreme reduction of students and/or researchers in study programs and research paths.
3. General blocking on new employment for all state-funded higher education institutions and research-performing organisations (RPOs) as part of policies that seem to highly affect the public scientific sector.
4. Actively promoting among public opinion a biased image of the role of research, researchers and universities and higher education institutions, that lays the cultural background for concrete measures that actively affect Academic Freedom and the right to high quality education for all.

To protect Academic Freedom, we believe, it is crucial to guarantee stable contracts, full social benefits and to reduce the dependence of RPOs and researchers from the “projects for funding” method, that can be used to covertly defund lines of research, approaches and disciplines.

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On the contrary, a strong public funding of research can increase RPOs' and researchers' autonomy in their choice of topics, tools and methods of research, thus being a fundamental requirement for a greater academic freedom. We believe that the balance of all disciplines is needed for the sustainability of the academic community's work and to foster the resources to properly face expected and unexpected societal challenges.

We also want to recall the basic right to perform research without fear of repercussions. The term "repercussions" here should be understood in its broadest meaning, and including: physical violence, expulsion from academia and/or the country, psychological violence, mobbing and isolation, and reduced access to funds and other necessary tools for research that can violate the Academic Freedom without impeding formally the research activity.

This freedom from repercussions must stand regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or disability; for this reason, researchers that experience conditions of vulnerability should always be provided with the tools needed to guarantee their academic freedom to a full extent.

In this context it is crucial to underline that discrimination against women in any sphere of life, including the scientific one, is unacceptable and all unlawful practices, including those supported by governmental organizations, should be met with lawful consequences.

Eurodoc and the The Young Academy of Slovenia (Društvo Mlada akademija) will collaborate in monitoring the evolution of the situation in Slovenia in the near future.

Signed by Agnieszka Żyra [President [European Council of Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers \(Eurodoc\)](#)] on 10 October 2021.