



*Cluj-Napoca, 7 november 2016*

Open letter of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (UBB):

In the name and for maintaining Romanian academic competitiveness

Addressed to:

- The President of Romania, Mister Klaus Iohannis
- The Prime Minister of Romania, Mister Dacian Cioloș
- Romanian European Parliament Members

The declared policy of the European Union is to have a balanced and equitable development of member countries. The core of the competitiveness of a country is represented by knowledge produced in the academic environment that results in innovative solutions which, in their turn, give the country a competitive advantage at international level, with a positive impact on the quality of life and social functioning of its citizens.

Academic competitions organized by the European Commission in the past (e.g., the 7th Framework Programme/FP7) have been based on the correct principle that all winners in a programme should enjoy the same benefits, regardless of where they come from (e.g., Western or Eastern Europe). Indeed, the international area of research and education is globalized, such that academic expenses in top research (e.g., prices of books, conference and training course fees) are the same.

The framework contract in the Horizon 2020 programme includes the inequitable specification that salaries in grants won by European competition must be based on the basic salary of teaching staff/researchers (this interpretation has been corroborated by the answer of ANCSI, Nr. 3659/29.09.2016 to the address sent by UBB in July 2016, requesting clarifications on the articles of the Framework Contract). Consequently, income from European grants is drastically reduced (e.g., to an average of 7 EURO/hour for a senior UBB professor and of 3 EURO/hour for a senior UBB assistant professor). In other words, we win the same competition, but the quality of the gold in the medal is different! It is important to note that we are not talking about European structural and cohesion funds, whose primary purpose is not supporting excellence, but development, and the competition is organized nationally, which makes it logical to be tailored to the local financial context. We are talking about competitions whose primary purpose is to support excellence and competitiveness, organized by bodies of the European Commission, in relation to which public discourse is that all winners are treated equally, as Europeans.



The change in the Horizon Programme has three immediate negative consequences on the Romanian academic environment:

- (1) Teaching staff/researchers with ongoing grants seek to transfer these grants to Western European universities;
- (2) Teaching staff/researchers who have won European grants refuse to contract them and/or try to transfer them to Western Europe;
- (3) High performing teaching staff/researchers from Romanian universities apply for European funding through Western European Universities.

We are thus witnessing a *brain-drain* phenomenon and, under the circumstances, we can no longer talk about reducing inequalities at European level; on the contrary, these inequalities are increased.

Through its own efforts, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (UBB) has succeeded to occupy some of the most important positions held by Romanian universities in international university rankings of 2016. This has been achieved despite the fact the UBB budget is at least 10 times lower than the budget of the last university in the rankings of reference (e.g., Academic Ranking of World Universities). Considering the conditions imposed by the financing of research projects in the Horizon 2020 Programme, we are witnessing the loss and/or demotivation of UBB competitiveness areas. Under the circumstances, not only will we not manage to catch up with other major universities in the world, but we will not even manage to maintain our current status.

We have drawn the attention of competent national and European bodies to this situations (they have been notified in May of this year), but the answer is late, and the delay has catastrophic consequences for the Romanian academic environment. Therefore, we ask for your support in correcting this situation, in the spirit of equity that unites European countries. The following solutions could be taken into account:

- (1) Obtaining an exception for Romania (other Eastern European countries have requested and have been granted this);
- (2) A constructive interpretation of the regulations, in the sense that financing is subject to national framework/regulations, similar to the 7th Framework Programme. This interpretation must be explicit and endorsed by the European Commission to avoid the situation in which, drawing on certain unclarities, we would be tempted to give this interpretation ourselves, locally, and then be confronted with investigations by European bodies;
- (3) The modification of the extant framework, for a more equitable treatment of Eastern European countries.