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## **Academic Freedom in Historical Perspective**

**Twenty-Five Years of the *European Review of History* /  
*Revue européenne d'histoire*: An Anniversary Conference**

**Central European University, Budapest, 8-10 November 2018**

### **Call for Papers**

Academic freedom is a central idea in modern scholarship. Even if a precise definition of it is difficult to state, it can be understood as the freedom for members of academia to teach and research without being restrained by political or social surveillance. The concept is not legally defined, it proceeds from customs, conventions or even traditions. Legally, discussions on academic freedom fall into the category of freedom of speech, even if this concept only partly corresponds.

When first created in the Middle Ages, universities were religious institutions. Throughout the centuries, they had to fight to escape the Churches' influence. Modern universities created in the 19th century were both instruments of learning the new techniques of capitalism (in engineering, for example) and for the promotion of the new nation-state. They were instruments of nationalisms. In the 20th century, dictatorships and totalitarian regimes severely restricted any freedom in academic institutions. In the 21st century, academic freedom and freedom of speech can be found only in a few countries, mostly in liberal democracies. In many countries, it remains difficult, often dangerous, to criticise the rulers. Even in liberal democracies, academic freedom remains fragile and is never perfectly achieved. Neo-liberal governance of universities is a significant threat: academics are expected to follow the market-oriented, customer-satisfaction, impact-driven agendas of their employers. Rising bureaucracy and micro-management imposed on academics could also be a way of suppressing conflicting views. Critical thinking and freedom of expressions could also be restricted by students themselves. The recent emergence of 'safe spaces' on American campuses, in which students demand not to be challenged by conflicting views and/or by topics bearing on adverse personal circumstances which students have experienced in their lives, are examples of such a phenomenon. Identity politics and political correctness may also restrain debates.

The organisers of this conference welcome proposals on various relevant topics, not confined only to academic freedom in the strict sense, but to intellectual freedom more broadly. Presentations can cover any period in history or any country, including freedom of enquiry within intellectual contexts in eras before the creation of universities: for example, within the philosophical schools of Greco-Roman antiquity.

Papers linking challenges to intellectual freedom in such eras to modern debates about academic freedom are also welcome. They could address the questions of university governance, institutional autonomy, the recruitment of academics. Purges following regime changes can be considered. Legal aspects are of interest to this conference, together with case studies of academics exposed to persecution, harassment, ostracisation or legal action because of their pursuit of knowledge in teaching and research, whether in democracies or in authoritarian states.

The organisers of the conference welcome individual proposals of no more than 300 words. They should be sent with a brief biography of no more than 200 words. For roundtable proposals please send a maximum 500-word description of the panel.

Keynote speakers:

**Olivier Beaud** (University of Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas)

**Paula Findlen** (Stanford University)

**Oleg Kharkhordin** (European University, St. Petersburg)

Proposals should be sent to Andrea Talabér ([andrea.talaber@EUI.eu](mailto:andrea.talaber@EUI.eu)) before **31 July 2018**.

Conference language: English.

Participants are generally expected to cover their own travel and accommodation costs, though limited support may be available upon request for those without access to institutional funding.

Conference organizers (on behalf of the *ERH/Reh* editorial committee): Jean-Marc Dreyfus (University of Manchester), László Kontler (Central European University), Agne Rimkute (Central European University), Andrea Talabér (Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague), Bertrand Taithe (University of Manchester), Karin Tilmans (European University Institute)