European Summit
Freedom of Research

November 4–5, 2026 · Aachen

Program

Freedom of Research (FoR) – A European Summit 2026

Our freedom and democracy are under pressure. Populist parties are gaining ground, research budgets are shrinking, and researchers are leaving the United States in search of secure working conditions. At the same time, Europe is striving to strengthen its capacity for innovation, competitiveness, and resilience. Can it remain open while becoming more sovereign – and what role does academic freedom play in this?

Over two days, our Summit brings together voices from science, politics, industry, and civil society across Europe to ask the questions that are rarely asked together: What happens to research when data and supply chains become instruments of power? Who decides which medicines count as critical? How does science continue in a country at war – and what does it mean for a university when populists take power? All of them point to one question: on what does freedom of research depend – and who is prepared to defend it?

WED · NOV 4 · EVENING	THU · NOV 5 · DAY	THU · NOV 5 · EVENING
Festive Reception	**Scientific Symposium**	**FoR Science Night**
Coronation Hall, Aachen Town Hall	Generali Hall, SuperC, RWTH Aachen University	Apollo Kino & Bar, Aachen

The program is subject to change.

Festive Reception

WED · NOV 4 · AACHEN

Dinner 7:00–9:00 PM · Coronation Hall, Aachen Town Hall
Languages: English and German (with simultaneous interpretation)

Words of Welcome

Dr. Michael Ziemons – Lord Mayor of the City of Aachen

Prof. Dr. Thomas Prefi – Chairman, Charlemagne Prize Foundation

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Rüdiger – Rector, RWTH Aachen University

Keynote

Why It Matters

Prof. Dr. Manuel Heitor – Former Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education of Portugal; Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Instituto Superior Técnico, University of Lisbon; Visiting Professor, New York University

Perspective: Author of "Align, Act, Accelerate", the Heitor Report on the future of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation – one of the most influential contributions to current European research policy.

Fellowship Awards

Passing the Baton

Charlemagne Prize Fellows 2026/27 and their research questions:

Raffaella Binetti
Research question:
Can waste heat from data centers help to ease water and energy scarcity in Europe?

Dr. Gesine Weber
Research question:
How can a geopolitical grand strategy for the EU be justified and institutionally anchored?

Manuel Tonneau
Research question:
How can multilingual AI evaluation tools support public administrations in Europe?

MUSIC	Laser harp, Chair for Technology of Optical Systems (TOS), RWTH Aachen University
MODERATOR	Dr. Angela Maas, Member of the Executive Board, Charlemagne Prize Foundation

Scientific Symposium: Innovation and Competitiveness

THU · NOV 5 · AACHEN

9:00 AM–5:00 PM · Generali Hall, SuperC, RWTH Aachen University
Language: English

9:00–9:15 AM | 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, Charlemagne Prize Foundation

9:15–10:00 AM | Opening Keynote & Q&A

Innovation in a Totalitarian Regime: Historical Observations from National Socialism

Political pressure on science is not a new phenomenon. Before discussing what Europe should do today, the opening keynote examines historical precedents – and the lessons Europe has learned, or failed to learn, from them.

Prof. Dr. Carsten Reinhardt – Historian of Science, Bielefeld University; former Senior Fellow, Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)
Perspective: His work on the interplay of science, technology, and political power provides the historical perspective on which the day builds.

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Gabriele Gramelsberger, Director Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)

BLOCK I Freedom Under Pressure

Where Europe stands: the pressures on research – political, economic, and geopolitical – and what the evidence tells us about them.

10:00–11:00 AM | Policy Debate

Secure, Sovereign, Free? Europe's Innovation Dilemma

The Draghi and Heitor reports converge on one diagnosis: Europe must strengthen its capacity for innovation. At the same time, research security, strategic autonomy, and export controls are redefining the conditions of international scientific collaboration. This debate brings together three perspectives – European security policy, strategic foresight and research governance, and the practice of building secure digital infrastructure – and asks where the protection of Europe begins to constrain the openness on which excellent science depends.

Prof. Dr. Hylke Dijkstra – Maastricht University Europe Chair and Professor of International Security and Cooperation
Perspective: Studies how international organizations govern security and where security logics meet the openness of science.

Dr. Georgios Kolliarakis – Coordinator, European Union P2P Dual-Use Export Control Programme, and Senior Associate Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)
Perspective: Works on the international security governance of sensitive research and technology in a fragmented geopolitical environment.

Eduardo Brito – Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2025/26; Security Engineer and Industrial PhD Candidate, Cybernetica AS / University of Tartu
Perspective: Contributes the practitioner's view from developing secure digital infrastructure, including decentralized proof-of-location systems.

