

Detailed report on the student forum

We present the contributions made at the internal university forum held on 8 November, the questions of students and lecturers, as mediated by the moderator, and the relevant answers.

On 8 November 2023, in the main lecture hall of Building C, at the invitation of the Corvinus Student Union and the 23 student associations of the university, Acting Rector Lajos Szabó and Trade Union President Gábor Toronyai informed the students about the background of the recently concluded ethics and irregularities procedure. A short summary of the event is available [here](#), and below is a detailed report from the Forum.

In his introduction, Kristóf Kovács, President of the Student Union and the main organiser of the event, thanked Acting Rector Lajos Szabó and trade union leader Gábor Toronyai for their willingness to accept the invitation, and said that he hoped there would be opportunities for similar discussions in the future again. They initiated the forum because they wanted to get information on the issue from the university citizens and not from the press. He added that the forum was not open to the press and asked any journalists present to leave, adding that it would be possible to interview the two invitees or the organiser after the event. He said that students followed the case with keen interest, which was proved by the fact that in addition to the Student Union, 23 university organisations [supported](#) the organisation of the forum, and he listed these organisations. He outlined the agenda of the forum, which foresaw 15 minutes for each of the two invited guests to present their views. During the presentations, students and lecturers could ask questions in a separate block of the Mentimeter online interface, and the most popular questions would be forwarded by the moderator - in order of popularity - to the two invited persons, allowing 60 minutes in total for the answers, and excluding vulgar, insulting or mocking questions.

Briefing by Gábor Toronyai

In his speech, Gábor Toronyai said that he was present as the leader of the Trade Union to speak out against the injustice suffered by Zoltán Ádám, but affecting everyone. He said that students should speak out for the reinstatement of Zoltán Ádám, because their support is at least as important, if not more important, as that of lecturers in defending non-discriminatory examinations and the value of their degrees. University staff have already done this by expressing their opinions at the staff forum. He missed Anthony Radev, President of the University, and Zsolt Hernádi, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University, at the forum. The organiser Kristóf Kovács later said that they were not invited in the first place.

Gábor Toronyai went on to say that it was perhaps the most serious management mistake of recent years that the university terminated the employment of the initiator of the ethics procedures by extraordinary notice. This move undermines the reputation of the university and creates the impression that the Corvinus University of Budapest is controlled by a narrow group of university leaders who are protecting their own interests. He stressed that this was not caused by the discovery of ethical misconducts, but by the dismissal of Zoltán Ádám, and asked the responsible leaders to consider their resignation because of that.

In his opinion, the loss of external and internal trust must be stopped, and the damage to the reputation of the Corvinus must be repaired. In his opinion, the university should not be run in an autocratic, corporate-like (in a bad sense) manner, because the university is a scientific and educational institution performing a public service, which can fulfil its tasks properly only when provided with a high degree of independence and freedom of speech, and not only in scientific matters but also in the discussion of public affairs. He asked students to take a stand for university autonomy and freedom of speech. Gábor Toronyai suggested that the university should set up a committee that can quickly prevent any legitimate attempts to influence the

university's operation. He asked the students to support the development of sound ethical regulations and the creation of an autonomy or integrity protection vehicle.

He said it was necessary to strengthen trust in each other and to express solidarity, too. He asked the students to take a stand for the reinstatement of Zoltán Ádám, and in doing so, they would also be taking a stand for the lecturers, so that nobody could be fired immediately for forced, fictitious reasons. According to Gábor Toronyai, the reinstatement of Zoltán Ádám would be the only truly credible and efficient step towards restoring the reputation of the university.

He added that in the case of the Corvinus, it was particularly important for the country's prosperity that for decades this university had been helping the development of young people who would mostly become leaders in economic, social and public government institutions, or, even if they did not become leaders formally, they could think like leaders. Without university autonomy and freedom of speech, it is impossible to conduct free debate, which is at the heart of the cultivation of science, genuine university education and public life.

