

17 March 2026**HRK Executive Board calls for the preservation of university autonomy**

Responding to public debate about the decision by the Rectorate of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf to permit a student-organised event on campus with artist Basma al-Sharif on her film works, the President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Professor Dr Walter Rosenthal, issued the following statement on behalf of the HRK Executive Board:

"German universities see themselves as places of open discussion and dialogue. Following on from the HRK resolution 'Protecting universities as a free space for discourse', I would like remind the fact that, within the framework of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the arts and sciences, of research and teaching, universities fulfil their responsibility to facilitate a space for academic discourse as comprehensive as possible and wherever possible. Within the limits of the law, every university, represented by its leadership, has the right to determine autonomously the forms of academic discourse. The Executive Board of the HRK expects politicians and society to show the necessary respect and support for those people at universities who are committed to upholding academic and artistic freedom even under difficult circumstances. This must apply regardless of whether academic or artistic contributions to the discourse reflect one's own views. Specifically, the decision in favour or against an academic event must not be made the subject of disciplinary or personnel law considerations in a prejudicial manner. Incidents such as those at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf must not lead to a knee-jerk political reaction that calls into question the autonomy of universities, which is enshrined in the Basic Law."