

To President Emmanuel Jean-Michel Frédéric Macron
President of the French Republic

To His Excellency Mr. Philippe Baptiste
Minister of National Education and Youth, France

To Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Thomas Römer
Chairman of the Collège de France

Sent by email

12 November 2025

Dear Mr President, dear Minister, dear Chairman,

We write to express our deep concern regarding the cancellation of the [symposium “Palestine and Europe”](#) organized by the Chair of Contemporary History of the Arab World at the [Collège de France](#) and the [CAREP](#) (Arab Center for Research and Political Studies).

We - the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO), the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES), the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) - are, respectively, Germany's, Britain's, Italy's, and North America's largest associations for Middle East Studies. Founded in 1993, 1973, 1995, and 1966 respectively, our associations work to promote research and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa and to raise awareness of the region and how it is connected to other parts of the world. We are all committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, in our respective countries and globally.

The symposium, scheduled for November 13-14, gathers eminent academic specialists from prestigious institutions across the world, including DAVO, BRISMES, SeSaMO, and MESA members. It aims to examine how the question of Palestine fits into contemporary European political and scholarly dynamics. This is a legitimate and timely object of scholarly inquiry.

It is therefore deeply troubling that the symposium was cancelled following misleading commentary on social media and political pressure from the French Ministry of Higher Education. The subsequent public statements ([here](#) and [here](#)) characterising the symposium as “activist” and

questioning its academic legitimacy constitute an unjustified attack on the integrity of the invited researchers. To misrepresent rigorous academic work as partisan undermines the very principles of historical and social scientific inquiry. Scholarly debate must be evaluated by the academic community, not curtailed by political intervention.

France's obligations to respect academic freedom are clearly established in national, European and international law. Article L952-2 of the French Code de l'Éducation guarantees the independence and freedom of expression of teaching and research staff, an entitlement reinforced by the Conseil d'État in decision no. 329056 of 9 June 2010, which recognized the principle of independence of higher education teachers as a fundamental principle of French law. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which France signed and ratified, protects freedom of expression, which the European Court of Human Rights has interpreted, notably in *Mustafa Erdogan and others v. Turkey* (27 May 2014), as encompassing academic freedom. At the European Union level, Article 13 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly recognizes the freedom of the arts and sciences, including teaching, research, and dissemination, imposing a duty on EU Member States to safeguard academic freedoms. Finally, Article 19 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guarantees freedom of expression, which UN bodies and instruments have interpreted as extending to academic freedom, thereby creating binding obligations for France to protect the ability of scholars to research, teach, and express ideas without undue interference.

The cancellation of this symposium represents a grave violation of these obligations. It sets a dangerous precedent whereby media pressure or ministerial intervention can determine which [topics may be researched and discussed in academic spaces](#). Such interference threatens pluralism, chills critical scholarship and risks encouraging broader attacks on academic freedom in France and beyond.

We are particularly concerned by the ways in which the notions of “scientificity” and “scholarly rigor” are being invoked to suppress legitimate scholarly activities. Similar accusations have repeatedly been used (including by [state actors](#)) to [delegitimize](#) researchers and to curtail pluralistic academic debate, often through the instrumentalization of charges of supporting [political Islam](#), [terrorism](#), and antisemitism. Such uses of “scientificity” have also fuelled Islamophobic and anti-Arab discourses and contributed to attacks on academic research (such as [postcolonial studies](#)). We are worried that the cancellation of an academic symposium at an institution as prestigious as the *Collège de France* will further encourage attacks on academic freedoms that are a key element of a democratic society.

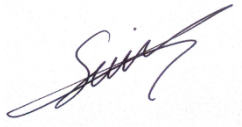
DAVO, BRISMES, SeSaMO and MESA jointly call on the Ministry of Education and the Collège de France to guarantee and defend academic freedom by taking the following steps:

1. issue a formal apology to the symposium organisers and participants for the cancellation and allow the symposium to proceed on the premises of the Collège de France;

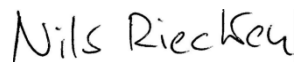
2. publicly affirm your commitment to open, critical, and evidence-based scholarly debate;
3. actively protect students and staff from political pressure, intimidation, and media attacks that threaten their academic freedom and/or personal safety;
4. refrain from adopting or supporting measures that restrict the university's role as a space for pluralism and independent scholarly inquiry.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your response. In accordance with our standard policy, this letter will be published on our websites.

Yours sincerely,



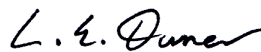
Dr Sevil Çakır
Speaker of DAVO Committee on
Academic Freedom



Dr Nils Riecken
Speaker of DAVO Committee on
Academic Freedom



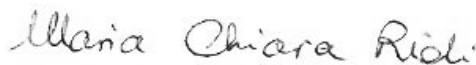
Professor Nicola Pratt
BRISMES President



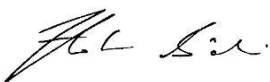
Dr Lewis Turner
Chair of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom



Professor Rosita Di Peri
SeSaMO President



Dr Maria Chiara Rioli
Chair of SeSaMO Committee on Academic Freedom



Professor Ash Ü. Bâli
MESA President



Professor Laurie A. Brand
Chair of MESA Committee on Academic Freedom