

Friday 17th August 2018

To: The European Parliament

We understand that a Hungarian government decree, enacted without proper consultation with the interested parties, has been sent out ordering the termination of the teaching of Gender Studies, specifically canceling two accredited, well-performing MA programs, with consistently high enrollments. We understand that those already enrolled at MS courses may finish their degree, but that no new students can enroll and, no new courses can be developed.

We write to protest at this proposed decree of the Hungarian government and the attempt to legislate the curriculum of universities without consultation with appropriate university institutions. According to The Hungarian Journal, “the part of the amendment which concerns gender studies provides no explanation whatsoever. Two universities are concerned: Hungary’s biggest state-funded university ELTE, and the Central European University. If the amendment becomes official, it will mean that nobody can attend gender studies courses in Hungary and get a degree in the subject.”

This also sets a very dangerous precedent for state intervention in all other university courses. By denying to faculty and administrators the academic freedom that is the guarantee of the autonomy of higher education, the Hungarian government puts itself outside the community of democratic nations.

More specifically, it appears that the Hungarian government may understand gender studies inaccurately as a humanities discipline alone, whereas it is in fact currently vital in its empirical and theoretical work in relation to social sciences broadly, business, management and organisation studies, technological sciences, medical sciences and natural sciences.

We call upon the Minister of Education to refuse this amendment. We also call upon the European Union, of which Hungary is a member nation, to condemn this action as a violation of its principles. And we call upon academic institutions in our own countries to join our protest. We would urge all concerned to rectify this anti-educational, anti-scientific, anti-democratic, and anti-equality move. We are also extremely concerned with further impacts of this move in terms of not only the loss to RINGS, but also the loss of Hungarian scholarship to international and EU collaborative projects and communities of scholars.

We sincerely trust that there will be a reconsideration and withdrawal of this decree by the Hungarian government to ensure that Hungarian universities continue to teach the whole range of disciplines appropriate to a modern society and in line with countries in Europe and beyond.

Your sincerely,

Professor Jeff Hearn, Örebro University; and Professor Emeritus, Hanken School of Economics, Finland; and Professor Tamara Shefer, University of Western Cape, Republic of South Africa
RINGS Co-chairs on behalf of the Executive Committee of RINGS: the International Association of Institutions of Advanced Gender Studies, with over 50 member institutions in 27 countries.