



5-6 November 2025, Aachen Program

The program is subject to change.

Freedom of Research (FoR) – A European Summit 2025 *Europe in Times of Division*

Our freedom and democracy are under threat. Our Summit serves as a place for reflection and foresight. We aim to bring together people from various backgrounds from all across Europe, fostering connections with thought leaders, and addressing pressing issues that will define Europe's future.

Freedom, in all its dimensions, is a core European value and right. The freedom of research is vital for fostering innovation, expanding knowledge, and securing Europe's future in times of division. Today, our continent faces complex challenges – ranging from political polarization and geopolitical tensions to economic disparities and environmental divides. How can we navigate these challenges and create a resilient framework for future developments?

Festive Evening Event

5 November, 7:30 PM – 10:00 PM, Coronation Hall, Aachen Town Hall
Languages: English and German (with live interpretation)

Welcome Remarks:

- Prof. Dr. Thomas Prefi, Chairman of the Charlemagne Prize Foundation
- Prof. Dr. Ulrich Rüdiger, Rector, RWTH Aachen University

Keynote: Roger de Weck, Bestselling Author, Publicist and Manager, former Director General of Swiss Broadcasting Corp. and Editor-in-Chief of the German weekly “Die Zeit”

Awarding of Scholarships: Fellows 2025/26 of the Charlemagne Prize Academy

Music: Carbon Ensemble, Collegium Musicum, RWTH Aachen University

Moderation: Dr. Angela Maas, Journalist and Moderator, Deputy Spokeswoman of the Executive Board of the Charlemagne Prize Foundation

Symposium

6 November, 9:30 AM – 5:30 PM, Generali-Saal, SuperC, RWTH Aachen University
Language: English

9:30–9:45 | Words of Welcome:

- Prof. Dr. Gabriele Gramelsberger and Prof. Dr. Stefan Bösch, Directors, Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)
- Prof. Dr. Thomas Prefi, Chairman of the Charlemagne Prize Foundation

9:45–10:05 | Opening Keynote

Prof. Dr. Maria Leptin, President of the European Research Council

BLOCK I: BRIDGING KNOWLEDGE & POWER

10:05–11:00 | Panel Discussion

Freedom under Pressure: Funding as a Political Weapon

- Moderation: Dr. Toon van Overbeke, Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2024/25 and Assistant Professor, Maastricht University
- Caroline de Gruyter, European Affairs Correspondent and Columnist, NRC Handelsblad
- Prof. Dr. Maria Leptin, President of the European Research Council
- Erica Lutes, Head of Fulbright Commission Brussels

How free is research when funding comes with strings attached? This panel brings together leading experts to explore the growing pressures on universities and research institutions in Europe and beyond. From political influence and corporate interests to debates over innovative funding models like research lotteries, the discussion will examine real-world challenges to academic freedom. Panelists will share insights from their experiences at the European Research Council, national policy arenas, and international contexts, exploring how institutions can protect independent, investigator-driven research while navigating external pressures. Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of the stakes and strategies for keeping scholarship open, rigorous, and truly free.

11:00–11:15 | Coffee Break

11:15–12:00 | TedTalk Session

Influencing Credibility: Opening the Black Box of Trust

- Dr. Dr. René von Schomberg, Technical University of Darmstadt

In the last decade, major academic publishers like Elsevier and Springer have shifted their business focus from publishing to data analytics services. These research information systems allow scientists to identify relevant publications and data sources, but they may impact the credibility of research as well as the freedom of research. In his talk, René von Schomberg will examine these developments and their consequences using three examples: the steering of research objectives, the profiling of researchers, and the erosion of knowledge commons.

- Prof. Dr. Sahana Udupa, LMU Munich

Exclusionary extreme speech on social media thrives on fun. Hateful and derogatory expressions come wrapped as merely funny. Word games, memes and witticism lift up the energies of variously motivated ideological warriors. How do we reclaim fun and humor – online and offline – and collectively imagine a life of dignity – a life free from fear, but more vitally filled with onward moving opportunities?

12:00–13:30 | Lunch Break

13:30–14:30 | Panel Discussion

Dialogue between Citizens, Science, and Policy: Rethinking EU Enlargement

- Moderation: Sophia Beiter, Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2024/25 and Research Associate, Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM)
- Prof. Dr. Giselle Bosse, Full Professor and Chair in EU External Democracy Support, Maastricht University
- Dr. Giulio Venneri, Deputy Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST), European Commission

In a time of democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and geopolitical uncertainty, the question of how to advance EU enlargement has become more urgent than ever. More than 20 years after the Thessaloniki Summit, the enlargement process faces a crisis of credibility: while the EU frames enlargement as a strategic necessity, progress is slow, hindered by bilateral vetoes and “enlargement fatigue,” and citizens across Europe often feel excluded from the debate. This panel brings together perspectives to explore how EU enlargement can be “future-proofed.” The discussion will examine how science, politics, and civil society can be better connected, and how effective communication can help rebuild trust and engagement with citizens. Drawing on recent surveys, workshop findings, and a comparative analysis of reform proposals from the project “A comparative approach to different models of EU integration: How to achieve a citizen-based, enlarged and reformed EU?” by Charlemagne Prize Fellow Sophia Beiter, the panel will explore strategies for making Europe’s enlargement approach more resilient, inclusive, and credible for the future.

