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Science needs liberal democracy and the rule of law

Statement by the Executive Board of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Against the backdrop of increasingly blatant anti-democratic endeavours and the associated contempt for humanity, we emphasise clearly and unequivocally: liberal democracy and the rule of law are the immovable pillars of our country and its institutions. They are also an essential prerequisite for the existence of a competitive and internationally compatible German higher education system.

The comprehensive legal protection of academic freedom, as provided in our Basic Law, is the basis for the success of our scientific endeavour. Scientists must be able to freely choose and work on research topics. Research and teaching must not be instrumentalised for political purposes. Only in this way can science realise its full potential for the economy and society.

The legal protection against discrimination in any form, which is enshrined in the German Basic Law, is also a pillar of our scientific capabilities. The diversity of international perspectives and backgrounds makes our science system strong and contributes significantly to its progress. We are proud of and expressly support the fact that people from all over the world and from the most diverse backgrounds study and work at our universities. In their long-standing campaign „Weltoffene Hochschulen“ (German Universities Open to the World), the member universities of the HRK have declared and affirmed repeatedly) that only a university that thinks and acts internationally can be competitive and fit for the future. An open and international campus and the international mobility of teaching staff and students therefore provide the essential foundations for high-quality teaching, learning and research.

The increasing tendency in the public and political sphere to change the content and tone of social discourse in order to normalise hostility to science, restrictions on academic freedom, racism, intolerance, and ideas and enemy stereotypes based on exclusion, to break down social cohesion and to undermine trust in liberal democracy is highly alarming. We, as the HRK Executive Board, are clearly opposed to this. Every single member of our universities is called upon to stand up for the fundamental values of our constitution.