

3 December 2024**HRK welcomes EU considerations to strengthen competitiveness, but criticises possible abandonment of the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation**

The future of European research funding was on the agenda of the General Assembly of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) in Tübingen, having already been the subject of intensive discussions at the HRK's recent EU Strategy Day in Brussels. With the aim of increasing the competitiveness of the European Union, the EU Commission is considering a fundamental reorganisation of innovation and research funding from 2028. The HRK welcomes, among other things, plans to double the funding for the European Research Council (ERC). At the same time, it criticises the idea of abandoning the tried and tested Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. In the HRK's view, EU research funding must be substantial and predictable as well as thematically open, broadly accessible and competitively orientated on the basis of research excellence.

Prof Dr Georg Krausch, HRK Vice-President for Research and Academic Career Paths, explains: "In mid-October, it was unofficially announced that the EU Commission's Directorate-General for Budget is considering not relaunching the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and instead designing the central instruments of European research funding as part of a broader competition fund. Such a reform may be intended to increase administrative and economic efficiency. But in the end it must not lead to fewer funding opportunities than today for research that is primarily based on scientific curiosity and relevance and therefore does not usually have a specific practical application in mind. The universities are ready and waiting if the EU Commission wants to systematically increase European economic performance, particularly through increased investment in research and innovation. However, for the successful generation and dissemination of new knowledge, they are dependent on reliable funding conditions, such as those provided at EU level by the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It has proven its worth and is still necessary."

HRK President Prof Dr Walter Rosenthal says: "A comprehensive reorganisation of EU research funding must ensure greater flexibility on the one hand and long-term predictability on the other. The EU needs a differentiated funding structure that can take appropriate account of different support requirements, from open-ended basic research through to the development of applications that can be rapidly utilised economically. The intended strengthening of the ERC for cutting-edge research projects is logical and of central importance for European innovation globally. The idea of inviting tenders for research projects on key technologies and societal challenges via separate 'councils' in future, analogous to the ERC and the European Innovation

Council, is also a step in the right direction. However, the fact that the responsibilities for education, culture, research and innovation continue to be divided between different departments in the newly formed EU Commission gives pause for thought. In order to achieve sustainable success and comprehensively increase competitiveness, these policy areas should be considered more closely together at European level.”