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November 1, 2024
Ms. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Dear Ms. Ursula von der Leyen,

We hope this letter finds you well. We write to you on behalf of the African Studies Association (ASA) to express our concerns regarding the EU's restrictions on and handling of the grant funded publication *Voices of the People: Society, Politics and Public Opinion in Guinea-Bissau*, organized by DEMOS.

We are grateful that the European Ombudsperson has agreed to investigate this matter and encourage a swift and positive resolution of the case. In the wake of this investigation, the ASA encourages the EU to review and enhance transparency around its granting programs and improve communications regarding contractual obligations, specifically surrounding open access publications.

One of the key barriers for grant seeking individuals and institutions is the lack of clear, consistent guidelines for all available grants. By ensuring that all possible grant guidelines, application instructions, eligibility criteria, and evaluation metrics are transparent and easily accessible, the EU can make the process more equitable. Communication and transparent criteria would not only ease administrative challenges but also level the playing field, allowing more diverse applicants to compete on an equal footing for the correct kind of funding that meets their project goals.

In addition to transparency, providing ongoing, detailed support for grantees is essential for ensuring the successful completion of funded projects. Particularly we hope that the EU will communicate clear expectations regarding any eventual publication of projects, with special attention to current publication and open access funding models. ASA encourages the EU to consider how it could better communicate technical assistance, training, or even peer networks, to foster a more collaborative, supportive environment that leads to optimal project outcomes for all parties.

We urge the EU to consider these suggestions as part of an ongoing effort to strengthen the impact of your grants and their subsequent publications. More transparent processes and robust support for grantees would undoubtedly improve the effectiveness of your funding programs and make a positive difference in the lives of the communities we mutually serve.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to the outcome of the European Ombudsperson investigation and the adoption of measures that further transparency and safeguard academic freedom for all EU-funded projects.

Sincerely,
African Studies Association
Task Force for the Protection of Academic Freedom and Board of Directors Executive Committee