



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



Leopoldina
Nationale Akademie
der Wissenschaften



Towards the European Fifth Freedom and Global Competition: Voices from Science

Science-Policy Event on
the Future of European
Research and Innovation

29 June 2026
Brussels · Belgium

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Rationale

The “European Fifth Freedom” – the free flow of knowledge, research, innovation, and talent – embodies Europe’s ambition in a time of global competition and tensions. Realising this vision, as outlined in the Letta and Draghi Reports, requires more than policy frameworks and funding. It calls for collective action from the scientific community and policymakers, grounded in well-informed choices.

Expectations are high for the tenth European Union Framework Programme “Horizon Europe” and the European Commission’s commitment to building an agile European research and innovation ecosystem – one that integrates the European Research Area, the European Innovation Area, and the European Education Area with policies such as the “28th Regime” and “Choose Europe for Science”. Success will widely depend on ensuring these policies reflect the needs, potential, and responsibilities of researchers and innovators.

The European Research Council and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, supported by National Academies from the Netherlands, Slovakia, Finland, and Cyprus, are bringing together decision-makers and scientists to build common understanding around critical questions:

How should FP10 be designed and function, and what should it prioritise? How can central European policies on research and innovation strengthen both competitiveness and strategic autonomy? How can we ensure responsible international cooperation in science and technology under unstable geopolitical and security conditions?

Welcome



Distinguished guests,

Europe has no shortage of talent, ideas or scientific ambition. What it needs now is the confidence and clarity to make full use of them.

The idea of a European Fifth Freedom – the free movement of knowledge, research, innovation and talent – comes at an important moment. Europe is asking how it can remain competitive, secure and open in a world marked by geopolitical tension, technological change and intense global competition. These questions cannot be answered by science alone. But they cannot be answered without science.

The European Research Council was based on a simple principle: that Europe should support the best researchers, in all fields, to pursue the most ambitious questions, wherever those questions may lead. This principle has served Europe well. Frontier research expands what we know, trains the people who will shape future discoveries, and creates possibilities that no policymaker, market or programme can fully predict in advance.

As Europe prepares FP10 and considers the future of its research and innovation landscape, we should hold on to what works. Excellence, openness, autonomy and trust in researchers are not luxuries. They are conditions for Europe's long-term strength.

This event brings together scientists, academies, policymakers and institutions at a time when choices are being made that will shape European science for decades. I am grateful to the Leopoldina and to our partner academies for helping to create this space for serious discussion.

I hope our conversations will be open, practical and ambitious – and that they will help Europe act on the knowledge, talent and freedom it already possesses.



Distinguished guests,

Europe's strength in research and innovation has long underpinned its economic competitiveness and democratic resilience. In an era of complex global transformation, rigorous science remains an indispensable basis for policy decisions.

The current moment is critical: political choices about the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034 and the design of the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation will determine the resources and frameworks available to European science for the next decade. Those choices are being made now.

Together with the European Research Council and fellow National Academies from the Netherlands, Slovakia, Finland and Cyprus, we have convened this event because these decisions cannot be made well without direct engagement between the scientific community and policymakers.

Three questions are central to our discussions: how FP10 can be structured for maximum impact; how the “Fifth Freedom” can move from aspiration to implementation; and how Europe retains talent and sustains its position in international science and technology. The answers have implications not only for research and innovation, but for growth and strategic autonomy.

As Germany's National Academy of Sciences, Leopoldina is committed to science that is inseparable from freedom, excellence and merit, and addresses the challenges societies face. Evidence shows that Europe maintains competitive advantages in fields of global significance. The strategic question is whether the conditions we put in place will unlock or constrain them.

I invite you to engage substantively in today's conversations, so that together we can help build a Europe that lives up to its promise.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Bettina D. Gall".



