

**23 January 2017**

**A new political concept for Europe: An Education, Research and Innovation community**

**HRK-President: a unifying force in an existential crisis**

On Tuesday 24th of January, the German Rectors Conference (HRK) calls for a European education, research and innovation community. More than 100 university leaders will meet with high-ranking representatives of the EU institutions for an 'EU Strategy Day' in Brussels (programme attached).

HRK President Professor Horst Hippler said in Berlin today:

"The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, is right: The European Union is in the middle of an existential crisis. Now is not the time for "business as usual". In Europe, education, research and innovation are our most important resources and our key asset. Education and culture is a strong, perhaps the strongest, glue for European society.

We call upon EU policy makers to refocus on these policy areas. The currently fragmented EU policies of education, research, innovation and also culture should be rethought - as an integrated policy strategy that can reinforce our common European identity.

The European Union has already proved the great value of these policy areas: the EU education program Erasmus has enabled millions of students, university teachers, administrative staff and trainees to experience Europe in their everyday lives, thereby contributing to the development and strengthening of a European identity. The European Framework Program for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020, is the world's largest program to fund research. The European Research Council (ERC) has become a worldwide flagship for research excellence.

There is great potential, but there is also room for improvement. For years, the EU has narrowed its educational policy focus on the increase of short term employability. However, there are other aspects of higher education that are essential – in addition to specialist knowledge: the formation of personality, critical thinking, citizenship, tolerance towards other people.

The European Union should connect the big potential of education, research, innovation and culture in order to harness the synergies for its citizens. However, the right political instruments should be chosen. A European education, research and innovation community should be co-owned and supported by all political actors and stakeholders as well as citizens. A community can only arise if the European Institutions work closely together with the political decision makers and the science and education sector in the EU member states and regions. It will be important to perceive the diversity and variety of the education, research and innovation

systems in Europe as a value and opportunity. With these assumptions, a new identity-creating European Union project could successfully take shape.