

Hungary passes controversial science sector reform bill

July 2 2019

The Hungarian parliament passed a bill Tuesday enabling the takeover of research institutes by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government, which is accused by critics of seeking to control key institutions and sectors.

The bill, approved by 131 of lawmakers in the 199-seat assembly, gives Orbán's nationalist, anti-migration [government](#) control of a vast network of research institutes currently run by the two-century old Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA).

Orbán's critics say that since coming to power in 2010 he has tightened his control over most key institutions in Hungary, including public media, the judiciary and the [education sector](#).

Scientists have condemned the move against research institutes as a threat to academic freedom.

Under the legislation, a new institution with [board members](#) appointed by Orbán will allocate funding for research.

This body would also use the MTA's properties and part of its administration.

Founded in 1825, the MTA is the country's oldest and largest scientific institution but the government views it as an inefficient relic of communism.

Its institutes currently employ some 5,000 staff nationwide including around 3,000 researchers, and perform a vast range of research ranging from philosophy to music, animal husbandry to space research.

Orban has argued that Hungary needs to boost its performance in international innovation rankings and create more economic profit from science.

Last year, he set up a new Innovation and Technology Ministry (ITM) to begin moving control of scientific funding away from the MTA in favour of new "innovation-driven" projects.

The MTA's president has said the reforms "threaten academic freedom" and have alarmed "the vast majority of Hungarian scientists," arguing that the shake-up is partly because MTA experts have criticised government policies in recent years.

Thousands have demonstrated in Budapest in solidarity with the [institution](#) at several street protests since the bill was drafted earlier this year.

A new protest has been set for Tuesday afternoon.

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