He pointed out that, in his view, there was no university autonomy under the laws on universities managed by foundations, worked out in 2019-20-21, as there was autonomy for the Board of Trustees only, and this is why they are excluded from Erasmus and EU research grants. He said there would be a way for the Board of Trustees to give greater autonomy to the university. In his opinion, they are trying to turn the university into a business school, while it is integrated business, economics and social science education and research that serve the interests of the university and the country.

He explained that the university's ethics committee had investigated the ethics case excellently and thoroughly, according to those involved, and had reprimanded the criticised persons, and then the then Vice-Rector General Lajos Szabó had overruled their decision, after which, as far as he knew, the committee had resigned as a body, and this is one of the reasons why the sound ethics regulations and a new committee he had proposed were needed.

As to the dismissal of Zoltán Ádám, he said that probably no-one believed that the two reasons given were the real reasons, as the real reasons must be sought in the lecturer's public activity in recent years: on the one hand, he criticised the change of the university model, highlighting that the involvement of economic actors, such as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mr Hernádi, or President Radev, could also cause adverse situations. He said that Zoltán Ádám filed a lawsuit against the communication regulations, too, and in this spring he took legal action in the well-known ethics case, representing the interests of lecturers, without being reprimanded. According to Gábor Toronyai, these are all public issues, which should not be suppressed by dismissal, and he disputed the proportionality of the measure.

Briefing by Lajos Szabó

Acting Rector Lajos Szabó was the second person to speak, he summarised again what was said about the case at the Senate meeting on 7 November. In his introduction, he said: we are talking about an emotional issue, which can add a different colour to everything, because it makes you see what bothers you and makes you deaf to what is against it. He said that he would not mention the names of the colleagues concerned because of privacy rights.

He said that the issue was related to a student studying a subject with unclear specifications, because two versions were in use. Quizzes and assignments were required in both versions, but in different ways. For the student in question, the completion of certain mid-year assignments was a tight squeeze: he missed one quiz, for which he requested and received dean's equity. Thus he completed the right number of successful quizzes and quiz conditions. And whether or not his assignments were fulfilled, it could be interpreted in three ways.

He recalled that the university used two types of subject datasheets, one in Neptun, at the place prescribed by the study and examination regulations, and one in Moodle. Under the former, you have to take quizzes under relatively strict conditions to get the necessary signature in your registration book, and there are no assignments, i.e. homeworks. The Moodle version is slightly more permissive about the completion of quizzes and the associated assignments, but it is not clear whether the latter are part of the condition of getting the signature in the registration book, or are just taken into consideration in the exam. For the latter, it was not specified exactly what rounding rules should be applied in the student's favour, although there were three mathematically sound solutions. In the case of the affected student's assignments, Zoltán Ádám calculated 48.94%, the first instance committee calculated 49.2% and our colleague Y, acting as subject leader and examiner calculated 50%, and the correctness of the latter is explained in detail in the appeal.

Lajos Szabó continued by saying that the way the student passed the exam was also an important question. After the missing quiz had been written, the seminar leaders of the subject and Zoltán Ádám took the position that the student could take the exam, but could not get a better result than grade 1 (fail), even if he achieved maximum points. The Acting Rector noted that this was not a student-friendly solution. Lajos Szabó pointed out that although Zoltán Ádám said that he could not divert from the rules, in reality he did: he did not use the regular subject description available in Neptun, and probably announced exams of different difficulty levels during the exam period. In fact, one of the requirements of the non-regular subject datasheet in Moodle was that the later the student takes the exam, the harder the exam will be. The Acting Rector said that this was allegedly used by the lecturers until the second exam, but not afterwards. On this basis, the exams of students in the second exam could be annulled, because they did not perform according to Neptun, but as the university is student-friendly, they would refrain from that, he added.

Lajos Szabó went on to explain the case: as opposed to the lecturers of the subject, the colleague acting as the subject leader thought that the student was entitled to take the exam, so he decided that this student should be examined separately. The procedure investigated whether the reason for the special examination was that the colleague wanted to discriminate positively, because of parental pressure, or because he was convinced that the student was being discriminated negatively because he was entitled to take the examination regardless of his family background.

