



Romania to Replace National Research Council After Mass Resignation

by Lucas Laursen on 19 April 2013, 4:30 PM | [0 Comments](#)

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The Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport has asked universities to nominate replacements for the 19 members of the [National Research Council \(CNCS\)](#), Romania's main research funding agency. Council members resigned en masse on 12 April to protest retroactive cuts in research grants.

In e-mails recently sent to CNCS grantees, the Romanian government announced that it would make cuts in the 2013 installment of multiannual research grants issued in 2011. The decision appears to have been the final straw in already strained relations between the government and the council, chaired by neurobiologist Alexandru Babeş of the University of Bucharest.

One of the researchers affected by the cuts is Romanian paleoclimatologist Bogdan Onac of the University of South Florida in Tampa, who used his 2011 CNCS grant, worth \$455,000, to rekindle research relationships with his home country. Onac bought an isotope analyzer, hired two graduate students in Romania, and paid half a professor's salary there to help him analyze samples found in Romanian caves. On 8 April, however, Onac got an e-mail from the government financing agency, UEFISCDI, advising him that the grant's 2013 installment would be about 45% less than agreed, "taking into account the available budget." Other grantees lost up to 55% of their promised 2013 funds, Onac says.

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The government e-mails said that the difference would arrive in 2014. But many Romanian scientists no longer trust such promises. A [protest letter](#) to the Romanian government signed by 568 Romanian researchers notes that similar delays beset the 2010 funding round and that promises of later making up the payments fell through. ([Three hundred and fifty-eight researchers signed the English version](#) of the letter.) The letter, dated 9 April, also asks why the government is issuing new calls for grants in 2013 if there is not enough funding to fulfill its previous obligations.

Onac says that the cuts may hurt his three collaborators in Romania. "They are completely dependent on my Romanian grants," he says. "I will just keep going until I finish the grant money and then I will just stop working with them."

The cuts are only one flash point between the current Romanian government and CNCS. The government has also struck a requirement, introduced by former research and education minister Daniel Funeriu, that international panels review grant applications and that applicants have papers published in an internationally ranked peer-reviewed journal. Onac calls the decision a step back that will hurt research quality. With international review, "only the best proposals were awarded, because evaluation went outside Romania," he says.

In a [press release](#) carried by HotNews.ro, the research ministry defended the cuts by claiming that CNCS's approval rates for the Ideas grants had been higher than it could sustain. The ministry attacked the council for asking it to prioritize the Ideas grants over the much smaller Human Resources grants, which tend to benefit younger researchers. The 2013 call will differ in that it will focus on "real socio-economic needs" and attract private-sector co-financing.

Onac is worried about how the government will fill the new council, because it asked universities, and not a broad array of scientists, for nominations: "Our experience is that the universities will always propose people who are high in their structures but not necessarily scientists with good publication records," he says.

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