

Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action. Recommendation to the Vice President/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

2018/2117(INI) - 29/11/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 421 votes to 97, with 111 abstentions, a resolution on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action.

In the light of the recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel adopted in 1997 by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Higher Education Institutions, Parliament considered that democracy cannot exist without academic freedom, the definition of which should be based on fundamental democratic values, the possibility of critical and independent thinking, institutional autonomy and social responsibility; that democracy cannot exist without academic freedom.

The academic community and educational institutions are increasingly vulnerable to interference, pressure or repression from states, the business sector or other non-state actors.

However, **autonomy is a necessary precondition** for education institutions to fulfil their proper functions. Academic freedom requires constant and vigilant protection from undue pressure from the State or commercial interests.

Accordingly, Parliament made the following recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

- **explicitly recognise the importance of academic freedom in public statements** and policies relating to the EU's external action, including recognition of the principles that ideas are not crimes and that critical discourse is not disloyalty, but rather essential parts of a democratic society;
- recall that academic freedom extends to the freedom of academics to disseminate information and conduct research and **distribute knowledge without restriction**, the freedom to express their views and opinions — even if controversial or unpopular — in the areas of their research and professional expertise,
- **publicly highlight the problems of attacks** on academic freedom, including their negative consequences and recall the responsibility of states to guarantee academic freedom;
- ensure that EU institutions and Member States' representatives visiting third countries are briefed on the situation of academic freedom;
- support equal access to the academic community, regardless of ethnicity, caste, disability, nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation or other status;
- raise academic freedom at **different levels of political dialogue**, including in human rights dialogues and consultations with partner countries, and step up **diplomatic efforts** with partner countries through bilateral and multilateral engagement in relation to incidents of concern ;

- encourage all states to do as most EU Member States have already done and endorse and implement the **Safe Schools Declaration** and its accompanying Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict;
- work with the UN, the Council of Europe, international agencies, civil society and higher education communities to create **mechanisms for monitoring and reporting attacks**, threats and undue restrictions on higher education and individual scholars;
- encourage **regular dialogue with university communities**, in order to develop the best policy frameworks, initiatives and advocacy strategies for academic freedom;
- foster work on research and advocacy aimed at reforming legislation imposing undue restrictions on academic freedom, and promote institutional autonomy;
- revisit existing protection mechanisms for human rights defenders to provide assistance, including through physical protection, legal and visa support, medical support, trial and prison monitoring, advocacy and lobbying, and long-term support during exile;
- promote the existing projects financed by the EU, such as the ‘**Academic Refuge**’, which strive to raise greater awareness of the importance of academic freedom in the higher education sector;
- ensure that the **EU’s macro-financial assistance programmes** for third countries and the policies of European financial institutions do not undermine academic freedom by supporting policies that reduce the allocation of national income to the education sector;
- create **new initiatives within existing and future programmes** -such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA III), Horizon 2020, Erasmus+ and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, for new EU-funded programme actions to support the placement of at-risk academics.