



Speech by dr. Bela Merkely

On September 10, 2025.

Mr. President, your Honors,

I am honored to be able to speak before this court. Thank you for the opportunity on behalf of our 16,000 students and 15,000 colleagues, whom I represent here. In addition to being an active interventional cardiologist (I operated all day yesterday, so I arrived in town only late last night), I am a university professor and I am the rector of Semmelweis University. I was re-elected by 36 votes to 8 by the University Senate from two candidates in January 2023. The Senate, which is the executive body of the University, is composed of 45 members, of whom

- 27 are directly elected by secret ballot by professors, researchers and educators,
- 2 (the rector and the chancellor) are directly elected by secret ballot by the Senate,
- 12 are directly delegated by student organizations out of their elected members, while
- 4 are directly delegated by the trade unions among their elected board members.

So, I believe that I may represent the more than 30,000 university citizens, who are all stakeholders in these proceedings. Not only legally, but also morally.

This university was founded in 1769, yes: – more than 250 years ago. Since then, governments have come, governments have gone, and the University has struggled against each and every one of them to defend our academic freedom and integrity. Just as in your own countries. Now the bizarre situation has arisen that we also need to fight the European Union. Notwithstanding, academic freedom and integrity is worth fighting for: – we are considered to be the leading medical science university in Central Europe, and we have a very prestigious place in global medical school rankings.

I have had to accept that the Commission of the European Union and the Hungarian Government have had a grumpy relationship for years. This is not the University's choice and not our dispute – especially not that of our university students from almost 130 countries.



But until December 2022, we believed that the deep-rooted integrity of our University would keep us out of this purely political debate. At that time, we were shocked to learn from the press that the European Union is punishing us instead of its political adversary. Moreover, it does so with a measure that affects our students and researchers – who are completely blameless in the EU and Hungary's political games. No one ever approached us before this sad decision was made.

I would add that no one has ever even hinted at any financial irregularities in relation to the Erasmus+ and Horizon programs at our University – allegedly the basis for the Council's Decision.

It would be a mistake to think that this is a matter of money. The University itself has never been a dispenser of either Erasmus+ or Horizon funds. Indeed, this has never even been claimed by the Council or the Commission.

The real problem is - and let me emphasize this - that our students and researchers are now being discriminated against. They are being left out of the European Erasmus+ and Horizon programs and being stripped of opportunities which could profoundly affect their futures.

Early in 2022, we were delighted while reading the European Commission's European strategy for universities. It reads somewhere that – quote – “Europe could still do better in stimulating mobility” – unquote. Back then nobody in his good sense, not even the Commission, could have imagined that only some months later this Decision was about to come out.

In my non-legal opinion, it is not a very European move for the European Union to deprive us of opportunities and money, and hand them directly to our competitors (as provided for in Recital (62) of the Decision)

Finally, we came here to be heard. The University and its stakeholders suffer gravely from the Decision. Notwithstanding, that none of those stakeholders have ever been involved in – or can be made responsible for – the rocky relationship between the Union and Hungary. We presented an Application full of facts to support this. Neither the Council nor the Commission have bothered to notice, respond to, or even dispute those facts. In fact, they have diligently avoided facts and any discussion of facts. We understand: – facts are stubborn.

One of those facts is that our students left out of Erasmus+ will never again be third, fourth, fifth and sixth year medical students. Concerning them, the damage has already been irreparably done.

Should you have any question in connection with our University, any facts concerning our University or its stakeholders, I am available and would be pleased to answer. Thank you for your attention.