Programme

Programme

12:00 – 13:00 **Meet and greet over light lunch and refreshments**

13:00 – 13:10 **Welcome**

Maria **LEPTIN**

President of the European Research Council, Brussels, Belgium

Bettina **ROCKENBACH**

President of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, Halle, Germany

13:10 – 14:00 **Opening panel: Doing Excellent Science in Europe**

Keynote

Ekaterina **ZAHARIEVA**

European Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation, Brussels, Belgium

Panel

Ekaterina **ZAHARIEVA**

European Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation, Brussels, Belgium

Dietmar **HARHOFF**

Managing Director of the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition Munich, Germany & Member of the Strategy Group for Technology and Innovation of the German Federal Chancellor

Maryna **VIAZOVSKA**

2022 Fields Medallist; École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland

Mirta **GALESIC**

Complexity Hub Vienna, Austria & Santa Fe Institute, USA

Moderator: Bettina **ROCKENBACH**, President of the Leopoldina, Germany

14:00 – 14:15 **Coffee break**

14:15 – 15:15 **Panel: Towards a New European Knowledge Economy**

Keynote

Enrico **LETTA**

Former Prime Minister of Italy; President of the Jacques Delors Institute Paris, France & Dean of the IE School of Politics, Economics and Global Affairs in Madrid, Spain

Panel

Enrico **LETTA**

President of the Jacques Delors Institute Paris, France

Severine **VERMEIRE**

Rector of KU Leuven, Belgium

Carole **MUNDELL**

Director of Science, European Space Agency & Head of European Space Astronomy Centre, Madrid, Spain

Nuria **OLIVER**

Vice President and Co-Founder of the European Laboratory for Learning and Intelligent Systems (ELLIS); Director of ELLIS Alicante, Spain

Moderator: Olya **KUDINA**, Delft University of Technology & Dutch Young Academy, The Netherlands

15:15 – 16:15 **Panel: Towards an Impactful and Attractive FP10**

Maria **LEPTIN**

President of the ERC, Brussels, Belgium

Martin **VENHART**

President of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

Marileen **DOGTEROM**

Past President of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Soteris **KALOGIROU**

Founding Member of the Cyprus Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts & Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus

Moderator: Pekka **AULA**, Secretary-General of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Helsinki, Finland

16:15 – 16:45 **Coffee break**

16:45 – 17:45 **Panel: Towards a New Global Pathway for Scientific Cooperation**

Peter R. **NEUMANN**

Professor of Security Studies, King's College London, UK

Junko **HIBIYA**

Vice-President of the Science Council of Japan, Tokyo, Japan

Shekhar C. **MANDE**

President of the Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi, India

Metin **SITTI**

President of the Koç University Istanbul, Türkiye

Moderator: Marie-Louise **NOSCH**, University of Copenhagen, Denmark &
Vice President of ALLEA – All European Academies

17:45 – 17:50 **Technical break**

17:50 – 19:00 **Closing panel: Co-Creating European R&I Policy**

Presentation of “Brussels Messages”

Bettina **ROCKENBACH**, President of Leopoldina

Christian **EHLER**

Member of the European Parliament, Rapporteur for FP10 Horizon Europe
and the European Competitiveness Fund

Regina **VALUTYTĖ**

Vice-Minister for Education, Science and Sports of Lithuania

Andreas **SCHWARZ**

Head of Cabinet of the European Commissioner for Startups,
Research and Innovation

Moderator: Conny **AERTS**, Member of the ERC Scientific Council

19:00 – 20:30 **Networking walking dinner**



Speakers

Speakers



Conny AERTS

ERC Scientific Council, Brussels, Belgium



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Pekka AULA

Secretary-General, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Helsinki, Finland



➤ Further
Information



Marileen DOGTEROM

TU Delft & Past President, The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam, The Netherlands



➤ Further
Information



Christian EHLER

Member of the European Parliament, Rapporteur for FP10 Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund, Brussels, Belgium



➤ Further
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Mirta GALESIC

Co-leader of the Research Group on Collective Minds, Complexity Hub Vienna, Austria & Santa Fe Institute, USA



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Dietmar HARHOFF

Managing Director, Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition Munich, Germany & Strategy Group for Technology and Innovation of the German Federal Chancellor



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Junko HIBIYA

Vice-President, Science Council of Japan, Tokyo, Japan



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Soteris KALOGIROU

Founding Member of the Cyprus Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts & Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol



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Olya KUDINA

Delft University of Technology &
Dutch Young Academy, Netherlands



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Maria LEPTIN

President, European Research Council,
Brussels, Belgium



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Enrico LETTA

Former Prime Minister of Italy;
Dean, IE University, Madrid, Spain &
President, Jacques Delors Institute, Paris, France



