

**To: The President of the Republic of Bulgaria
The Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
The Minister of Education, Youth and Science
The Chairman of the Parliamentary Education,
Science, Children, Youths and Sports Committee
The Chairman of the Executive Board of the
Bulgarian National Science Fund**

Declaration

of the General Assembly of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

The results of the call “*Financing Basic and Applied Research in Priority Areas - 2012*” that has ended recently and has been organized by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (BNSF) run by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS) have revealed numerous grave infractions and violations of the BNSF rules and of Parliament and MEYS decisions that regulate science funding .

Regulating rules, transparency norms, established European practices have been breached. All this casts doubt on the final results of the competition and dashes out the work and aspirations of the entire academic community from Bulgarian universities and research institutes. In compliance with the "National Strategy for Advancement of Research 2020 “approved by Parliament, the project funding from BNSF is the main source of financial support.

Among the most serious violations of the BNSF rules are:

1. The National Strategy clearly sets five research priority areas for funding that are important for the national economy and foresees that extra 15% should be channeled to basic research, the latter "only benefiting the global economy," and of importance for advancement of scientific disciplines themselves. Art. 4. of the BNSF rules states "the promotion of research" should be in these areas. The BNSF management, however overstated beyond recognition the letter and spirit of the Strategy, in the part promoting basic research and created as sixth national priority "research with applications in education," distributed 6% of the total budget to projects within this distorted priority.

2. According to Art. 31 (1) of the Rules, "the evaluation of research projects and programs is carried out by independent foreign evaluators in accordance with international principles of impartiality, competence and avoiding conflicts of interest," and national referees - according to par. (2) - allowed only for projects of cultural heritage and national identity. In contrast, all 1094 projects of this competition were reviewed only by national reviewers. Moreover, the list of national referees announced on the BNSF website reveals drastic cases of potential conflict of interest of scientists who

were at the same time, award-winning project leaders, funded with sums close to the declared maximum. One could only guess how many are the referees among other winning teams.

3. The composition of the Executive Board (EB) was formed in violation of the provisions of Article 8 paragraphs (2), (4) and (5) of the BNSF rules concerning the age and qualifications of EB members and balance between the scientific fields they represent. Evaluation and ranking of the applying projects were performed in direct conflict with the "Guidelines for applicants" in the call, the official record of the terms which all candidates are required to comply within their projects.

4. Part II, Item 1 of the "Guidelines" excludes participation in the contest of "bogus research organizations": Applicants must be directly responsible for the implementation of project activities and should not act as intermediaries. In contrast, the beneficiaries of 16 successful projects awarded with nearly 4.5 million lev (over 20% of the budget) are organizations without their own research potential, i.e. they are "intermediaries" in the purest sense of the word.

The demoralizing effect of these violations is compounded by the complete lack of transparency about the evaluation procedure, in stark contrast with the established European and international practice. Indeed, the results of the competition are not and have never been intended to be released! Only the list of winners has been made public, which is unconvincing with the numerous procedural violations already established. The announced procedure of access to expert assessments for the leaders of unsuccessful applications is unfathomably stretched in the future and looks like an attempt to delay the decision of the problems and blur the tension.

We believe that the results of the competition “*Financing Basic and Applied Research in Priority Areas - 2012*” divert the bulk of the already meager resources for research project funding in Bulgaria away from good science .

We demand:

1. The cancellation of the results of this competition.
2. The evaluation and ranking of applications in the competition to be published . Within 14 days the following data to be published on the BNSF website:
 - a) The composition of the temporary scientific expert committees for the competition;
 - b) The list of referees for the competition, with an indication of their area of expertise and the number of reviews each one has prepared;
 - c) The list of all applications, with the following data:
 - The main priority area of the application (to dispel the doubts that part of the projects has not met the requirement of ch.II, 3 of the "Guidelines" for full compliance with the objectives of the research priority area);
 - Summary of the project (up to 1800 characters);

- CV of the project leader, required in the "Guidelines" (to dispel the doubts about the " scientific expertise in some of the projects);
- A list of team members and their affiliations;
- Required and awarded funding;
- Evaluation (number of points) for each of the 4 criteria of each review;
- Comprehensive formulation of the established administrative violations (for disqualified projects);
- Complete list of all currently active or completed projects in 2012, funded by BNSF, including the project leader (the management of last- stage projects is cited by BNSF as the most common cause of administrative violations) .

3. New regulation to be introduced, ensuring full transparency for all future competitions organized by BNSF in accordance with the established practices for scientific competitions in EC and USA. The share of funds for each priority area as well as for basic research should be determined and announced before the start of the competition. To adopt the practice of publishing the scientific and financial reports of all completed projects funded by BNSF on its website.

Chairman of the General Assembly of BAS

Prof. N. Malinowski

Signature

This Statement was adopted by the General Assembly of BAS on 28. 11 2012.

The Scientific Councils of the Institute for Nuclear Research and Nuclear Energy, Georgi Nadjakov Institute of Solid State Physics, The Institute of Electronics "Academician Emil Djakov" of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences have adopted Declarations with similar demands.