

28 November 2014**'Help-yourself' on all sides jeopardises top-level European research**

HRK President Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler warned today in Berlin of the severe consequences for higher education institutions caused by EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's infrastructure investment fund:

"We must not fund investment at the cost of excellent top-level research. European national politicians in favour of austerity measures recently attacked the EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development with demands for savings of one billion euros. Now pro-investment politicians have also discovered the funds set aside for findings-led research as a kind of 'help-yourself store'. They also want to cut the 2015 research budget by just under a billion euros, or a further 10%. Both developments taken together mean that next year there could be one fifth less EU funding available for excellent advanced research than previously announced.

The announcement by Jean-Claude Juncker presenting a €315 billion investment package for strategic investment in infrastructures could have been a reason for celebration, as Europe – including its universities – urgently needs this investment. However, over the next three years €2.7 billion of funding is to be taken from the EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. As much as 25% of the EU money raised for the fund to provide contingency insurance for private investment money is to come from financing taken away from basic research. By contrast, other parts of the EU budget, such as the agricultural budget and money in the Structural Funds, again remain untouched.

In the current situation in Europe, we should not be content to simply make the most of existing knowledge. Europe will continue to need new discoveries as the raw material for successful and innovative businesses. If pro-austerity and pro-investment politicians, in a rare show of unity, now help themselves to funding earmarked for research, they will be jeopardising the very substance and effectiveness of findings-led research.

I can but warn about the consequences of this development. The pain threshold of European top-level science and research has been reached, if not already exceeded. The Commission should not ignore the fatal signal that has been sent out with regard to its investment package: Europe's best researchers are looked after much better in other regions of the world than they are here. The Commission is therefore jeopardising our long-term capacity for innovation for the sake of short-term success. Applied research and technology transfer can only be successful in the long term if new discoveries continue to be generated.

For example, the success rates for research visits abroad for early career researchers on EU Marie Curie fellowships have already fallen to 15%. On visits to China, South America or the USA, important links and networks are forged which are of exceptional benefit to German and European business. Painful cutbacks also threaten the European Research Council, the European funding body for top-level research."