The Acting Rector pointed out that the second instance was bound by the Code of Ethics and could only examine what was allowed by the Code. He noted that he agreed with Gábor Toronyai that the 2011 Code was outdated and that the Ethics Committee failed to renew it. He said that the decision did not say that there was nothing wrong, but it said that it was not possible to prove with absolute certainty that the principle of incorruptibility specified in the Code of Ethics had not been violated. It could not be proved that the discrimination was not based on the student's financial situation.

Lajos Szabó also explained that cases of suspected irregularities must be reported according to the university's regulations, it is not an alibi investigation. He noted that the chairperson of the committee of first instance had also reported irregularities independently of him. He added that the regulations stipulate that the Chancellor and the Rector - or, because of his or her involvement as a whistleblower, his or her deputy, the Vice-Rector for Academic Development - are authorised to investigate these cases, not the Rector alone.

He also pointed out that another student B, not belonging to Zoltán Ádám and arriving late in the semester, who took the exam one day later than student A, was found to have missed one quiz, just like student A. This student B, without any equity, asked for and received a possibility to improve the quiz, as it was customary in previous years, although he only missed one quiz because of his being late. He added that this equity option was not advertised for other late students. Lajos Szabó said that Zoltán Ádám rejected student A's request for a make-up on

the grounds that the subject datasheet did not allow for a make-up. The committee wanted to shed light on these discriminations when it heard, among others, Zoltán Ádám, who read out several e-mail exchanges. As one of the leaders of the investigation, the Chancellor asked him to submit the written copies of these letters, too, to get the full picture - listing five characteristics of the letters to help identify them. As Lajos Szabó recalled, Zoltán Ádám first questioned the Chancellor's authority in the matter, and then he sent some kind of reply, but not the requested emails, even after the fifth notice sent in email, eight days later, when the rules allow only 30 days for the investigation. Lajos Szabó thought it was not realistic to refer to a technical error, as there are other ways to send mails, such as using a pendrive or printing.

Lajos Szabó said that he saw no reason to overrule the employer's decision on the dismissal under the one-over-one principle, as it was proportionate. He added that the case started as a simple exam, but now, due to the high press coverage, Corvinus is being used as a tool for individual political ambitions. He said that politics can, must and should be allowed, but that the events should have been investigated as an internal matter and legal remedies should have been sought. Instead, the ethics case was in the press before the first instance procedure was even completed, giving rise to speculations. In conclusion, he stressed the need to reject, on behalf of the university's administration, any attempt by a parent to persuade lecturers to give their child preferential treatment.

Students' questions, in the sequence of online reactions

1. There are contradictions in what Zoltán Ádám and Lajos Szabó are saying. Why are the minutes taken by the ethics committee not made public?

In his answer, Lajos Szabó said that this could be done only if the students and the lecturers involved in the case agreed to it, in order to protect their privacy. He added that it was obviously easy for him to say that the minutes could be made public, as his name is already public as a decision-maker, but he cannot talk on behalf of the others.

According to Gábor Toronyai's response, Lajos Szabó confirmed that the ethics committee was in place, did a thorough job, made a negative decision, the university was silent about it, and then the Vice-Rector overruled it.

2. Does the university's administration consider Zoltán Ádám's dismissal to be proportionate in light of the fact that others who made the exception were only given a warning?

Lajos Szabó said that there was no evidence of ethical misconduct, but there was irregularity, and it fell into the most serious category. He added that the lecturer did not handle the situation properly with the special examination, as he himself would have examined the person concerned in the same room as the other candidates and with the same examination test. He noted that the lecturer had given a standard previous examination test, and that it was also common practice to use quizzes from previous years for other make-up quizzes. As for the proportionality of the dismissal, he said that the Chancellor had asked Zoltán Ádám, perhaps already in his third letter, not to obstruct the process. He stated that it was not a question of not sending two letters, but he questioned the regularity of the investigation, the role of the Chancellor, and that he deliberately did not send these letters so that the issue could not be clarified. It was a public affair, attracting considerable public attention. He said the decision could be legally challenged and it was for the legal forums to decide who was right.

