

11 December 2020**Decision on EU financial framework: research funding must be invested with long-term vision**

Yesterday, the heads of state and government of the EU member states reached a compromise on the design of the rule of law mechanism in the future allocation of EU funding. This means that the outcome of negotiations on the European Union's next seven-year financial framework can be finalised in time for the coming year.

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Peter-André Alt, commented on this development in Berlin today:

"The federal government deserves thanks for its tireless efforts, which finally allowed this agreement to be reached. The universities now have planning security for future European cooperation next year. During the negotiations, the members of the European Parliament advocated for a stronger rule of law mechanism and ensured that the funding cuts for education, student mobility, research and innovation envisaged by governments will be €6.2 billion less than originally planned.

The Parliament has achieved some important things with respect to the forward-looking allocation of funds within the EU budget. Unfortunately, in spite of the agreed improvements, substantial cuts remain for the Erasmus+ education programme and Horizon Europe, the Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. In particular, the €8.5 billion for research and innovation lost from the European recovery fund represents a tangible loss for European innovation.

The task now is to ensure that the remaining funding is put to use in the most beneficial way possible. The Erasmus+ funding of €2.2 billion additionally negotiated by the European Parliament should be used particularly for the benefit of the European higher education alliances. This will allow pan-European study programmes to be expanded and regional innovation systems within Europe to be interlinked.

Strong basic research is crucial to Europe's future viability. In the past, significant resources from the Framework Programme have been redirected into more readily marketable application-oriented research. Pandemic control measures, climate protection and new technologies such as artificial intelligence are certainly good reasons to give additional support to research geared towards specific applications. Universities are working hard in all these areas. However, basic research must remain a priority in EU funding. It forms the foundation and creates a knowledge resource that is essential to the development of innovative solutions with which to respond to future crises and challenges.

Without the groundwork done in basic research it would be impossible, for example, to tackle current challenges such as the reorganisation of energy generation and usage through the European Green Deal. The springboard innovations that are so vital to our economy are also based on new insights generated by basic research conducted without any specific goal in mind. For this reason, the additional funding now available should be used to strengthen the part of the Framework Programme oriented towards basic research, thus guaranteeing a reliable foundation for science and capacity for cooperation in distributed excellence in Europe.”