

Role of Institutions in Safeguarding Academic Freedom

20 October 2021

Summary

At the invitation of the main organizer, [Human Rights Initiative](#), OSUN Global Observatory on Academic Freedom on 20th of October 2021 co-organized a panel debate on the ***Role of Institutions in Safeguarding Academic Freedom***. Being an exclusively online event, open to the Central European University and Open Society University Network communities, the debate aimed to present several cases and issues to further reflect how can higher education institutions better provide safety for their members and what are the institutional, legislative and political limitations.

Shwetha Nair, Human Rights Initiative Program Coordinator, introduced the event together with **Milica Popović**, Research Fellow at the OSUN Global Observatory on Academic Freedom, who chaired the panel.

Aysuda Kölemen, Threatened Scholars Initiative Manager, at Bard College Berlin, introduced the reflection on the topic of Academic Freedom intersecting her personal and professional experience of a threatened scholar from Turkey today residing in Germany with the institutional efforts of Threatened Scholars Initiative to provide fellowships for individual scholars at risk around the globe. Kölemen also highlighted the limitations of institutions in integrating scholars forced to seek alternative teaching or career paths in their host countries. Kölemen posed questions aiming to depict the situation of today's scholarly work in which academics are facing all levels of threats, underlining that there is no threshold as minimum for infringements on AF. The threats differ from country to country, from various academic contexts and cultures but remain multifaceted and require more sustainable response in assuring the safety of production of knowledge.

Marielle Debos, Associate Professor at University Paris Nanterre and Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, but also an active member of Fariba Adelhah [support](#) committee, gave a thorough depiction of the case of Fariba Adelhah, Sciences Po CERI researcher who is still detained in Iran and her colleague Roland Marchal, who has been released. Debos, through the presentation of the work of the committee, provided several possible paths for more active involvement of academics in fighting against hostage diplomacy and in freeing academic prisoners, beyond Iran.

Moving away from the state attacks on academic freedom, **Erdost Akin**, PhD Candidate in Political Science at the CEU, argued for a reflection on the situations when institutions themselves pose a threat to Academic Freedom. Inquiring the possibility of trust between the academic community, including students, and the university management, Akin raised the important issues of access to education and knowledge, including the principles of self-governance within the institutions.

Agreeing with a much-needed reflection of an internal document at the CEU on Academic Freedom, **Liviu Matei**, Provost at the Central European University, discussed Academic Freedom as a

fundamental value and a principle, yet an elusive concept which continuously reminds us of the importance of understanding knowledge as a public good. Matei underlined the diversity and multiplicity of actors who are stakeholders in issues of academic freedom, and the importance of educating ourselves on the topic of Academic Freedom, including a thorough reflection which should led to acceptance of the importance of Academic Freedom and the understanding of threats to AF beyond authoritarian governments.