

Ordinary Resolution Nr. 1

"On Safeguarding and Strengthening Academic Freedom in the European Union" - tabled
by European Democrat Students (EDS)

Adopted by the EPP Congress of 30 April 2025 in Valencia, Spain

Recognising that:

1. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular its Article 165, recognises that the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity;
2. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union guarantees respect for academic freedom, yet disparities in its enforcement persist across Member States;
3. Academic freedom is widely accepted as a fundamental value in higher education systems and a prerequisite for well-functioning democratic societies fostering independent thought, innovation, and the pursuit of knowledge free from undue influence;
4. Indicators show that academic freedom is under pressure across the EU and the world, as highlighted by recent reports, including the annual Academic Freedom Index, which highlight increasing political interference, social pressures, and economic constraints limiting scholars and institutions. In some countries, reforms of research and higher education systems are being used as a tool to restrict academic freedom, further undermining the independence of scholars and institutions;
5. The recent rise of populist movements in Western democracies and increased interference by oligarchs in democratic processes threaten academic institutions and their role as independent sources of knowledge and critical thinking;
6. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has recognised academic freedom within Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, but its protection requires a structured legal framework;
7. Institutional autonomy is vital for ensuring academic inquiry remains independent from external pressures, including governmental, economic, or ideological influences;
8. The absence of a clear EU-wide framework leaves scholars vulnerable to inconsistent protections, self-censorship, and politically motivated restrictions on research and teaching;

9. Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the cornerstones of the EU as enshrined in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union; any discrimination based on language is explicitly prohibited under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union;

10. Education authorities should ensure that pupils with special needs are able to study in their mother tongue, when such language is an official language and, if their families so wish, in accordance with the Council's recommendations on mother-tongue education and the integration of children with disabilities into education systems.

Acknowledging that:

1. Academic freedom contributes directly to strengthening the democratic competence of our societies by fostering informed citizens capable of critical thinking, resisting misinformation, and engaging meaningfully in public life;

2. Universities and research institutions are essential to democratic resilience, countering populist narratives with evidence-based discourse and safeguarding democratic debate against manipulation by vested interests;

3. Safeguarding academic freedom is essential to protecting European values, ensuring that universities remain bastions of open discussion, independent research, and societal progress;

4. A thriving academic environment fosters a well-informed public, strengthens democratic institutions, and promotes innovation and is a key driver of competitiveness;

5. The EU should adopt a coordinated approach to protect academic freedom, ensuring harmonised support across Member States;

6. On 30 September 2020, the Commission adopted a Communication on “A New ERA for Research and Innovation”, in which it set out a new vision for the European Research Area (ERA) and announced the intention to propose a Pact for Research and Innovation (R&I) in Europe;

7. The Council Conclusions on the New European Research Area, adopted on 1 December 2020, called on the Member States and the Commission to develop in 2021 an ERA policy agenda and a multi-level governance model to deliver on the new ambition for the ERA;

8. The proposal for a Council Recommendation of 16 July 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe calls for creating an area where “researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely”, for agreeing on a common set of values and principles for research and innovation in the Union, and for applying them in their internal research and innovation systems, in close collaboration with stakeholders; acknowledges that these values include ethics and integrity of research and innovation and freedom of scientific research as part of a research culture that is inherent to the ERA, and a necessary condition for researchers to freely define their research questions, theories and methods in an open and secure manner and to produce, share and disseminate knowledge, data and other results; these values and

principles should also be promoted by the Member States and the Union in their interactions with third countries in order to achieve a level playing field and common framework conditions.

9. It is essential to continue with the ERA spirit to enhance coordination of EU research efforts, boosting the circulation of researchers and knowledge, building critical mass and promoting excellence; and acknowledges that the EU should adopt a coordinated approach to protect academic freedom, ensuring harmonised support across Member States.

The European People's Party calls for:

1. **The European Commission and Member States** to integrate academic freedom protection within the EU's rule of law framework, recognising it as a fundamental pillar of democratic governance.

2. **Member States** to uphold and protect academic freedom, ensuring that researchers and educators can operate without arbitrary interference or pressure from political and economic elites and on the competent regional and national authorities of Member States to ensure that scholars of all ages are not being discriminated against.

3. **The European Union** to foster an academic environment free from nationalistic influences which instrumentalise academia, restrict diversity of perspective and hinder intellectual progress.

4. **The European Commission** to establish a structured monitoring mechanism within the annual Rule of Law Report to assess and address violations of academic freedom across the EU. This mechanism must be based on clear standards and systematic monitoring to ensure the effective safeguarding of academic freedom.

5. **The European Commission** to closely monitor how Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union is applied in all Member-State regions; and to establish a dialogue with Member States and offer technical assistance to address fundamental rights issues.

6. **The European Commission** and Member States to assess whether, in regions with a bilingual education system, equal treatment to co-official languages is being given. The imposition of linguistic requirements should not undermine the core principles of academic autonomy and the free exchange of ideas in bilingual regions.

7. **Universities and academic institutions** to reaffirm their commitment to academic freedom and institutional independence, protecting scholars from hate speech as well as from political, social, or corporate pressures.

8. **The European Union** to expand support programs for scholars at risk, ensuring the EU remains a safe haven for academics facing persecution or undue constraints on their work.

9. **Member-State governments** to promote a culture of critical thinking, academic integrity, and open discourse, strengthening the democratic resilience of European societies.

10. **The European Union** to ensure that academic freedom is respected in all cross-border cooperation and mobility projects. As an essential pillar of European identity and values, academic freedom should be a cornerstone of all European cross-border education projects.

11. **The European Union** to ensure that all non-European universities receiving EU funding uphold academic freedom and to place the highest priority on safeguarding freedom of thought.

12. **The European Union** must ensure that the safeguarding of academic freedom is an essential prerequisite for any non-European university seeking to establish connections with European universities receiving EU funding.

The European People's Party reaffirms its commitment to academic freedom as a fundamental pillar of democracy and a safeguard against authoritarian tendencies. The EU must take decisive action to integrate academic freedom into its broader efforts to combat populist disinformation, external interference, and democratic backsliding. By reinforcing protections for academic institutions and scholars, we ensure a resilient and dynamic intellectual environment that fortifies democracy for future generations.