

Version 13.7.2026

**EU Strategy Day for
German University Leaders and
International Guests**

in Brussels

Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the European Union

**Knowledge as Fifth Freedom in Europe? – New EU programmes,
future European legislation and the impacts for German
universities**

47, Rue Montoyer, 1000 Brussels

28 / 29 September 2026

- 12:15 Registration and light lunch
- 13:00 Opening remarks
Rainer Steffens, Head of the Permanent Representation of North-Rhine Westphalia to the European Union
Walter Rosenthal, President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)
- 13:15 **Research security as a key element of resilient international collaboration – How can we safeguard academic freedom whilst protecting our research and knowledge?**
Panel discussion

Speakers
Dame Karen Holford DBE FREng, Chief Executive & Vice-Chancellor, Cranfield University (tbc)
Valérie Hurská, Counter Foreign Interference Manager, Charles University, Czech Republic
Andrew James, Professor, Manchester Institute of Innovation Research, Manchester Business School
Walter Rosenthal, President, German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Moderation: **Marijke Wahlers**, Deputy Secretary-General, German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

14:30 Coffee break

15:00 Political speeches

Impulses

Marc Lemaitre, Director-General, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission

Markus Pleyer, Secretary of State, Ministry of Research, Technology and Space, Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (tbc)

Christian Ehler, MEP, Member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), European Parliament (tbc)

15:20 **Knowledge as Fifth Freedom in Europe? – New EU programmes, future European legislation and the impacts for German universities**
Political Debate

Speakers

Katja Böhler, Deputy Secretary General of the German Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK)

Christian Ehler, MEP, Member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), European Parliament (tbc)

Marc Lemaitre, Director-General, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission

Markus Pleyer, Secretary of State, Ministry of Research, Technology and Space, Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (tbc)

Walter Rosenthal, President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Moderation: **Lisa Bungereth**, Director of Public Affairs, Imperial College London

16:30 Coffee break

17:00 Workshops

- **Workshop 1: Security-related research and development: Comparing European approaches**

Introduction: **Malek Finn Khan**, Deputy Director General (acting), Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), Sweden

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Moderation: **Georg Krausch**, HRK Vice-President for Research and Academic Career Paths; President of Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

- **Workshop 2: European University Alliances – Reflecting on Progress, Shaping the Future**

Introduction:

Jan Danckaert, Rector Vrije Universiteit Brussel (EUTOPIA Alliance) (tbc)
Birte Wassenberg, Vice-President Europe and International Relations, Université de Strasbourg

Moderation: **Angela Ittel**, HRK Vice-President for International Affairs, Equal Opportunities and Diversity; President of Technische Universität Braunschweig

- **Workshop 3: Nexus: Connecting Excellence in Europe Bottom-Up**

Introduction: **Christian Rebhan**, Head of the Brussels office of the German Research Foundation (DFG)

Moderation: **Mattias Björnmalm**, Secretary General of CESAER

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| 18:00 | End of the first day of the conference |
| 18:20 | Departure of the buses to the restaurant |
| 19:00 | Dinner reception at the Grand Place Brussels |
| 21:30 | Return to hotels by bus shuttle service |

Day 2

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| 08:30 | Arrival and Coffee |
| 09:00 | Workshops: |

- **Workshop 1: European Gender Equality Strategy: „From compliance to institutional strategy“**

Introduction: **Kateřina Svíčková**, Head of Sector for Gender, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, European Commission

Moderation: **Angela Ittel**, HRK Vice-President for International Affairs, Equal Opportunities and Diversity; President of Technische Universität Braunschweig

- **Workshop 2: Universities and democracy in times of polarisation**

Introduction: **Carsten Schneider**, interim President of the Central European University (CEU)

Moderation: **Thomas Jørgensen**, Director of Policy Coordination and Foresight, European University Association (EUA)

- **Workshop 3: EU actions fostering the valorisation of academic research**

Introduction: **Federica Baldan**, Policy officer for valorisation policies and technology infrastructures and member of the European Commission Startup and Scaleup Taskforce, responsible the valorisation of academic research results

Axel Koch, Chair of the Executive Board TransferAllianz e. V.

Moderation: **Ingeborg Schramm-Wölk**, HRK Vice-President for Transfer and Sustainability, President of Fachhochschule Bielefeld

10:00 Coffee break

10:20 **Attracting Talent: Programmes for the recruitment of international researchers**

Panel discussion

Speakers

Katrin Amian, Deputy Secretary General of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

Angelika Epple, Board Member of the European University Association (EUA); Rector of Bielefeld University

Emmanuelle Garnier, President of Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, Membre du Conseil d'Administration de France Universités (tbc)

Luca Perego, Head of Unit “Choose Europe and MSCA”, European Commission

Sabine Simmross, Senior Expert External Relations, European Research Council (ERC) (tbc)

Moderation: **Georg Krausch**, HRK Vice-President for Research and Academic Career Paths; President of Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

11:30 Coffee break

12:00 **Presentation of the workshop results**

12:10 **European Research Area Act (ERA Act)**

Panel discussion

Speakers

Manuel Aleixo, Cabinet Expert for Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva, European Commission

Josep M. Garrell, President of the European University Association (EUA)

Georg Krausch, HRK Vice-President for Research and Academic Career Paths; President of Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

Eszter Lakos, MEP, Member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), European Parliament

Melanie Rüter, Head of Department for European Cooperation, Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR)

Moderation: **Victoria Reichl**, Head of KoWi Brussels Office, European Liaison Office of the German Research Organisations (KoWi)

13:15 Closing remarks and end of the EU Strategy Day

Walter Rosenthal, President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK)