

12 June 2013**HRK Senate on EU structural funds: too many federal states are failing to harness the innovation potential of their universities**

In the future, EU structural funds will increasingly be channelled towards investment in research and innovation, with the aim of increasing Europe's productivity and competitiveness. The European Commission has tasked the federal states with drawing up so-called "smart specialisation strategies" by the end of the year. Regions across Europe are to build on their particular strengths, to identify niche markets and to boost their knowledge-based potential through targeted investment. This requires businesses and universities to play an active role in the development of regional strategies.

An HRK survey among German universities shows that currently around half of the federal states are doing enough to involve their HEIs in the preparation of these strategies. According to the HRK's President, Professor Horst Hippler, "These states realise that developing a systematic innovation strategy is not just an obligatory act – it is in their own best interests as innovative and competitive locations. German universities must be part of these processes as they make a vital contribution to the German economy's ability to compete and innovate, and to the living conditions of the 16 federal states."

Back in October last year, the HRK highlighted the need for universities to participate in developing the strategies, but around half of the federal states have yet to take significant steps to secure their involvement. As Professor Hippler notes, "In the years 2007 to 2011 of the current funding period, Germany was eligible for 4.9 billion euro from EU structural funds for research and innovation, most of which was assigned to the federal states. The matching funding requirement for projects means that there is a considerable leverage effect. The resources have to be used specifically to strengthen innovation in the area concerned. For this to happen, there needs to be a dialogue with stakeholders in research and business."

Germany's universities also point to the pressing need to simplify the project implementation ensuring that structural funds are used effectively. With this in mind, they call on state governments to put in place funding conditions and arrangements that do not make it unnecessarily difficult for universities to access structural funds.