14:30–14:45 | Coffee Break

BLOCK II: BRIDGING INTERESTS & IDEALS

14:45–15:45 | Conversation

Europe in the Tech Tug-of-War: Does EU Tech Law Dilute Europe’s Voice?

- Moderation: Dr. Julia Hagel, Consumer Insights Manager and Moderator
- Dr. Oliver Grün, Founder and CEO of the GRÜN Software Group and President of the European Digital SME Alliance
- Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Lippert, Director of Jülich Supercomputing Centre
- Rebekka Weiß LL.M, Head of Regulatory Policy and Senior Manager Government, Microsoft Berlin

The panel seeks to examine how Europe can reconcile economic competitiveness, technological sovereignty, and regulatory ambition within an increasingly polarized global tech landscape. The discussion will navigate the fine line between maintaining legitimate regulatory authority and creating fertile ground for innovation and progress — a balance essential for ensuring that Europe remains future-ready, resilient, and capable of shaping the global technological order. At its core, the session asks whether Europe’s well-intentioned guardrails risk fragmenting its innovative capacity, or whether they can instead serve as the foundation for a distinctively European model of freedom through responsibility and trust. Bringing together perspectives from research, industry, and policymaking, the panel will offer a rich cross-section of insights into the tensions and synergies that define Europe’s pursuit of technological leadership in a transatlantic and global context.

15:45–16:30 | Panel Discussion

Spaces of Unity in Divided Times? Freedom and Fragmentation in Urban Strategy

- Moderation: Dr. Ali Abdelshafy, Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2024/25 and Assistant Professor in Future Industrial Systems, TU Delft
- Patrick Child, Deputy Director-General of DG Environment, European Commission, and EU Mission Manager for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities

- Prof. Dr. Cornelia Redeker, Professor in Architecture and Head of Umeå University School of Architecture, Member of the New European Bauhaus Facility Experts Group
- Valentino Tignanelli, Architect, Designer and Project Manager at Aaltosiilo Ry and Factum Foundation in Oulu, Finland

The European Union's mission to create 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 is ambitious, aiming to drive a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban future. But is this target truly achievable? This panel brings together perspectives from policy, civil society, practice, and academia to tackle this pressing question. The discussion will explore the mission's objectives, the role of cities in reaching the EU's 2050 climate neutrality goal, and the mechanisms for monitoring progress. It will also highlight the opportunities and challenges faced by local stakeholders, how collaboration is reshaping urban strategies, and the academic insights into reducing the built environment's climate footprint. Together, the panel will examine innovative approaches to accelerate the path toward climate neutrality, balancing prosperity, sustainability, and heritage, while reflecting on lessons learned to assess whether achieving 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030 is within Europe's reach.

BLOCK III: BRIDGING SCIENCE & SOCIETY

16:45–17:30 | Conversation (and Snacks)

Education as a Bridge for Europe – Connecting People, Ideas, and Futures

- Moderation: Santiago Ardisson, Jean Monnet Professor, Universidad Austral
- Boris Walbaum, Founder and President of Forward College
- Walter Zampieri, Head of Unit for European Higher Education, European Commission

This closing conversation explores education as one of Europe's most powerful instruments for connection—across borders, disciplines, and generations. In a world marked by geopolitical tensions, social fragmentation, and technological transformation, the session reflects on how education can serve as a bridge that unites people and fosters shared understanding. Drawing inspiration from Europe's long intellectual tradition, it invites participants to consider how universities and knowledge communities can uphold freedom of thought, rebuild trust, and promote cooperation, both within Europe and with other regions of the world. Ultimately, it asks what kind of Europe we want for the future, and how education can help us begin shaping it today.

Stand-up FoR Science NIGHT

6 November, from 6:30 PM, Apollo Kino & Bar, Aachen

Unless stated otherwise, this part of the program will be conducted in German.

18:30–18:45:

Opening

Cinema 4: Professor Matthias Wessling

18:45–19:45:

Block #1 A:

Cinema 1: Poetry Slam by Simon Middelkoop

- Evgenija Kosov
- Florian Stein
- Jeanette Kasper-Feld

Block #1 B:

Cinema 3: Reading & Discussion (in English)

- Dr. Hannah Pool, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Author of the book “The Game: The Economy of Undocumented Migration from Afghanistan to Europe”, Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2020/21
- Dr. Gülay Türkmen PhD (USA), Faculty of Arts and Humanities, RWTH Aachen University

20:00–21:00:

Block #2:

Cinema 4: Late Night Talks

Moderation: Luca Swieter

Music: RWTH BigBand Combo

- Maria Clara Groppler, Comedian
- Quarks Science Cops: Maximilian Doeckel and Jonathan Focke

From 21:15:

Block #3 A:

Cinema 1: Film screening of “Matrix”

Block #3 B:

Cinema 2: Film screening of “Barbie” (in English)