

The German Rectors' Conference (HRK) presents the HRK-Audit "Internationalisation of Universities" in Brussels

"Europe is a reality, not a vision anymore." (Peter Greisler, German Federal Ministry for Education and Research)

The German Rectors' Conference (HRK) presented the HRK-Audit "Internationalisation of Universities", as part of a joint event with the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), to high-ranking representatives from the European Commission, European Parliament, and a large number of European academic and research organisations.

On 7th June, 2011, the HRK and BMBF hosted an event called "Promoting the International Attractiveness of European Higher Education – German Perspectives and Strategies" in the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany in Brussels. Current trends in European higher education policy was selected as the topic for the event because of the central role that knowledge and education plays in the social and economic development of Europe.

In his opening remarks, Jan Truszczyński, Director-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission, emphasised the special importance of internationalisation for higher education institutions in Europe. In order to attract the best academics and researchers, and provide their students with optimal preparation for the global labour market, universities must develop their internationalisation efforts in a strategic fashion. For this reason, according to Truszczyński, the European Commission will work more closely on the internationalisation of universities in the future. There are plans, for example, for the development of an EU internationalisation strategy for the higher education sector within the framework of the "Youth on the Move" initiative, said Truszczyński.

Next, the BMBF presented the internationalisation strategy of the German federal government to the attendees. Peter Greisler, Deputy Head of the Directorate General "Science System" at the BMBF, emphasised in his speech that the university of the future will be highly international. The aim of German universities must therefore be to increase their global attractiveness, which can only be achieved through their greater autonomy. Only an autonomous university will be able to stand up to international competition, according to Greisler.

Professor Dr Georg Winckler, Rector of the University of Vienna and a former president of the European University Association (EUA), made clear in his speech that, given the still-present fragmentation of national higher education systems, greater European efforts are needed to enhance the capabilities of universities in Europe. As such, it is necessary to further develop and implement the EU's modernisation agenda for the higher education sector, said Winckler.

Jürgen Prömel, Vice President of the HRK, stressed that both the modernisation agenda and the proposed EU strategy for the internationalisation of the higher education sector must be developed in close coordination with the universities in the member states. In his talk, Prömel illustrated the benefits of the HRK-Audit "Internationalisation of Universities" for German universities and presented it as an example of how the strategic internationalisation of higher education can be supported in a targeted fashion.

The event "Promoting the International Attractiveness of European Higher Education – German Perspectives and Strategies" served as a successful forum for addressing the fundamental challenges facing European universities and European higher education policy. Approaches and instruments were presented that could serve to increase the international attractiveness of the European universities. The interest in the event and the lively discussion at the end made it clear that the internationalisation of universities is a crucial and multifaceted issue for European higher education policy. The HRK hopes, through this event, to have sparked new ideas for European cooperation in the internationalisation of universities.