

Balázs Gulyás, the president of the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Network (RN), has argued (Nature 652, 1420 (2026)) that the RN operates as a self-governing body and that its recent reform was necessary and justified. As representatives of the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers, we challenge these claims: the RN became increasingly centralized, and “self-governance” was reduced to the autonomy of the President and the Board. The reform was a top-down, non-transparent transformation with unclear objectives and significant risks.

The RN had already undergone constant transformation before Gulyás’s appointment, a process accelerated under his leadership. In 2024, he commissioned an evaluation by an international committee. The results have not been made publicly available, but based on limited information, including statements by Professor Zehnder, who oversaw the assessment, the network performs well, particularly given its chronic underfunding.

Over the past year, the RN has remained in limbo amid a proposed transformation aimed at privatization and promising additional resources. Again, the objectives were unclear, the process took place without consultation with the employees. When the government decided to proceed and provide extra funding, Gulyás unexpectedly announced that the four SHAPE institutions would be transferred to Eötvös Loránd University, excluding them from extra resources and exposing them to serious financial instability. This decision, despite the widespread protest from the colleagues throughout the RN, was carried out in a 1.5 month long time-frame.

Taken together, these developments raise questions about the extent to which “self-governance” characterizes the RN and how well conceived this reform is.

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