

12 May 2014**HRK President opens the Annual Meeting in Frankfurt am Main**

HRK President Prof. Dr. Horst Hippler has just welcomed over 160 university heads together with many other guests to the Annual Meeting of the German Rectors' Conference. The University of Frankfurt, celebrating its centenary this year, is hosting this year's Annual Meeting. Prof. Dr. Hippler pointed out that, as a 'foundation' university, it can largely control its own development. He went on to say that this level of freedom has been proved to provide a key prerequisite for top scientific performance. "In contrast to this, in some places we are presently experiencing that our autonomy is being restricted again and the influence of the state and politicians becoming heightened," he remarked.

He indicated the special role that universities play in the scientific and research system. "They are the only places to combine research, teaching and innovation. Universities require relevant basic funding, which the federal states cannot guarantee alone." Prof. Dr. Hippler therefore regrets that, contrary to the announcements made earlier, the amendment to the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany will not be tackled prior to the German Bundestag parliamentary elections. We do not even have a rough sketch of the future pact for science demanded by the German Council of Science and Humanities.

Prof. Dr. Hippler appealed to the representatives of the federal government and the federal states present: "Find a common solution in the interests of the future viability of Germany."

The Annual Meeting, like the HRK General Meeting held the next day, is concerned about the ever-increasing volumes of data in research. The keynote speaker Alex Szalay, Professor of Astronomy at Johns Hopkins University, is presenting a talk today on the opportunities and risks associated with data-intensive science. According to HRK President Prof. Dr. Hippler: "Technical developments enable us to generate, store and use virtually unlimited volumes of data today. This opens up hitherto unforeseen possibilities for acquiring knowledge but also raises a number of problems. We need to ensure that our interest in knowledge – in health research for instance – can be brought into harmony with the need to protect personal data."