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HRK Urgent Warning against Cuts to the EU Research Budget

Directly before the summit of European Union leaders to agree the next budget, the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) at its General Meeting has once again strongly expressed opposition to cuts of any kind to the EU research budget. At a press conference in Berlin today, HRK President Professor Horst Hippler expressed his utmost concern at the current state of negotiations in the European Council:

"The budget proposed by the European Commission defines a critical lower limit for European funding of research and innovation. The proposed budget of 80 billion euro would enable the continuation of research activities at a constant level, at least for the upcoming budget period starting in 2014.

Yet, what we are seeing is a debate which – in opposition to the EU's own self-defined aims for a European area strong in research and innovation – is almost exclusively led by fiscal policy considerations. The priority focus has been on cost-cutting measures and the question of funding allocation based on geography. In contrast, there has been little discussion in the Council on the urgent and fundamental question of where the future EU priority investment areas will lie. Negotiations have until now left little room for optimism in this regard.

Any cuts to the budget proposed by the Commission would represent an enormous problem for Germany. And cuts would be an even greater problem for structurally weak states in the EU, who are heavily dependent on EU funding for research to develop the innovation potential in their economies. National economies in Asia and South America are currently seeing decisive investment in research. Competition for excellent researchers is in full swing. Those who wish to keep the best minds in Europe or even attract them here in the first place must be willing to offer employment conditions that can stand up to international comparison."