

Joint statement by ESU and ŠRVŠ against the attacks on students of the Slovak government

Document Type **Statement** ▾

Mundo-Mandou, Avenue
des Arts 7/8, 1210 Bruxelles

tel.: +32 2 893 25 45
fax.: +32 2 893 25 45

secretariat@esu-online.org
www.esu-online.org

The European Students' Union (ESU), the organisation representing 20 million students at European level, and the Student Council of Higher Education in Slovakia (ŠRVŠ) are condemning the unacceptable attacks against students and academic freedom of the Slovak government and Prime Minister Robert Fico. We are demanding urgent redress to the injustice caused to our colleague Marek Janiga and a swift change of course of the government's attitude.

After Marek Janiga questioned the political support given by the Dean of the Faculty of Law of Comenius University to a controversial initiative of the Slovakian government to disband the special anti-corruption prosecutor office, asking for a professional debate between the student body and the dean, Prime minister Robert Fico reacted through an outrageous public position, which not only belittled students, their freedom of expression and student agency in academia, but also demeaned Marek Janiga through personal attacks.

This is only an escalation of worrisome trends in Slovakia pursued by the current government in relation to the rule of law, academic freedom and student participation. Constructive discussions at higher education institutions are vital for intellectual growth, contributing to the creation of well-rounded and socially conscious higher education institutions.

We are disappointed that Comenius University did not intervene and condemn the attacks from the prime minister of Slovakia. The Academic Senate of the Comenius University not only failed to uphold the student's right to seek remedy for the injustice and adopt a resolution to defend the academic community, but some of its members attempted to silence students and shifted the blame on them.

It is not acceptable that students feel as lesser members of the universities, as they are an equal and meaningful part of the academic sphere. We call on all higher education institutions in Slovakia to strengthen the position of the students and publicly condemn the infringements of the Slovak government. We are also calling on the Slovak accreditation agency (SAAVŠ) to determine to what degree Comenius University sustains quality standards stipulated in Slovakian legislation

in relation to non-discrimination and reviewing complaints by which a student seeks protection of their rights or legally protected interests.

ESU and ŠRVŠ decry the vertiginous decrease in the effectiveness of student participation rights in Slovakia and reminds the Slovak government of the international standards it has committed to abide by, asking for a public apology of prime minister Robert Fico. We welcome the resolution adopted by the European Parliament in this regard and call on European institutions to closely monitor the developments in Slovakia in relation to academic freedom and rule of law, in line with their competencies, and support student rights.