

18 December 2018**Vienna Declaration: European rectors' conferences make the case for academic freedom and university autonomy**

Solidarity for academic freedom and university autonomy: At a meeting in Vienna last week, the presidents of ten European rectors' conferences stressed the crucial significance of academic freedom, academic integrity in teaching and research, and the autonomy of universities. In their joint declaration "Universities for Enlightenment", the university peak bodies from Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland reiterate the social responsibility of universities. In their view, it is all the more imperative that universities take this seriously in light of current social and political trends in many countries.

They express their conviction that this responsibility arises from the firm belief that the fundamental values of higher education reflect the achievements of enlightenment. HRK President Professor Dr Peter-André Alt makes the following appeal: "Universities must remain a place of freedom and tolerance."

At the same time, governments are encouraged to support universities in the fulfilment of their fundamental role by providing appropriate legal frameworks and adequate funding. The declaration states the following: "We also call upon governments to prevent any form of undermining of independent research, including arts based research and artistic co-creation, and institutional autonomy." What's more, concern at movements in Europe and beyond that threaten the democratic nature of institutions and societies is also expressed.

In the past, the HRK has advocated for tolerance and open-mindedness time and time again. Under the label of "German Universities Open to the World", the 268 HRK member universities are taking a clear stand against racially motivated verbal and physical abuse in Germany and growing isolationist tendencies in several countries in Europe and beyond. The HRK has repeatedly condemned restrictions placed on academic freedom and the intimidation of researchers in other countries.

At the meeting in Vienna, the leaders of the rectors' conferences agreed to further strengthen the dialogue between them and the public discourse about these issues in the European Higher Education Area and beyond.

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