

## **Defending Academic Freedom and Strengthening European Research and Higher Education**

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### **Recognizing that:**

- Academic freedom is a fundamental European value and a core element of European identity, essential to the promotion of liberal democracy and critical inquiry, and enshrined in Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>1</sup>.
- The Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research affirms that “freedom of scientific research is a universal right and a public good,” and commits national governments to protect researchers from political or institutional pressure, principles reiterated in the Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation<sup>2</sup>.
- Article 179(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union establishes the objective of strengthening the scientific and technological bases of the Union through the creation of a European Research Area (ERA) in which researchers and scientific knowledge circulate freely<sup>3</sup>.
- The European Parliament, in its resolution of 17 January 2024 on the promotion of the freedom of scientific research in the EU, reaffirmed the centrality of academic freedom and highlighted its erosion in the Union<sup>4</sup>.
- Academic freedom is under attack across the world as well as within the Union, as was made clear by the 2020 judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union in Case C-

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union [2010] OJ C83/389, art 13.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Ministry of Education and Research, ‘Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research’, 20 October 2020, [https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/b/bonn\\_declaration\\_en.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=5](https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/b/bonn_declaration_en.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5); Ministry for Higher Education and Research, ‘Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation (R&I)’, 8 March 2022, <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2022-03/marseille-declaration-english--17075.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [2016] OJ C202/128, art 179(1)

<sup>4</sup> European Parliament Resolution on the Promotion of the freedom of scientific research in the EU, 2024 OJ C/2024/5713

66/18, which ruled that Hungarian law violated the right to academic freedom enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>5</sup>.

- Disruptions to academic freedom in the United States following the new administration's cuts to research funding and large-scale layoffs at major federal science agencies, often targeting specific universities and scientific disciplines, are highly concerning, as European Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation Ekaterina Zaharieva recently stated before the European Parliament<sup>6</sup>.
- International academic mobility is not only a vector of innovation but also a tool of resilience against political repression and academic censorship.<sup>7</sup>

#### Acknowledging that:

- Higher education and research are strategic assets for Europe's economic future, critical to increasing productivity, enabling the green transition, and strengthening Europe's position in the global innovation race, as recognised in Enrico Letta's Report on the Future of the Single Market, which explicitly identifies the development of the free circulation of knowledge as a fifth freedom, essential for deepening the Single Market and making Europe a hub for talent and research, and by Mario Draghi's Report on the Future of European Competitiveness, which emphasises how research and innovation are essential for productivity growth, economic competitiveness, improved and increased employment, and successfully tackling the green and digital transitions<sup>8</sup>.
- European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's mission letter to Commissioner Zaharieva included the proposal of a European Research Area Act which would aim at reducing research fragmentation and guarantee the free movement of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology as a 'fifth freedom'<sup>9</sup>.
- A growing body of evidence demonstrates that the reception of displaced scholars and skilled migrants can significantly boost host-country innovation and productivity, as made

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission v Hungary, Case C-66/18, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:62018CJ0066>

<sup>6</sup> Verbatim report of proceedings of 31 March 2025, Strasbourg, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-03-31-ITM-016\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-03-31-ITM-016_EN.html)

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO. (2023). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023: Technology in education: A tool on whose terms?* UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54676/UZQV8501>

<sup>8</sup> Enrico Letta, *Much More than a Market: Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, 2024, Brussels; Mario Draghi, *The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe*, 2024, Brussels.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *Mission Letter to Ekaterina Zaharieva*, 2024, Brussels.

clear by the decisive role played by European scholars who migrated to the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, particularly in response to Nazi persecution, and who contributed substantially to the post-war scientific dominance of the United States<sup>10</sup>.

- The current disruptions to freedom of scientific research in the United States are prompting many scientists at American institutions to leave the country, with as many as 75.3% of respondents saying they are considering doing so, according to a recent survey by leading scientific journal *Nature*<sup>11</sup>.
- Several European universities, including the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the Université Paris-Saclay, and Aix-Marseille Université, have launched initiatives targeted at American-based researchers, ranging from doctoral fellowships to tenure-track positions and research chairs<sup>12</sup>.
- According to recent estimates, over one in seven of all full professors at the top 48 universities in the United States have an undergraduate degree from a European university, which entails that initiatives aiming at attracting American-based researchers contribute to retain European-trained talent and combat brain drain<sup>13</sup>.
- Progress has been made in terms of the internationalisation of European universities and higher education institutions, particularly with regard to intra-European cooperation through instruments like European Universities alliances, which have improved the international visibility and attractiveness of participating higher education institutions<sup>14</sup>.
- A recent open letter to Commissioner Zaharieva by 13 European ministers of research has called for “immediate action”, emphasized the importance of attracting talented researchers

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<sup>10</sup>Petra Moser, Alessandra Voena, and Fabian Waldinger, ‘German Jewish Émigrés and US Invention’, *American Economic Review*, 104:10, 2014, pp. 3222-55; Harald Hagemann, ‘European émigrés and the ‘Americanization’ of economics’, *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 18:5, 2011, pp. 643–671; Agostina Brinatti and Xing Guo, ‘Third-Country Effects of U.S. Immigration Policy’, Working Paper, 2024, available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4915266](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4915266); William R. Kerr and William F. Lincoln, ‘The Supply Side of Innovation: H-1B Visa Reforms and U.S. Ethnic Invention’, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 28:3, 2010, pp. 473-508.