Norbert Sagstetter – Head of Unit, eGovernment and Trust, DG CONNECT, European Commission
Perspective: Brings the European Commission's perspective on building trusted digital infrastructure for public services across Europe.

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Michael Riesener, Director Laboratory for Machine Tools and Production Engineering (WZL), Chair of Production Engineering, and Rector's Representative for Translation, RWTH Aachen University

11:00–11:10 AM | Coffee Break

11:10 AM–12:10 PM | Interactive Fishbowl

Who Owns a Good Idea? Transfer, Trust and Tensions

Universities are increasingly expected totranslate research into societal and economic impact. In practice, transfer raises fundamental questions: who owns the results when industry funds research, who decides what may be published, and what becomes of curiosity-driven research when applicability is expected immediately? 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. One chair on stage remains open: members of the audience are invited to take it and join the discussion.

Prof. Dr. Cyrus Mody – Professor in the History of Science, Technology and Innovation; Director, Maastricht University Science, Technology and Society Studies (MUSTS)
Perspective: Offers a historical perspective on how universities and industry have shared – and contested – research.

Dr. Jürgen Janger – Senior Economist, Austrian Institute of Economic Research (WIFO)
Perspective: Examines the economic evidence on which transfer and innovation policies actually generate societal impact.

Dr. Agnieszka Radziwon – Associate Professor of Innovation Management, Aarhus University; Visiting Scholar, University of California, Berkeley
Perspective: Studies university–industry collaboration and open innovation on both sides of the Atlantic.

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Matthias Wessling, Vice-Rector for Translation and Transfer and Professor of Chemical Process Engineering, RWTH Aachen University

12:10–1:00 PM | Evidence Session

Academic Freedom Under Pressure: Data, Trust, and Institutional Resilience

Academic freedom in Europe is under pressure – through political interference, legal and administrative constraints, attacks on researchers, and declining trust in scientific expertise. But how can such developments be measured, and how can institutions respond? Drawing on findings from the Academic Freedom Monitor 2025 and broader reflections on European responses to challenges to academic freedom, this session connects empirical evidence with the institutional perspective of Europe's universities and asks what researchers, funders, and policymakers can do to halt the erosion of academic freedom.

Dr. Olga Ceran – Postdoctoral Researcher, UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles; Guest Researcher, Europa Institute, Leiden University; Co-Author, Academic Freedom Monitor
Perspective: Awarded first prize in the DAAD Fundamental Academic Values Award 2026 for her research on academic freedom and the rule of law in EU law; discusses findings from the Academic Freedom Monitor 2025 and broader reflections on European responses to challenges to academic freedom.

Dr. Monika Steinel – Deputy Secretary General, European University Association (EUA)
Perspective: Represents the largest network of universities in Europe and its work on university autonomyandacademic freedom.

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Stefan Böschen, Director, Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)

1:00–2:00 PM | Lunch Break

BLOCK II What Freedom Depends On

What Europe needs: the conditions that keep research free – and the political choices that will decide whether Europe can protect them.

2:00–2:45 PM | Lightning Talks

Freedom Depends On …

Debates on the freedom of research and innovation often remain abstract. This session grounds them in three concrete conditions on which autonomy depends in practice: control over industrial supply, physical survival, and control over data. Three short interventions introduce the analytical categories to whichthe afternoon returns.

… Secure Data

Dr. Paul-Olivier Dehaye – CEO, hestia.ai; Founder, PersonalData.IO
Perspective: Played a key role in uncovering the Cambridge Analytica case and works on individuals' controlovertheir personal data.

… Survival: The Case of Ukraine

Dr. Tetiana Vodotyka – Academic Director, Master's Program in Urban Studies and Postwar Reconstruction, Kyiv School ofEconomics
Perspective: Teaches urban studies and postwar reconstruction in a country at war – the most existential perspective of the day.

2:45–3:30 PM | Deep Dive I · Freedom Depends on Supply

"Freed from Desire": Confronting Europe's Dependencies in Medical Supply

This deep dive applies the question of sovereignty to a field that concerns everyone. Around 80% of Europe's imported pharmaceutical ingredients come from just five countries, nearly half from China. The Critical Medicines Act, agreed in May 2026, is Europe's first serious legislative attempt to reduce this dependency. Yet reshoring production is not merely a question of industrial policy: it raises the questions of who determines what counts as critical, and who bears the cost of resilience.

