

Resolution of the
42nd General Assembly of the
HRK
on 28 April 2026
in Weimar

**On security-related research
and development at
universities**

HRK German Rectors' Conference
The Voice of the Universities

Leipziger Platz 11 Tel.: +49 30 206292-0 post@hrk.de
10117 Berlin Fax: +49 30 206292-215 www.hrk.de

Ahrstraße 39 Tel.: +49 228 887-0 post@hrk.de
53175 Bonn Fax: +49 228 887-110 www.hrk.de

Table of Contents

I. Preliminary remarks	3
II. Security-related research and development	3
III. Areas requiring action	4

I. Preliminary remarks

The 272 universities united under the umbrella of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) base their actions on the values enshrined in the Basic Law and the principle contained therein of serving global peace and protecting the free democratic constitutional order. In light of the changing global security landscape and the associated threats to our security and our democratic way of life, universities contribute in various ways to building and maintaining peace and to the security of our society. They determine the nature and scope of their contribution autonomously, in accordance with their respective profiles, on the basis of the freedom of research and teaching (Article 5(3) of the Basic Law). In this context, the HRK emphasises the equal value of all contributions to security-related research and development, and the right of every university to conduct the relevant discussions independently.

This position paper is intended as the HRK's contribution to the wider debate on higher education and research policy concerning security-related research and development in Germany. It sets out the need for action from the perspective of universities.

II. Security-related research and development

Where academics at universities choose to engage in security-related research and development and associated teaching activities, the HRK bases this position paper on a **broad definition** of security-related research, in line with the definition provided by the German Council of Science and Humanities. This goes beyond purely military research in the narrow sense and encompasses any research that contributes to the integrated security and resilience of society.¹

As **organisational hubs of the research system**², universities also play a special role in the field of security-related research and development. Universities cover the entire spectrum of academic disciplines. As centres of academic teaching and education, universities provide the main pool of talent for professionals in security-related fields. They train early-career researchers who contribute to security-related research and development. Universities also cover the entire spectrum, from basic research to applied research, across all relevant fields of study, ranging from the humanities and social sciences through the natural and life sciences to engineering. Ultimately, universities are at the forefront of

¹ German Council of Science and Humanities: Science and security in times of global political upheaval: Position paper. Cologne 2025, p. 51. This HRK position paper deals exclusively with security-related research. Aspects of research security, which are always also aspects of knowledge security, are only addressed where they overlap with aspects of security research.

² German Council of Science and Humanities: Perspektiven des deutschen Wissenschaftssystems (only available in German) Braunschweig 2013, p. 28.

knowledge transfer and innovation. The involvement of universities is therefore a key prerequisite for making full use of publicly funded research in order to achieve the goal of ensuring the highest possible level of security in Germany.

The debate surrounding the growing importance of security-related research in Germany is taking place against the backdrop of **European developments**, such as the drive to integrate the forthcoming EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development more closely with security and defence policy objectives. The aim is to open up the EU's Framework Programme, which has hitherto been focused exclusively on civilian applications, to 'dual-use research'.³ Other countries in Europe are already taking the lead and have begun to set up such platforms.

III. Areas requiring action

In order to realise the full potential of universities in the field of security-related research and development, action is needed both within the universities themselves and with regard to the structural framework conditions. The following points appear to be of paramount importance. They identify areas where action is needed whilst also addressing the risk of undesirable developments.

- In certain cases, security-related research and teaching may conflict with the university's overarching ethical guidelines, as set out, for example, in its statutes, mission statements or 'Civil Clauses' (voluntary commitments limiting research to civilian purposes). In such cases, it is advisable to hold an open university-wide discussion with the aim of reaffirming shared values against the backdrop of a changing geopolitical landscape.
- Security-related research requires the equal involvement of the humanities and social sciences. Insights from the fields of conflict and peace studies, linguistics, history, regional studies, communication and media studies (for example, on dealing with disinformation), as well as theology and philosophy (for example, on ethical issues), to name just a few selected examples, are essential for a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis of security-related developments.

³ As part of the preparations for the forthcoming EU Framework Programme, FP10, discussions are currently taking place at European level regarding the possibility of opening up the programme – which has hitherto been exclusively focused on civilian applications – to dual-use research to a limited extent. Transparent funding criteria and the avoidance of perverse incentives within the competitive system therefore remain of central importance. The HRK shares the increasingly widespread view that the term 'dual use' is becoming less precise in terms of analytical distinction, given the wide range of security-related applications of modern research, as virtually all research has the potential to be used for both civilian and security or defence purposes.

- The strengthening and further academic development of study programmes in social work, health and education, as well as the expansion of medical security research, also enhances crisis-related care capabilities and thus contributes to security in the context of civil protection.
- Security-related research may, in some cases, entail significant technical and infrastructural requirements for which universities are either unprepared or only partially prepared. These include, amongst other things, access restrictions to buildings and rooms, as well as requirements relating to IT security and communication technologies. Although such requirements must always be met on a local basis and in the context of specific individual cases, a structured exchange of experience between the member universities of the HRK would seem helpful and beneficial. Security-related research also requires a strengthening of cybersecurity.
- Not all universities have the infrastructure in place to facilitate research under conditions of heightened security requirements. The establishment and use of shared research infrastructures and so-called innovation hubs for security and defence research, where researchers from universities who wish to do so can carry out research even under heightened security conditions, could offer potential solutions.
- Security-related research makes it particularly important to consider issues of research security. This applies equally to university leaders (e.g. in their responsibility for establishing appropriate structures and processes to ensure export controls) and to researchers and research support staff, who are particularly vulnerable to the risk of espionage. It would seem appropriate to launch information campaigns to further raise awareness among university staff and students of potential risks.
- The specific framework conditions governing security-related research inevitably have an impact on established publishing practices. The scientific community is called upon to address issues relating to the academic applicability of security-related research for career progression, particularly for researchers at the early stages of their careers.
- It is necessary to establish funding programmes for security-related research that cover both basic research and applied research. As the key players in research in Germany, universities must be eligible to apply, and the established principles of the peer review process must be applied when selecting submissions, in order to ensure the transparency of decisions. They must also address the outstanding issues in civilian security research, and in particular in peace and conflict studies.
- Research funding structures must be made more flexible or expanded in order to meet the specific needs of security-

related research. Research projects that begin as purely civilian research but in the course of which a security-related component also emerges should be given the opportunity to secure follow-on funding in the field of security-related research to address these spillover effects.

- Networking needs to be strengthened. This applies to the networking of universities that carry out security-related research and teaching. Universities should share their experiences and make the most of opportunities for cooperation. However, this also applies to closer links between universities and society, the armed forces, the security authorities, non-university research institutions, industry engaged in research, and political bodies at both state and federal level. It makes sense to build on existing institutions in the field of peace and conflict research. The HRK could play a coordinating role on the university side in this regard.