

DÉPARTEMENT DE LA COMMUNICATION ET DES RELATIONS EXTÉRIEURES

Service Communication - Presse

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[PRESS RELEASE]

ULB and VUB take a stand on a law that could ban gender studies in Romania

Both universities support the Amicus Curiae's brief to the Constitutional Court of Romania on Law 87/2020, which would ban gender studies.

The rectors of the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), **Annemie Schaus**, and of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), **Caroline Pauwels**, have decided, on behalf of their institution, to sign the "Amicus Curiae's brief regarding the file no. 959A / 2020 of the Constitutional Court, with a trial date of September 30." The law 87/2020, adopted in June 2020, could ban gender studies in Romania. However, President Klaus Johannis did not promulgate it, but referred it to the Constitutional Court, which is due to examine it on September 30.¹

Rectors ULB and VUB consider that **this law, if adopted, would severely undermine academic freedom, freedom of research, university autonomy and freedom of expression. It would also threaten the protection of fundamental rights. For this reason, they ask the Constitutional Court of Romania to declare this law unconstitutional.**

Annemie Schaus (ULB): *"The ULB has always been a frontrunner in terms of gender equality. The ULB was the first Belgian university to open its doors to women and to appoint a female professor. The commitment of our institution in support of the right to abortion, along with the VUB, is also well-known. In 2016, the ULB introduced the pioneering "mesure cascade" to combat the phenomenon of "leaky pipeline" in academic careers and we have developed an ambitious gender equality and diversity policy. In 2018, the ULB and the VUB were also the first universities to attend officially the Belgian Pride, marching in the streets of Brussels under the banner "open-minded universities." The promotion of gender equality and the defence of sexual freedom are central to the project of our university. Gender studies, a strong area of research at the ULB, are crucial to achieve this goal."*

Caroline Pauwels (VUB): *"Freedom of research and expression is a key value for the VUB, and we take many efforts in that respect. Yearly we organize the Difference Day at the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day. This event is intended in particular to remind governments of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression. The latter reflects the democratic vitality and pluralism of a society. The VUB is an academic partner in the project for establishing equality in society in general, and in Brussels in particular. The VUB was one of the first Flemish universities to establish a centre for what was in the 1980s still called 'women's studies.' Today RHEA, the VUB interdisciplinary Research Centre Gender, Diversity, Intersectionality studies the many faces of gender inequality at the intersection of other strands of inequality. Gender studies contribute to delivering scientifically solid answers to the many challenges our societies face today. They therefore deserve the same freedom as other fields of knowledge. The VUB has always been a fierce defender of academic freedom. When academic freedom is threatened, the VUB resists."*

This decision follows several statements in defence of gender studies and academic freedom. In the past, the ULB and the VUB have already interpellated the authorities of the Università degli Studi di Verona and the Hungarian government, when gender studies and academic freedom were threatened either by civil society organisations or by governmental educational plans. Throughout their history, they also repeatedly supported researchers in danger around the world.

This statement takes part into an international movement in support of academic freedom and gender studies in Romania, supported by the Conseil des Recteurs of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (CREF), and several rectors in Belgium and abroad.

¹ More information : <https://internationaledugenre.net/news-on-romania/387-2/>