Elizabeth Kuiper – Associate Director, Health and Societal Resilience, European Policy Centre
Perspective: Analyzes the Critical Medicines Act and European health resilience policy in Brussels.

Yu-Wei Chen – Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2025/26, Visiting Researcher, Charité Center for Global Health
Perspective: Researches Europe's dependencies in medical supply.

Prof. Dr. Albrecht Eisert – Chief Pharmacist, RWTH Aachen University Hospital
Perspective: Manages the consequences of medicine shortages in daily hospital practice and brings the clinical view on what resilience in medical supply requires.

Moderator: Fabia Kehren, Member of the Charlemagne Prize Directorate

3:30–3:45 PM | Coffee Break

3:45–4:30 PM | Deep Dive II · Freedom Depends on Networks

Freedom through Networked Cooperation – The Role of Leadership Programs

As populism challenges open societies and funding for international exchange comes under pressure, the networks that connect people across borders matter more than ever. Leadership programs create spaces for trust, independent thinking, and collaboration – but what happens when their foundations begin to erode? Representatives of programs in North Rhine-Westphalia discuss what is at stake and how such networks can continue to sustain an open and resilient Europe.

Speakers: Representatives of Leadership Programs in North Rhine-Westphalia

Moderator: Johanna Vogel, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)

4:30–5:00 PM | Closing / Lightning Talk

Europe – What's at Stake? Can Europe Become a Safe Haven for Free Research?

Two months after the state election in Saxony-Anhalt, in which the AfD became the strongest party, and at a time when researchers are leaving the United States, the closing session draws together the threads of the day. Drawing on her own experience of moving from Harvard to Mannheim in 2026, Dr. Eirliani Abdul Rahman will give a short talk on how freedom of research can be protected – institutionally, politically, and structurally – and whether Europe is prepared to become the safe haven it aspires to be. The talk will be followed by a Q&A with the audience.

Dr. Eirliani Abdul Rahman – Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), University of Mannheim

Perspective: Moved from Harvard to Mannheim in 2026 with support from the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung's academic freedom program, citing growing threats to academic freedom in the United States – a firsthand perspective on Europe as a safe haven.

Moderator: Prof. Dr. Stefan Böschen, Director, Käte Hamburger Kolleg: Cultures of Research (c:o/re)

The Symposium will be moderated by Dr. Julia Hagel.

Stand-up FoR Science Night

THU · NOV 5 · AACHEN

From 6:30 PM · Apollo Kino & Bar, Aachen
Program in German, parts in English

The questions of the day, after dark: a poetry slam, a midterms special, a late-night talk between spaceflight and comedy – and a film about the price of freedom.

6:30–6:45 PM | Opening · Cinema 4

Prof. Dr. Matthias Wessling – Vice-Rector for Translation and Transfer, RWTH Aachen University

6:45–7:45 PM | Stage A · Cinema 1 · Poetry Slam

Words for Freedom

Four slammers, one theme – and the audience decides.

Käte, Luise Wolff, Leon Hanke, Björn Rosenbaum – Slammers

Moderator: Simon Middelkoop

6:45–7:45 PM | Stage B · Cinema 3 · Midterms Special

Two Days After the Midterms: The Future of the Transatlantic Relationship

On November 3, the United States vote. Two days later, two experts assess the results and their implications for Europe, as well as the long term pathways for the transatlantic relationship.

Dr. Mayssoun Zein Al Din – Executive Director, Academy of International Affairs NRW; Senior Fellow, CASSIS, Universityof Bonn
Talk: Midterms and Global Power: U.S. Foreign Policy under Trump

Anca Agachi – Defense Policy Analyst, RAND; Charlemagne Prize Fellow 2025/26
Talk: Global Power beyond 2026: The Future of the Transatlantic Relationship

8:00–9:00 PM | Late NightTalk · Cinema 4

From Orbit to Open Mic

A meteorologist who trained for spaceflight and one of Germany's best-known comedians in conversation about curiosity, courage – and what is worth laughing about.

Dr. Insa Thiele-Eich – Meteorologist and Spaceflight Expert; trained as an Astronaut Candidate
Perspective: Brings the scientist's curiosity – from climate research to preparing for a mission into space.

Khalid Bounouar – Comedian (Rebell Comedy)
Perspective: Brings the comedian's view on freedom of speech and what society can laugh about.

Moderator: Luca Swieter

From 9:15 PM | Movie · Cinema1

The Seed of the Sacred Fig

Mohammad Rasoulof's acclaimed film about a family in Iran under political pressure. The director left Iran in secret before the film's premiere – a fitting conclusion to a day about what freedom depends on.

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