Gábor Toronyai said that Zoltán Ádám sent over the whole thread that Outlook gave him, and did not notice at first that two of them were missing, it was not deliberate that he did not send them, and he asked several times what was missing. He added that there was nothing in these two e-mails that would be incriminating for Zoltán. He noted that the investigators knew the contents of these reports from elsewhere, they were in the minutes, so they could not hinder the investigation, and the irregularity investigation was not invoked as a reason for dismissal.

In his reaction, Lajos Szabó noted that when the person exercising employer's rights takes the most serious measure, there is no point in listing the other, less serious irregularities.

3. According to the investigation and Lajos Szabó's statements, no ethical misconduct was committed in this case. Why did the ethics committee and Ms Helga Habis resign?

Lajos Szabó said that the ethics committee resigned because an ethics committee independent of them did not find any ethical misconduct. In addition to the two ethics procedures within the university, the first instance committee opened a third ethics procedure, too, but the colleague in question declared bias and requested that his case should not be heard by this committee. Therefore, an independent interim ethics committee was set up and made a decision.

Gábor Toronyai said that the resignation of the ethics committee was a significant development, it was kept secret, they did not say anything, neither did the university, while it was an important gesture. Their report was overruled, then this was overruled, so it is only fair that they stand up, he added.

As to Helga Habis, Lajos Szabó said that she accepted another position because of a conceptual, professional dispute, not because of the ethical issues, and that she had a different vision for the future of the Master's degree. The Acting Rector pointed out that the renewal of the Master's programmes had long been overdue, applications were decreasing, while applications for bachelor's programmes were increasing, the bachelor's portfolio had been successfully renewed, a good example is the PPE programme, in which some colleagues did not believe.

4. If and when full transparency is the goal, why was Zoltán Ádám not present at the forum?

Kristóf Kovács said that they wanted to avoid making value judgments on behalf of students, and that their aim was to provide an opportunity for collecting information and a forum where views could clash. He added that, although Gábor Toronyai urged them to invite Zoltán Ádám, they refrained from personal matters and a debate between the dismissed person and his supervisor, instead they addressed one representative of each of the parties concerned. He noted that their decision was influenced by the fact that they were aware that a separate forum had been organised by a student organisation, inviting Zoltán Ádám, too.

Gábor Toronyai confirmed that he had tried to convince Kristóf Kovács to invite Zoltán Ádám, and that there should be more representatives from the other side, as the university and the Board of Trustees are separate legal entities. He said that he was not a replacement for Zoltán Ádám, and that we must stand up for him, but also for everyone, so that no one can be dismissed on spurious grounds, because these fear-mongering measures are destroying the

university, trigger self-censorship and make people withdraw from public life. He asked the students: as they are the greater force, do not let the matter die down.

Lajos Szabó noted that the President of the University or the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees were not present because they were not invited, and he represented the academic leadership of the university. He said that the study and examination regulations are approved by the University and the Senate, and the Board of Trustees has nothing to do with that. How and in what way exams are organised, what and how we teach are internal affairs of the university, and not of the Board of Trustees. He added, however, that unfortunately there are many irregularities and uncertainties, because there are many common law or customary practices that do not comply with the current rules - this needs to be addressed. The Acting Rector recalled that he had to say no to a colleague who asked him for advice on whether he could allow students - who had not registered - to take their exams on the scheduled date, and to 'artfully' record registrations and grades afterwards. He pointed out that this would be against the rules and could lead to ethics cases like the one we are dealing with now, and that you should not go straight to the Rector with issues like that. On the topic of fear, he said that if flexibility within the rules is taken away, student-centricity is killed.

Lajos Szabó said that the university's management also has tasks in connection with this case: among other things, they must be even more resolute in representing that any pressure must be rejected.

5. Did the student refer to the difference in subject data during or before the exam?

Lajos Szabó said that no, the student simply asked for the possibility of making up for a missed quiz.

