

22 May 2018**HRK President calls for clear statements by the Bologna Ministerial Conference in Paris**

"We need a European understanding of education that encompasses personal development and the ability to engage with society. Unfortunately, this understanding is not shared as clearly everywhere in Europe." This was the comment made by the President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) in the lead-up to the Bologna Conference in Paris. He accordingly called on the Ministers to explicitly consider this aspect in their final communiqué, which is to be adopted on Friday.

"Europe is a great deal more than an economic community. University graduates, in particular, play an important role in shaping its future social and cultural identity. This is why we must not merely nurture their professional or technical skills; their studies should also equip them to think critically and to find new solutions for the many challenges facing society. Focussing on immediate value to the employment market is the wrong approach. What is important is to link research and teaching more closely, and take more account of social learning in all study cycles," the HRK President said.

He noted that Bologna provided important impetus for the further development of higher education systems in Europe. "The process brings very different nations together. The shared European Higher Education Area is the only way forward in a globally networked world. It is important that we strengthen the combined focus on research and study still further as the Area develops."

Ministers also need to be open to critical discussion in Paris on troubling developments in some countries, Hippler added. "The arrest of academics, the restriction of academic freedom, the relativisation of fact-based science and the attempt to shut down politically inconvenient higher education institutions – all these issues pose a real danger to a European higher education community. Academic freedom is not negotiable. A clear passage to this effect is included in the draft of the final communiqué – in part thanks to representations by the German government. I very much hope that it will be adopted in this form."

French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal to establish a network of European universities is to be debated in Paris. HRK President Hippler said: "This is a unique opportunity to enable universities throughout Europe to collaborate strategically and stimulate teaching, research and innovation on a mutual basis."

Hippler also assessed the Bologna Process positively in relation to national developments: "German universities have done an enormous amount over recent years in terms of content to

develop teaching and learning. We are increasingly succeeding in making study pathways more flexible. Bologna is no longer seen as a bureaucratic monster, but as a genuine opportunity to design high-quality courses of study.”

The Bologna Implementation Report 2015-2018, which will be officially presented at the Ministerial Conference in Paris, also mainly rates Germany as good to very good. The report calls for systematic monitoring of students to be further developed in order to obtain a better overview of study progress. However, the report has not yet considered the effects of the Hochschulstatistikgesetz (federal higher education statistics legislation) passed in 2017.

Ministers responsible for higher education in the 48 signatory countries to the Bologna Declaration of 1999 will meet in Paris from Wednesday. The Paris meeting, the 10th Ministerial Conference since Bologna, will take stock of the process to date and establish the timetable to 2020. HRK President Hippler is a member of the German delegation, which is led by the Federal Minister of Education and Research, Anja Karliczek, and the Rhineland-Palatinate Minister of Science, Prof Dr Konrad Wolf.