

# Academic Freedom in Europe. Assessing Initiatives Announced in 2025 to Attract At-Risk Academics and Researchers to Europe



University for  
Continuing  
Education Krems



## Imprint

**Title of the event:** Academic Freedom in Europe. Assessing initiatives announced in 2025 to attract at-risk academics and researchers to Europe

**Date and time:** 18 March 2026, 16:00–18:00 CET

The meeting took place online.

Organised by the Thematic Entry Point on Science Diplomacy and Academic Freedom of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance. The meeting was co-organized by Jean Claude Arditti, Dr. Catherine Hodeir, AVRIST, France and Christina Hainzl, University for Continuing Education Krems, Austria.

Prepared by Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI), Austria

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## **Introduction and opening remarks**

It was a first meeting of the Thematic Entry Point (TEP) on Science Diplomacy and Academic Freedom of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance.

Academic freedom is fundamental for research and innovation, as well as for the higher education, allowing scholars to teach, to conduct research, to develop innovations and share knowledge openly and independently. It is also closely linked to democratic resilience, institutional autonomy and the conditions that enable researchers and innovators to work safely and effectively. In this context, growing attention is being given to initiatives that strengthen support for researchers and innovators reinforce Europe's role in protecting academic freedom.

This meeting focused on presenting and exchanging initial assessments of the initiatives announced in spring 2025 at European, national and institutional level to support academics and researchers whose work has been hindered. It also included examples of earlier initiatives introduced to support researchers, including those from Ukraine.

The session provided an overview of developments in Belgium and Sweden, alongside additional perspectives from the United States. The Choose France for Science initiative was presented, both from a general policy perspective, including the role of the French National Research Agency, and through the institutional example of Aix-Marseille University. Also, the Austrian and Italian initiatives were mentioned.

The EU Science Diplomacy Alliance extends its sincere thanks to all speakers and participants for their valuable contributions and active engagement in the discussions.

This report provides a short summary of the key discussion points and provides an inside on next possible steps to initiate a study on initiatives to support researchers in crisis.

### **Speakers and participants**

Eric Piaget, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Stéphanie Thiébault, National Research Agency, ANR, France

Solène Tyrlik, Aix-Marseille University, France

Elisabeth Hilbink, University of Minnesota, recently transferred to Aix-Marseille University, France

Francesca Tolve, National Research Council CNR, Italy

Participants included members of the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance.

## Summary of the presentations and discussion

### LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

- A legal and institutional framework is essential for the protection of academic freedom.
- For example, Belgium does not have an explicit constitutional provision on academic freedom, while Sweden provides explicit protection through the Higher Education Act. In Sweden, academic freedom includes the freedom to choose research questions, methods and the publication of results.

### MAIN TRENDS AND RISKS

- Belgium and Sweden rank very highly in the Academic Freedom Index<sup>1</sup> and remain among the top-performing countries internationally.
- High academic freedom scores do not eliminate risks. For example, in Belgium, the main concerns include political interference, polarisation and security-related pressures.
- A decline in academic freedom is observed in the United States.

### FUNDING AND STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

- Pressure on research and innovation funding across countries creates greater reliance on private partnerships, which may raise questions regarding publication choices and influence on research agendas.
- Changes in political direction also affect the conditions for academic freedom.
- Directionality in funding and strategic investment may influence academic freedom over time.

### SUPPORT FOR SCHOLARS AT RISK

- Support structures for scholars at risk are developing across countries.
- In Belgium, support for scholars at risk includes regional networks SAR Flanders VLIRUOS.<sup>2</sup>
- In Sweden, support is organised through the nationally coordinated SAR Sweden<sup>3</sup> section of Scholars at Risk. Sweden is receiving increasing interest from researchers seeking relocation, including researchers from the United States.
- In France, the Choose France for Science<sup>4</sup> initiative was launched in April 2025 to position France as a welcoming research destination for international researchers wishing to continue their work in Europe. It is operated by the French National Research Agency and supports the establishment of research chairs in French host institutions.
- Aix-Marseille University, France launched the Safe Place for Science<sup>5</sup> programme in March 2025 in response to the situation in the United States, with the aim of enabling researchers to continue their work in an environment supportive of research and academic freedom.
- The PAUSE programme in France<sup>6</sup> supports scientists and artists in exile by facilitating their hosting in higher education, research and cultural institutions and also carries out advocacy activities in support of academic and artistic freedom.
- In Italy, the National Research Council<sup>7</sup> launched research grants in 2022 to support PhD candidates, professors and researchers from Ukraine and enable them to continue their research activities in its institutes.

