European Summit
Freedom of Research

4-5 November 2026, Aachen
Program

The program is subject to change.

Freedom of Research (FoR) – A European Summit 2026

Innovation and Competitiveness

Our freedom and democracy are under pressure. How can we safeguard Europe's capacity for innovation, competitiveness, and resilience – and what role does academic freedom play in this?

Our Summit brings together people and perspectives from across Europe to explore pressing questions: How can we create space for free thinking, scientific collaboration, and innovation? What political and societal conditions are needed to build a Europe ready for the future?

An opportunity for dialogue, fresh perspectives, and looking ahead.

Festive Evening Event

4 November, 7:00 PM – 9:00 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
- Dr. Michael Ziemons, Lord Mayor of the City of Aachen

Keynote:
Manuel Heitor
Former Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal, Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Instituto Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon, and Author of "Align, Act, Accelerate", the so-called "Heitor Report"

Awarding of Scholarships: Fellows 2026/27 of the Charlemagne Prize Academy

Music: Laserharp by the Chair for Technology of Optical Systems TOS, RWTH Aachen University

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

Symposium

5 November, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, Generali-Saal, SuperC, RWTH Aachen University
Language: English

9:00–9:15 I Words of Welcome

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

9:15–10:00 I Opening Keynote and Moderated Q&A
Prof. Dr. Carsten Reinhardt, Historian of Science, former Senior Fellow of the Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)

Q&A moderated by Prof. Dr. Gabriele Gramelsberger, Director, Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)

BLOCK I:

10:05–10:35 I Policy Conversation
Can Europe Innovate More While Strengthening Academic Freedom?

- Hylke Dijkstra, Maastricht University Europe Chair and Professor of International Security and Cooperation
- Moderation: Prof. Dr. Michael Riesener, Chair of Production Engineering at the Laboratory for Machine Tools and Production Engineering (WZL), Head of the Deep Tech Innovation research area, and the Rector's Representative for Translation at RWTH Aachen University

Europe is under pressure to strengthen its innovation capacity and avoid falling further behind leading global economies, such as the United States and China. Reports such as Draghi, Heitor and EFI point to structural weaknesses: regulatory complexity, fragmented markets, bureaucracy, limited risk capital and insufficient institutional flexibility. Yet Europe's innovation challenge is not only structural, but also geopolitical: strategic autonomy, research security and technological sovereignty are reshaping the conditions for global scientific collaboration. At the same time, innovation depends on institutional and cultural conditions: the freedom to pursue open-ended questions, the patience to support long-term research, and the openness to attract talent and enable cross-border partnerships. This conversation asks how Europe can strengthen its innovation systems and address geopolitical and security demands without weakening the openness and pluralism on which excellent science depends.

10:40–10:55 I Coffee Break

10:55–11:55 | Interactive Fishbowl
From Open Knowledge to Societal Impact: Transfer, Trust, and Tensions

- Prof. Dr. Cyrus Mody, Professor in the History of Science, Technology and Innovation, Maastricht University, and Director, Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies (MUSTS)
- Dr. Jürgen Janger, Senior Economist, Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO)
- Dr. Agnieszka Radziwon, Associate Professor of Innovation Management, Aarhus University and Visiting Scholar, University of California, Berkeley
- Moderation: Prof. Dr. Matthias Wessling, Vice-Rector for Transfer and Professor of Chemical Process Engineering, RWTH Aachen University

Knowledge transfer is often presented as the bridge between research and societal impact. In practice, this bridge is built through relationships, contracts, expectations and trust. This fishbowl turns from the policy level to the concrete settings in which universities cooperate with industry, public institutions and society. The discussion will look at the everyday tensions created by publication rights, confidentiality, intellectual property, third-party funding and pressure for immediate applicability, asking how governance and collaboration models can generate societal impact while safeguarding the independence of researchers, the openness of scientific work and curiosity-driven research.

12:00–13:00 | Panel Discussion
Academic Freedom Under Pressure: Evidence, Trust, and Institutional Resilience

- Dr. Olga Ceran, Postdoctoral Researcher at UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles and Co-Author of the Academic Freedom Monitor
- Prof. Dr. Elena Bruni, Assistant Professor, LUISS Guido Carli University
- Monika Steinel, Deputy Secretary General, European University Association
- Moderation: Prof. Dr. Stefan Böschen, Director, Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)

Academic freedom is increasingly under pressure across Europe — through political interference, legal and administrative constraints, attacks on researchers, and growing distrust in scientific expertise. This panel asks where these threats are most visible, how they can be measured, and why they matter beyond academia. Drawing on the empirical research behind the Academic Freedom Monitor Europe and preliminary findings from its next edition, the discussion will examine how difficult it is to address threats to academic freedom with existing laws and procedures. It will also explore how restrictions on science and knowledge communication affect public trust, democratic institutions and societal resilience. The panel brings together empirical, societal and institutional perspectives to ask what universities, funders, policy-makers, and civil society can do to halt the erosion of academic freedom in Europe.