Gábor Toronyai noted that they were not aware of any other case where the university administration would have intervened in the interests of a student in this way. He said that the university's senior management had interfered with the powers of the lecturers. He added that they had heard that 30 percent of students repeat this subject. He said that that compared to the student involved in the ethics case, it is a different issue that a foreign student does not register in time and misses a quiz because of it.

In response, Lajos Szabó asked for equal weight to be given to customary law for all student groups. In his reply, Gábor Toronyai said that the issue was irrelevant to the dismissal of Zoltán Ádám. Lajos Szabó questioned why Zoltán Ádám, contrary to the provisions of the regulations, immediately called the Rector about the assumed ethical misconduct.

6. In the eyes of the university's administration, are procedural errors considered more serious than favouritism towards students?

Lajos Szabó denied that the investigations had found favouritism. However, he added that there was one irregularity: the fact that the exam was not held in the room where other students were sitting for it. He said it was a serious mistake to think that the student was not able to perform well. He noted that it was not a procedural issue, because the committee was actually prevented from getting the full picture: who did what in this case? He added that Gábor Toronyai also had the right to be curious about this.

Lecturers' questions, in the order of the responses received online

1. In the Rector's opinion, which sin is worse: to make an exception for a student with good intentions, but for financial gain, or to fail to send two emails by mistake?

Lajos Szabó said that this question was theoretical, so there is a theoretical answer: material interest cannot be tolerated in any way, it would be a serious ethical misconduct. Both are against the rules, the former calls for a warning, the latter calls for dismissal. He reiterated that the discrimination was not motivated by material interest, because there was no bribery, and they could not prove it, he added.

According to Gábor Toronyai, the dismissal of Zoltán Ádám was not only unfair, but a huge mistake, too, a great damage to the reputation of the university, because it should have been recognised that the general public would connect this and the ethics case, as the university dismissed the person who had investigated the ethics case. He said that the case made them feel ashamed in their academic relations abroad, and that the matter could not be trivialised and Zoltán Ádám could not be blamed for the press coverage. He pointed out that the damage must be mitigated, as the value of students' degrees would also decrease because of this. He said he believed that the leadership either did not assess the consequences well, or thought they could do anything. He reiterated that the only credible move would be to reinstate Zoltán Ádám, and in his opinion the dismissal was a good political publicity for the lecturer.

Lajos Szabó responded that Gábor Toronyai's statement merged the ethics case and the irregularity procedure. He reiterated that the first instance committee had also reported the irregularities. On the issue of unwanted media attention, he recalled that the case was leaked even before the first instance committee started the investigation. He argued that it was unfair - to say the least - to the university to use public opinion in an ongoing case, because any negative or positive resolution - which finds no offence - can be interpreted as detecting corruption or covering up corruption. He noted that there is freedom of speech at the university, Corvinus does not restrict colleagues from making political statements, and this did not happen in the case of Zoltán Ádám, either, but he rejects the idea that anyone could use the Corvinus as an institution to gain media attention.

Gábor Toronyai noted that Zoltán Ádám told him that he did not leak the case, their Facebook group has 160-170 members. He added that the case did not come out of nowhere, lecturers had always been loyal to the university, but lately they had seemed to think that the problem is with publishing something in the press, and not with their committing something. He said that the university's administration is more afraid of students, because they cannot be controlled like the lecturers, so the power of publicity does matter.

2. Can the Rector clearly declare for everybody that the Head of the Institute made a completely independent decision to dismiss Zoltán Ádám, and was not influenced by any pressure or superior orders?

Lajos Szabó said that there was no pressure on the Head of the Institute. He noted that the heads of the institutes have employer's rights, except for university professors, for whom the Vice-Rector for General Affairs exercises employer's rights. He added that there is consultation before all decisions, including this one, on the basis of the one-over-one principle, which means

that the decision-maker tells his or her superior the reason for the measure, and the latter either agrees and the decision is taken, or the matter is referred to the superior. He closed his train of thought by saying that in this case, he, as the superior of the Head of the Institute, agreed with the decision of the Head of the Institute.