<sup>11</sup>Alexandra Witze, ‘75% of US scientists who answered *Nature* poll consider leaving’, *Nature*, 640, 2025, pp. 298-299.

<sup>12</sup>Vrije Universiteit Brussel, ‘VUB welcomes outstanding researchers under threat’, 17 March 2025, available at <https://www.vub.be/en/news/vub-opens-its-doors-threatened-researchers>; Université Paris-Saclay, ‘Université Paris-Saclay ready to welcome American scientists alongside its French and European counterparts’, 21 March 2025, available at <https://www.universite-paris-saclay.fr/en/news/universite-paris-saclay-ready-welcome-american-scientists-alongside-its-french-and-european-counterparts>; Aix-Marseille Université, ‘Safe Place for Science: Aix-Marseille University ready to welcome American scientists’, 17 April 2025, available at <https://www.univ-amu.fr/en/public/actualites/safe-place-science-aix-marseille-universite-ready-welcome-american-scientists>.

<sup>13</sup>Tolga Yuret, ‘An analysis of the foreign-educated elite academics in the United States’, *Journal of Informetrics*, 11:2, 2017, pp. 358-370.

<sup>14</sup>European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, PPMI, Grumbinaité, I., Colus, F. and Buitrago Carvajal, H., *Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/32313>

from outside the Union, exploiting the full potential of existing instruments to secure funding, developing a dedicated immigration framework, and coordinating efforts at the European and national level, as well as between the public and private sectors<sup>15</sup>.

- Commissioner Zaharieva has recognised the importance of attracting leading researchers, enhancing Europe's pull factor by launching a new "Choose Europe" pilot programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, increasing the support given to European Research Council grantees who relocate to Europe, developing a visa strategy to facilitate the recruitment of top scientists abroad, and simplifying the bureaucratic process required by Horizon Europe's grant application process<sup>16</sup>.
- Despite the significant progress in strengthening the European Research Area (ERA), the ERA is still not fully capable of attracting and retaining talent, according to the European Commission<sup>17</sup>.
- The Commission's Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027 regrettably does not discuss instruments aiming at boosting the attractiveness of foreign talent<sup>18</sup>.
- Despite shared European commitments to academic freedom and the development of the ERA, the pace of implementation remains uneven across Member States, creating a fragmented academic and scientific landscape, as acknowledged by the Commission's analysis of ERA implementation and as can be seen from the stark imbalances in participation and success rates in Horizon Europe funding calls<sup>19</sup>.
- Europe's credibility as a defender of liberal democratic values is strengthened by its capacity to offer academic sanctuary and opportunity to researchers displaced by

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<sup>15</sup> Philippe Baptiste *et al*, *Letter to the Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation, Ekaterina Zaharieva*, available at <https://sciencebusiness.net/sites/default/files/inline-files/Letter%20to%20Commissioner%20Zaharieva.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Verbatim report of proceedings of 31 March 2025, Strasbourg, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-03-31-ITM-016\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-03-31-ITM-016_EN.html); David Matthews, 'How Europe aims to woo US scientists and protect academic freedom', *Nature*, 640, 2025, p. 300.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, *Implementation of the European Research Area (ERA) – Strengthening Europe's Research and Innovation: The ERA's Journey and Future Directions*, 2024, [https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-](https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-10/COM_2024_490_Implementation%20of%20the%20European%20Research%20Area%20%28ERA%29_22-20-2024.pdf)

[10/COM\\_2024\\_490\\_Implementation%20of%20the%20European%20Research%20Area%20%28ERA%29\\_22-20-2024.pdf](https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-10/COM_2024_490_Implementation%20of%20the%20European%20Research%20Area%20%28ERA%29_22-20-2024.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027*, 2025, <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/documents/proposal-council-recommendation-european-research-area-policy-agenda-2025-2027>

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, *Implementation of the European Research Area*, 2024; European Commission, *Horizon Europe Dashboard – Country Participation*, 2023, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/horizon-dashboard>

authoritarian trends elsewhere, given not only its commitment to academic freedom but also the public good nature of scientific research.

**YEPP calls on:**

- The Council of the European Union to include the attraction and retention of foreign researchers, particularly from countries where academic freedom is under pressure, in its Recommendation on the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027, either as its own standalone policy area or within policy area 3 (“Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union and enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems across the Union”).
- The European Commission to include the attraction and retention of foreign researchers, particularly from countries where academic freedom is under pressure, as a key policy objective in its forthcoming proposal for the European Research Area Act.
- The European Commission to expand the scope of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions to explicitly prioritise proposals from displaced young researchers whose academic freedom has been curtailed, including those from the U.S. and other high-income but politically volatile countries.
- The European Commission to coordinate with Member States on policies to attract leading academics based outside the Union so as to ensure a prompt and united European response and fully leverage established instruments for research financing, like ERC and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and intra-European cooperation, like European Universities Alliances.
- The European Commission to take all possible steps to protect academic freedom and the freedom of scientific research in the Union, reiterating the European Parliament’s resolution of 17 January 2024<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> European Parliament Resolution on the Promotion of the freedom of scientific research in the EU, 2024 OJ C/2024/5713