

## **The Guild launches an annual lecture series to mark the International Day of Academic Freedom by bringing together researchers and policymakers**

On 20 May 2025, The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities marked ‘International Academic Freedom Day’ by launching an annual lecture and discussion on Academic Freedom in Brussels. Bringing together policymakers, university networks, and researchers, The Guild co-organised the event with its member [Université PSL](#) including one of its most famous institutions, [Institut Curie](#). The event took place just two weeks after European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a €500 million funding package (2025–2027) to make Europe a leading destination for researchers worldwide. The event underscored the urgent need to focus not just on events in the US, but to uphold the freedom of scientific research and foster international research collaboration globally, including in Europe itself.

Commemorating academic pioneer Marie Skłodowska-Curie, whose work received a key stimulus through transatlantic collaboration, speakers emphasised that safeguarding academic freedom cannot be reduced to a reaction to current threats: it is a structural necessity for research institutions, a cornerstone of a democratic and sovereign European research and higher education space. They highlighted that academic freedom is indispensable to Europe’s knowledge society through the resilience of its research systems. But, as the events in the US show, it is also critical to strengthen academic freedom in the rest of the world, with whose research systems European researchers collaborate.

Arguing that the EU has to provide stronger legal protection for Academic Freedom, **Christian Ehler MEP**, Chair of STOA, made the case for a self-standing legal act, appealing to researchers to take responsibility in the development of the Act. He noted that this was a priority not simply for Europe’s capacity to stand for the freedom of science and provide the necessary framework conditions for excellent science. It was, at its core, a central issue in the upholding of democracy. Finally, Ehler reiterated his support for a strong, well-funded programme to welcome researchers-at-risk, from whichever situations of danger they hailed.

**Manuel Aleixo**, member of Commissioner Zaharieva’s cabinet, agreed with the need to provide stronger protections for academic freedom, as essential for European science, and for the free exchange of ideas across the continent. He outlined the extensive work going on to prepare the ground for legislation that complemented national protections across the EU, that would be articulated as part of the forthcoming ERA Act. Together, the two speakers outlined key areas of discussion that would frame the legislative work on Academic Freedom in the coming months.

The distinguished lineup of speakers also included **Anders Hagfeldt**, Chair of The Guild and Vice-Chancellor of Uppsala University, and **Renaud Huynh**, Director of Musée Curie, who highlighted

Marie Skłodowska-Curie's profound societal contributions. A thought-provoking keynote address was delivered by **Katja Brøgger**, Associate Professor and Research Program Director at Aarhus University. In her talk, Brøgger argued that the growing politicisation and political co-optation of education and science – coupled with increased state intervention – pose direct threats to academic freedom and to the governance frameworks that sustain openness in higher education. These developments extend beyond the United States and beyond illiberal or authoritarian regimes, reaching deeply into countries traditionally seen as liberal democracies. The event culminated in an engaging panel discussion featuring **Ana-Maria Lennon Duménil** (INSERM & Institut Curie), **Claire Morel** (European Commission), **Clare Birchall** (King's College London), and **Anders Hagfeldt**. Together they discussed the roots of the growing infringement on academic freedom and the solutions for better protecting universities and researchers, when their autonomy, freedom and capacities to collaborate are at risk especially because of political interference. They highlighted, among others, the role of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) as the main instrument supporting academic freedom and researchers at risk in the framework programme for R&I.

In his closing address, **El Mouhoub Mouhoud**, President of Université PSL, stressed the significance of continued dedication to academic freedom in the face of global challenges. And he formally announced an annual event series by The Guild to provide a space to bring researchers and policymakers together to discuss academic freedom in Europe and beyond.

#### **El Mouhoub Mouhoud, President of Université PSL:**

“The erosion of scientific autonomy is a global alarm. In the current context, we must stand in solidarity with our American colleagues and deepen international collaboration. Universities are not only places of learning—they are guardians of democracy, engines of discovery, and sanctuaries for free thought. As university leaders, we have a responsibility to act. By launching this gathering, we collectively affirm that the freedom of science is the foundation of innovation, sovereignty, and democratic strength—and must be protected at all costs.”

#### **Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild:**

“We cannot choose between strengthening the freedom of science in Europe and elsewhere. They are interdependent. Where international research collaboration is endangered by ideological retrenchment, Europe must step up. Where other science systems are weakened by attacks on science, Europe must strengthen its own capacity for excellence research in response. And where freedom of science is under attack in European countries, the need a resolute response within – from EU lawmakers, as well as other countries and institutions.”

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### **About The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities**

Founded in 2016, [The Guild](#) comprises twenty-two of Europe's most distinguished research-intensive universities in sixteen countries, and is dedicated to enhancing the voice of academic institutions, their researchers and their students. The Guild is committed to the pursuit of excellence, the importance of truth-seeking and trust-building as the foundation of public life, and the creation of new knowledge for the benefit of society, culture, and economic growth.