

31 May 2024**HRK on future EU research funding: keep the European Research Council and the 10th Framework Programme on an open and excellent footing**

On 23 May 2024, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) published a discussion paper on the preparation of the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation of the European Union (EU), which is due to start in 2028. It presents guiding principles and initial thematic considerations which, from a German perspective, should characterise the future design of European research funding. The German Rectors' Conference (HRK) welcomes the BMBF's initiative. The HRK also believes that EU research funding must continue to be placed on an open and excellent footing.

Prof Dr Georg Krausch, Vice-President for Research and Academic Career Paths at the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), explains: "European research funding that is comprehensively conceived, financially strong and follows scientific criteria is the key to Europe's long-term leading role in the global competition for knowledge. German universities therefore support the BMBF's stance of continuing to promote research and innovation in the EU along the entire innovation chain. The HRK also fully supports the call to further strengthen basic research, to specifically promote key technologies and to accelerate transfer. German universities can make outstanding contributions to all of these goals. Above all, it is right and important that the BMBF wants to see scientific excellence preserved as a fundamental assessment criterion for research achievements across the entire framework programme."

HRK President Prof Dr Walter Rosenthal emphasises the importance of EU funding for basic research and the European Research Council (ERC) for German science: "The BMBF rightly recognises the concept and work of the ERC. Since its foundation in 2007, the European Research Council has become a benchmark for cutting-edge research. The most recent German successes in the various ERC funding competitions are impressive proof of the extent to which researchers at our universities contribute to innovation in Europe and benefit from EU research funding. Around two thirds of the ERC grants awarded to Germany over the past ten years have gone to outstanding researchers at universities. In total, around €5 billion has been channelled to researchers at German institutions via the ERC since 2007."

In the EU funding architecture, the European Research Council must remain the place that focuses on the generation of new knowledge in a comprehensive, open-topic and excellence-based manner, says Rosenthal. Europe can only maintain its leading position in global innovation in the long term if basic research in particular reliably produces

new, original ideas and thus continues to set new trends in research and development, he notes. In this context, however, the HRK President is cautious about considerations to further develop the ERC's funding portfolio in the direction of funding for research alliances: "The particular strengths of the European Research Council lie in personalised funding. This should not be called into question by other funding logics."

HRK Vice-President Krausch emphasises: "The support of networks and alliances has always been above all a successful instrument for topic-orientated research funding. In the HRK's view, the 10th EU Framework Programme must continue this tradition. This is because all types of higher education institutions and their partners from academia and industry can successfully contribute their respective performance profiles to thematic collaborative research formats. We are not happy that the scope for small and medium-sized collaborative research projects in EU research funding has not recently increased, but rather decreased overall. This trend must now be stopped and reversed. We also need more funding opportunities for the humanities and social sciences, for artistic research and for elements of interdisciplinary basic research."