

**29 November 2021****The European Research Area – the second attempt**

The European Research Area should become a cosmos where researchers can exchange and move about freely, and knowledge and technologies can circulate without restriction with the support of funding initiatives that are value-based and driven by the pursuit of excellence and impact. Last Friday, the EU Competitiveness Council adopted the Council conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area, charting a new course towards the European Research Area (ERA). The newly created ERA Forum is to advance twenty voluntary ERA Initiatives, which have the active support of a majority of member states. These priority areas will be advanced in subgroups under the leadership and initiative of the EU Commission and in dialogue with the member states until 2024.

Prof Dr Peter André Alt, President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK):

"The new ERA process deserves our attention even at a time when a new government is being formed in Germany. It is e.g. about reforming how performance is measured in research, which is being intensively debated in the scientific community around the world. The EU Commission and the member states must not exercise political control over an issue that is inherent to science. What is needed is a transparent process based on a wide range of criteria, which must come from the core of science so that it can successfully explore alternative systems.

In general, despite all reservations, I am hopeful that the European Council and the Commission are opening a new chapter in the history of ERA with the Council conclusions. Many areas sound promising. For example, regular monitoring of the state of academic freedom in Europe is set to begin. Regional locations of innovation are to be networked throughout Europe in their respective profiles. National science strategies for coping with climate change are to be coordinated at the European level.

Universities are also pleased about the planned consolidation of the European Universities funding initiative, which is very much inspiring and having a strong impact on the European higher education landscape. A European Excellence Initiative is also to be discussed again.

The first attempt at creating a common European Research Area came to a dead end five years ago due to disputes between the EU Commission and member states over leadership. The ERA subject areas that have now been adopted can only be successfully addressed if all stakeholders are involved from the beginning to the end of the process and not just in supporting roles. Besides enlisting the European Rectors' Conference (EUA), which wants to coordinate the European umbrella organisations of universities in Brussels, it is key that all political levels and stakeholders across the board are involved. In Germany, this also includes the federal states responsible for the universities and, of course, the universities themselves. The parties involved have a significant political management task ahead of them. Here, the

German Rectors' Conference wants to help on behalf of German universities to master these issues."