

Joint Franco-German declaration on academic freedom

On 18 March 2019 Michelle Müntefering, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, and Anne-Marie Descôtes, French Ambassador to Germany, issued a joint declaration on the importance of academic freedom. Germany and France are working together closely to defend academic freedom and have established the Philipp Schwartz Initiative and its French counterpart PAUSE. These initiatives support academics at risk with scholarships.

The declaration was read at the Conference for Academic Freedom in Berlin, which was jointly organised by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the other Alliance organisations. It reads as follows:

Scientists face challenges, constraints and restrictions in many parts of the world. Academic freedom is coming under pressure. We have witnessed how the freedom of research is being curtailed and how scientists are being prohibited from exercising employment or forced to leave their homes, jobs or even their home countries. In recent years, many researchers at risk have travelled to countries where they can live and work, or at least find temporary refuge.

These countries include France and Germany. Our two European nations firmly believe that freedom of speech and academic freedom must be respected. Germany and France have launched programmes to support vulnerable academics, such as the Philipp Schwartz Initiative (PSI) and the National Program for the urgent aid and reception of scientists in exile (Programme national d'aide à l'Accueil en Urgence des Scientifiques en Exil, PAUSE). Both programmes are run by renowned institutions of academic excellence – the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Collège de France.

Together with our partners and supporters on both sides of the Atlantic, we believe it is important to broaden our efforts to uphold academic freedom in a world in which civil society's leeway is increasingly curtailed. To this end, we are committed to sharing our experiences with PSI and PAUSE with other research and funding organisations as academic freedom is fundamental to open and free societies worldwide. We call on the European Union to continue to support these efforts.