

New development goals for the European Research Area Key demands of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Five premises for a new design phase for the European Research Area

In the first development phase of the European Research Area (ERA) starting in 2012, the EU-Commission, member states and research stakeholders discussed and tackled many topics – ultimately, with a mixed record.

The HRK welcomes the resumption of the discussion on the further development of the European Research Area. This new phase should be based on shared policy objectives. Five key demands should be taken into consideration:

1. Defining the values of the European Research Area

To date, a discussion on fundamental values of the ERA has not played a significant role in its design. However, the European Research Area should be characterised by a clear set of values. These include academic freedom, which despite being mentioned in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, is repeatedly coming under threat, even in the EU itself.¹ They also include open and self-critical discussion about common values and ethics of the community of researchers. Researchers in the ERA set themselves ethical boundaries in dialogue with society and respect the rules established in democratic political processes. They do not pursue all that is discoverable and achievable in the name of freedom of research and under the pressure of economic competition without weighing up risks (cf. for example the complex issues of embryo research and Artificial Intelligence). The European scientific community supports the development of uniform and transparent standards for good scientific practice. And it recognises the need to discuss the "appropriate degree of transparency" in partnerships between publicly funded research and industry and commerce.²

2. Opening up the European Research Area

The European Research Area is not a goal in itself. It should be anchored in the global context of excellent research and innovation and constitute a constant driving force which advances global research cooperation with all suitable partners. An inward-looking ERA does not serve anyone well, as in the longer term it would cause Europe to slip into lasting mediocrity. The European Research Area should therefore open up even more, promote mobility in non-member states and attract international talent coming to the EU. Researchers in the EU must work closely with strong research partners outside the EU, in particular with those who share comparable values and exhibit complementary research quality. In other words, ERA should combine internal integration with external connection. Equally, it must enable the thorough integration of associated partners into ERA.³

3. Strengthening the cohesion of the research area and pursuing distributed excellence

The wide research and innovation gap that currently exists between the member states of the EU has to be narrowed; it calls into question the cohesion and the overall performance of the European Research Area as well as of the EU in general. A solution to this major challenge requires vigorous action by the countries with a moderate or modest innovation performance. This includes a serious endeavour to reach at least the share of public spending of the three percent goal⁴ in the medium term. A narrowing of the gap also requires greater willingness on the part of the countries with a stronger research performance to assume responsibility. This should find expression, for example, in proactive mentorships and various forms of partnership. A central goal should be to strengthen "Distributed Excellence" in the European Research Area via capacity building and development. This also would allow states that are modest innovators to participate in global research activity in selected fields in a competitive way.⁵

4. Strengthening research and the other dimensions of university performance

The importance of the knowledge triangle has become more evident in recent years, and thus the importance of the links between research, education and successful innovation. The universities are at the heart of the knowledge triangle and the European research landscape, and therefore of ERA. Therefore, the role of universities in the European Research Area merits more attention. They require special support as nodes of education, research and innovation and also as centres of cultural life in all member states of the EU and of the European society as a whole. Given their importance for these four areas, the universities' performance in the "knowledge rectangle" should be acknowledged.⁶

The great interest shown by governments, media and universities in the new call of the EU for European cross border university alliances ("European Universities") confirms this appraisal. In the future development of the ERA these interrelated dimensions of university performance should be taken into account.

5. Pursuing "brain circulation"

The unrestricted mobility of researchers has been a central objective of the ERA concept from the very beginning aiming at the creation of a competitive European research market analogous to the single market of the EU. Mobility, however, is not a value in itself. It is primarily a means to expand researchers' knowledge, experience and overall perspectives. Therefore, attention should more clearly be focused on the goal of "brain circulation", so that the required elimination of mobility obstacles does not intensify the brain drain in some EU member states or in non-member states.⁷ Increased national investments of the affected states, a more sensitive monitoring of migration processes and indirect policy incentives should be used to pursue the objective of "brain

circulation" in the EU enabling as many researchers as possible to participate. This is the prerequisite for making and keeping scientific excellence a shared goal of all member states.

¹ Cf. "Zehn Thesen zur Wissenschaftsfreiheit" (Ten theses on academic freedom), final memorandum of the campaign "Freedom is our System" by the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany, 27/08/2019 (only available in German)

² Cf. position paper "Universities as organisational centres of the research system and key players in society," resolution by the HRK Senate dated 13/10/2016 in the updated version dated 10/04/2018, pp. 1-2; https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-01-Beschluesse/HRK_-_Eckpunkte_Hochschulsystem_2018_EN_final.pdf

³ Cf. "The deep integration of associated partners into the European Research Area" [...] in Reinhilde Veugelers, Michael Baltensperger: Europe – the global Centre for Excellent Research. Study requested by the ITRE committee, April 2019, pp. 59, 61

⁴ The member states of the EU agreed in 2001 in Barcelona on the goal of investing 3 per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in research and development.

⁵ Position of CPU, HRK and CRASP: Living up to the significance of Universities, 10/07/2018:

https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-05-Forschung/Position_CPU_HRK_KRASP_18.5.2018/CPU-HRK-KRASP_Living_Up_to_the_Significance_of_Universities-2.pdf;

⁶ Cf. "Creating a European education, research and innovation community". Resolution of the HRK General Assembly dated 8/11/2016, p. 5: <https://www.hrk.de/resolutions-publications/resolutions/beschluss/detail/creating-a-european-education-research-and-innovation-union/>;

Position paper "Universities as organisational centres of the research system and key players in society," resolution by the HRK Senate dated 13/10/2016 in the updated version dated 10/04/2018, pp. 1-2: https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-01-Beschluesse/HRK_-_Eckpunkte_Hochschulsystem_2018_EN_final.pdf

⁷ <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/das-problem-der-abwanderung-warum-suedosteuropa-ausblutet-16295099.html> (The problem of brain drain. Why South Eastern Europe is haemorrhaging – only available in German); Freizügigkeitsmonitoring: Migration von EU-Bürgern nach Deutschland (Monitoring freedom of movement: migration of EU citizens to Germany), BAMF, Bericht für das erste Halbjahr 2018, Nuremberg, December 2018 (only available in German)