Gábor Toronyai pointed out that the impact of the decision on public opinion and its negative impact on the reputation of the university should have been assessed, regardless of the justification, because now they are left in disgrace, which should be remedied, in addition to explaining the reasons. He recalled that his credible proposal would be to reinstate Zoltán Ádám.

3. The Rector rejects the allegation of parental influence and dismisses the whistleblower. Is that a credible position?

Lajos Szabó reiterated that parental influence had nothing to do with the dismissal, and he firmly rejects any parental influence. He said they should make more efforts to make sure that lecturers know how to defend the university against this, with a balance of empowerment, delegated powers and leadership guidance.

4. I found out from the irregularity procedure that you can upload the subject datasheet to Neptun. Is the university's administration planning to check these?

Lajos Szabó said that an investigation by an external expert had identified the typical system errors, for which an action plan was prepared, for example, to avoid uploading the same document to several places, which is the case in both the Neptun and the Moodle. In response to the question, he said that, yes, in order to have the right learning outcomes, study programme leaders would have to look at the subject datasheets and the requirements, the competences developed through the subject, because it is not only the way and the contents of teaching that are important, but those of progress check, too. He added that this was exactly how study programmes were developed.

According to Gábor Toronyai, meaningful action should be taken in this situation. He said that they were afraid that they would be harassed with this, and this was not the way to go.

Lajos Szabó noted that the Corvinus follows Western European and American models, and the establishment of this kind of systems is one of the conditions of accreditations. He noted that they were lagging behind in developing extra-curricular skills and competences, so a talent management strategy was being prepared. In this context, he shared the recent news that the Cornell University's International Case Study Competition had been recently won by Corvinus students, from more than a hundred teams.

5. Why did Lajos Szabó release the two deans from office when the ethics committee found ethical misconduct?

Lajos Szabó reiterated that the first and the second instance decision-makers examined three aspects in the case of the two colleagues: the quiz as a performance assessment system, the assignment as a performance assessment system, and the administration of the exam. He said that in the case of the quiz, both the first and the second instance decided that no ethical misconduct took place. He continued by saying that in the first instance, the committee found

a 49.2% compliance rate for assignments, at which stage the colleague was criticised, but in his appeal he gave a plausible justification for his calculation method for 50%, so he was eventually acquitted. He said that in relation to the special examination, the first instance said that there was a strong presumption of discrimination based on the student's financial situation, but based on the opinion of an external law firm, which Lajos Szabó accepted, there was no evidence for a violation of the principle of incorruptibility. He recalled that the irregularity was detected and sanctions were imposed accordingly.

6. When the Ethics Committee did not receive a response from Zoltan Ádám by e-mail, in other words, the e-mail communication was not successful, did they try to get the e-mails from him personally? (the question was in English)

Lajos Szabó said that Zoltán Ádám had been asked to submit these to the committee. He noted that the distance between the Chancellor's office and Zoltán's office was only a few metres, so if he detected a technical error, he could have solved the problem in any other way, for example by printing the mail out or delivering it on a pendrive, either in person, by internal mail or by setting up a personal meeting to clarify the situation.

Gábor Toronyai responded to the question by saying that they should not harp on such things, the university's reputation is at stake. He reiterated that credible action was needed, and Zoltán Ádám was not reprimanded in the proceedings, and he asked the students again to be active and restore the damaged reputation.

In his reply, Lajos Szabó said that the reputation would be restored when the great results achieved by the Corvinus students are applauded.

The moderator's closing words

Kristóf Kovács thanked the invited guests and the audience for attending the forum. He said that more than 150 questions were received during the event, and the most popular ones were read out, about issues the highest number of people were interested in - there were some questions that attracted over 100 people. He emphasized again that the event was a joint forum of more than 20 organisations.

He found it sad that this was happening to the Corvinus and asked the invited guests to try and resolve the situation, because it is the students that matter most, they were not involved, but they became the victims as a result of the negative reputation. He expressed his hope that they would soon be able to return to normal university life.