13:00–14:00 I Lunch Break

BLOCK II:

14:00–14:30 I Talks
What Freedom Depends On

- Freedom Depends on Sovereignty:
  Peter Leibinger, President, Federation of German Industries (BDI) and Chairman of the Supervisory Board, TRUMPF (tbc)
  Dr. Felix J. Grawert, CEO and President of Aixtron (tbc)
- Freedom Depends on Survival: The Case of Ukraine:
  Dr. Tetiana Vodotyka, Academic Director of the Master's Program in Urban Studies and Postwar Reconstruction, Kyiv School of Economics
- Freedom Depends on Secure Data:
  Dr. Paul-Olivier Dehaye, CEO, hestia.ai and Founder, PersonalData.io

Discussions of research and innovation freedom often proceed at a high level of abstraction. This session grounds them in three concrete conditions on which autonomy depends in practice: physical survival, control over industrial supply, and control over data. Three short interventions introduce the analytical categories the afternoon will return to.

14:30–15:15 I Deep Dive I
"Freed from Desire": Confronting Europe's Dependencies in Medical Supply

- Moderation: Yu-Wei Chen, Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2025/26, Visiting Researcher, Charité Center for Global Health

- Elizabeth Kuiper, Associate Director, Health and Societal Resilience, European Policy Centre
- Dr. med. Werner Bartens, Physician, Historian, Author and Science Journalist (including for the Süddeutsche Zeitung) (tbc)
- Prof. Dr. Albrecht Eisert, Chief Pharmacist, Uniklinikum Aachen / University Hospital RWTH Aachen (tbc)
- Dr. Stephanie Jedner, Site Head, Kundl Anti-Infectives, Sandoz (tbc)
- Representative from Grünenthal (tbd)

Around 80% of Europe's imported pharmaceutical ingredients come from just five countries, with China alone accounting for nearly half. The Critical Medicines Act, agreed in May 2026, is Europe's first serious attempt to reverse this dependency — but reshoring production is not simply an industrial policy question. It is a question of what genuine sovereignty in healthcare requires: not only where medicines are made, but who controls the decision of what counts as critical, and who bears the cost of building resilience. This session asks what it would take for Europe to secure its own supply — credibly, sustainably, and without merely shifting dependency from one external actor to another.

15:15–15:30 I Coffee Break

15:30–16:00 I Deep Dive II
"The Architecture of Freedom": Digital Innovation for Security, Security through Innovation

- Moderation: Eduardo Brito, Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2025/26, Security Engineer and Industrial PhD Candidate, Cybernetica AS / University of Tartu
- Georgios Kolliarakis, Senior Associate Fellow, EU Strategic Foresight, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)
- Max Schrems, Founder and Honorary Chair, noyb – European Center for Digital Rights (tbc)
- Christiane Kirketerp de Viron, Acting Director for Digital Society, Trust and Cybersecurity, DG CONNECT, European Commission (tbc)

Europe is building new digital infrastructure — from sovereign tech investment to decentralised identity and location verification. The question is not whether this infrastructure will exist, but whose interests it ultimately serves: the state's, the market's, or a third logic that neither fully captures. This session tests whether Europe's emerging digital architecture strengthens freedom — or quietly redefines it as something to be verified rather than exercised.

16:00–16:45 I Deep Dive III
Freedom through Networked Cooperation - The role of Leadership Programmes

At a time when populism is challenging open societies and international cooperation is becoming more contested, the networks that provide trustful communication channels across borders can be more important than ever. Leadership programmes create dialogue structures and support independent thinking and collaboration, also in times of crisis – but what happens when the financial and political support for such networks is in decline? Bringing together representatives of different initiatives in North Rhine-Westphalia, this panel will explore what is at stake for intellectual freedom and innovation, and how leadership programmes can continue to build the connections on which an open and resilient Europe depends.

17:00–17:30 I Closing Remarks
Europe – What's At Stake?

- PD Dr. Benjamin Höhne, Acting Professor of Comparative European Government Systems, Chemnitz University of Technology
- Dr. Linn Selle, Alfred von Oppenheim Head of the Europe Center, German Council on Foreign Relations (tbc)

Populism is on the rise across Europe and in Germany, posing a threat not only to democratic institutions but also, in very concrete terms, to the freedom of research. When scholarly expertise is delegitimised, universities are placed under political pressure, and research funding is instrumentalised, one of the most vital foundations of European resilience is put at risk. The central question we wish to explore together is: How can we protect freedom of research in Germany and Europe, institutionally, politically, and structurally?

Stand-up FoR Science NIGHT

5 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: Prof. Dr. Matthias Wessling

18:45–19:45:

Block #1 A:
Cinema 1: Poetry Slam by Simon Middelkoop

- Slammer 1: Käte
- Slammer 2: Luise Wolff
- Slammer 3: Leon Hanke
- Slammer 4: Leon Rosenbaum

Block #1 B:
Cinema 3:

- Dr. Mayssoun Zein Al Din, Executive Director Academy of International Affairs NRW: **Midterms and Global Power: U.S. Foreign Policy under Trump**
- Anca Agachi, Defense Policy Analyst at RAND and Charlemagne Prize Academy Fellow 2025/26: **Global Power, beyond 2026: The future of the transatlantic relationship**

20:00–21:00:

Block #2:
Cinema 4: Late Night Talks
Moderation: Luca Swieter

- Dr. Insa Thiele-Eich, Meteorologist, Astronaut and Spaceflight Expert
- Khalid Bounouar, Comedian (RebellComedy)

From 21:15:

Block #3:
Cinema 1: Die Saat des heiligen Feigenbaums