- Italy also introduced ad hoc support through its Short-Term Mobility Programme<sup>8</sup> for researchers from countries affected by conflict. Grants were awarded to researchers from Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, although visa difficulties prevented some selected researchers from taking up the opportunity.
- In Austria, the Austrian Academy of Sciences launched the APART-USA<sup>9</sup> fellowship programme to support the relocation of researchers from the United States to Austrian research institutions.
- In 2025, the European Research Council announced increased funding for top researchers moving to Europe, strengthening support for the relocation of internationally leading researchers and reinforcing Europe's attractiveness as a destination for excellent research.<sup>10</sup>

#### **ISSUES REQUIRING FURTHER ATTENTION**

- The assessment of academic freedom during wartime and occupation remains an open issue and requires further research.
- practical importance of visa procedures for the effective implementation of support measures for researchers at risk.

## Key takeaways and next steps

- Programmes supporting the relocation of researchers at risk are essential to ensure the continuity of research activities and to facilitate knowledge, exchange and scientific capacity.
- Research security and academic freedom are closely interlinked and should be addressed together.
- Closer collaboration between the TEP on Academic Freedom and the TEP on Culture should be encouraged, as artistic research in various fields of science is also frequently under threat.
- A study on the impact of the geopolitical situation on the distribution and mobility of talents (from junior to senior) as well as on the national organisational models of research and higher education is welcome to inform further initiatives by European stakeholders (EU, States, HEIS). Of course, further collection of information is essential to support the next steps.
- In particular, a fact-finding study is needed to assess the initiatives launched in 2025 and their impact.
- There is no clear evidence on whether current initiatives to support researchers in crisis are attracting researchers who can make a strong contribution to the European Union's research and innovation ecosystem.
- There is currently no evidence-based study comparing the competitiveness of EU Member States in developing initiatives to attract researchers in crisis and retain talent.
- Establish and maintain contact with the EC ERA Working Group on research careers.
- Monitor the implementation of ERC grants supporting the relocation of researchers.
- **Identify a university or research-performing organisation willing to take the lead of the research project on the assessment of initiatives aimed at attracting at-risk academics and researchers to Europe.**

### ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND INITIATIVES MENTIONED DURING THE MEETING

- Banout Tony and Ginsburg Tom. (2024). The Chicago Canon on Free Inquiry and Expression.<sup>11</sup>
- Varieties of Democracy V-Dem project.<sup>12</sup>

1 Academic Freedom Index. <https://academic-freedom-index.net/>

2 SAR Flanders VLIRUOS. <https://www.vliruos.be/>

3 SAR Sweden. <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/sections/sar-sweden/>

4 ANR. Choose France for Science. <https://france2030.agencerecherche.fr/ChooseFranceForScience-2025/accueil.php?lang=EN>

5 Safe Place for Science. <https://www.univ-amu.fr/en/public/actualites/safe-place-science-aix-marseille-universite-ready-welcome-american-scientists>

6 PAUSE Programme. <https://www.programmepause.fr/en/>

7 CNR scholarships to support Ukrainian researchers. <https://www.cnr.it/en/war-in-ukraine>

8 CNR Short Term Mobility Support. <https://www.cnr.it/en/short-term-mobility>

9 APART-USA. <https://stipendien.oeaw.ac.at/en/fellowships/apart-usa>

10 ERC. <https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/news/increased-erc-funding-top-global-researchers-moving-europe-now-confirmed>

11 Banout Tony and Ginsburg Tom. (2024). The Chicago Canon on Free Inquiry and Expression. The University of Chicago Press. 224 p. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo239327187.html>

12 Varieties of Democracy V-Dem project. Academic Freedom. <https://www.v-dem.net/our-work/research-programs/academic-freedom/>