

7 February 2018**HRK President on cooperation agreement:****Strong foundation for progressive higher education policy despite some weak points**

"As far as the universities are concerned, there is a basis for moving forward now." This was the reaction of the President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Horst Hippler, to the recently published draft of the CDU/CSU and SPD cooperation agreement. "Given the gratifyingly high priority that the parties intend to place on education, science and research, we now hope that the grand coalition will be formed expeditiously. Essentially, the agreement would be a strong, noticeably improved foundation for the progress that is needed in higher education policy, and it reflects a great deal of what the HRK has formulated and proposed in the past."

Hippler continued, "The willingness to systematically involve the Federal Government in the funding of the universities now marks an important and fundamental change in our higher education system. This would be an appropriate use of Article 91 b of the Basic Law, enacted in 2014, in order to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the universities.

"This is especially true in relation to the intention to make federal funding for the Higher Education Pact permanent – an indispensable requirement for safeguarding the adequate availability of study places and the quality of teaching. I would also like to draw attention to particularly positive aspects such as the initiative to strengthen professorships at universities of applied sciences, the plans for a national open access strategy, the support for the digitalisation of higher education infrastructure, the expression of commitment to the European universities that are to be created and the planned expansion of BAföG, the German Federal Training Assistance Act."

But the HRK President also alluded to potential weak points in the agreement.

"The Quality of Teaching Pact has achieved good results. However, its planned "continuation in competition" must not mean that less federal funding is available to make the Higher Education Pact permanent or that elaborate new funding structures are imposed. It is also a pity that programme allowances for research projects are initially to remain at the present level of 22 per cent. We hope that the planned increase to 30 per cent will soon become binding." Last of all, the universities take a very critical view of coalition plans to create new joint qualification formats for vocational and university education. "The universities value the accessibility of the education system highly," Hippler said. "But that must not be allowed to result in the obliteration and devaluation of both these tried and tested pillars of the education system."