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Shekhar C. MANDE

President, Indian National Science Academy,
New Delhi, India



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Carole MUNDELL

Director of Science, European Space Agency &
Head of European Space Astronomy Centre,
Madrid, Spain



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Peter R. NEUMANN

Professor of Security Studies,
King's College London, United Kingdom



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University of Copenhagen, Denmark &
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President, German National Academy of Sciences
Leopoldina, Halle, Germany



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Head of Cabinet of European Commissioner for
Startups, Research and Innovation, Brussels,
Belgium



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Metin SITTI

President, Koç University Istanbul, Türkiye



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Vice-Minister for Education, Science and Sports of
Lithuania



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Martin VENHART

President, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia



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Severine VERMEIRE

Rector, KU Leuven, Belgium



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2022 Fields Medallist; École Polytechnique Fédérale
de Lausanne, Switzerland



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Ekaterina ZAHARIEVA

European Commissioner for Startups, Research and
Innovation, Brussels, Belgium



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Organisers

Organisers



European Research Council

The European Research Council, set up by the European Union in 2007, is the premier European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. It funds creative researchers of any nationality and age, to run projects based across Europe. The ERC is led by an independent governing body, the Scientific Council. Professor Dr Maria Leptin has been the President of the ERC since November 2021. The overall ERC budget from 2021 to 2027 is more than €16 billion, as part of the Horizon Europe programme, which is under the responsibility of Ekaterina Zaharieva, European Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation.

 erc.europa.eu



German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina

The Leopoldina was founded in 1652 as a classical scholarly society and now has more than 1,700 members from almost all branches of science. In 2008, the Leopoldina was appointed as the German National Academy of Sciences and, in this capacity, was entrusted with two major objectives: representing the German scientific community internationally, and providing policymakers and the public with science-based advice. The Leopoldina stands out for the freedom and appreciation of science on both the national and the international level. In the advice to policymakers and the public, the Leopoldina identifies and analyses important societal challenges and presents its policy recommendations in a scientifically qualified, independent, transparent and prospective manner, ever mindful of the standards and consequences of science.

www.leopoldina.org

In Cooperation With

The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences

The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) was founded in 1808. Today, the KNAW is a society of approximately 600 leading scientists in the Netherlands from across all disciplines and an independent advisory body to the government on matters related to science. In addition, the KNAW oversees twelve leading scientific institutes. As such, the KNAW fulfills three main tasks: fostering the exchange of ideas among scientists and between science and society, advising the government from a scientific perspective on matters of scientific and societal importance and strengthens the practice of science by conducting and stimulating high-quality research.

➤ www.knaw.nl

Finnish Academy of Science and Letters

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters is a broad-based learned society founded in 1908 with the principal aim of promoting scientific research, acting as a bond between those engaged in advanced research and supporting better utilisation of high-quality research in decision-making.

➤ www.acadsci.fi

Slovak Academy of Sciences

The Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) is an autonomous, publicly funded non-university institution organised into three main scientific divisions. Its core tasks are conducting advanced basic research across the natural, technical, medical, social sciences, and humanities; providing universities and R&D organisations with access to high-quality scientific infrastructure; and executing long-term strategic and applied research with businesses, public administration, and civil society to develop innovative technologies. Globally integrated, the SAS partners with organisations like CERN, ESA, and UNESCO, participates in European programmes like Horizon Europe, and utilises performance-based funding contracts to drive national innovation.

 www.sav.sk

Cyprus Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts

The Cyprus Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts is the Republic of Cyprus's highest intellectual institution in the sciences, humanities, and arts, bringing together leading scientists, scholars, writers, and artists as a centre of excellence, independent thought, and intellectual leadership. Established by law as an autonomous public institution, it promotes excellence in research, education, innovation, culture, and interdisciplinary dialogue, while supporting evidence-based public policy and international cooperation with academies, universities, research institutions, and cultural organisations worldwide. Through its activities, the Academy strengthens the role of knowledge and scientific expertise in society and enhances the international presence and intellectual contribution of Cyprus.

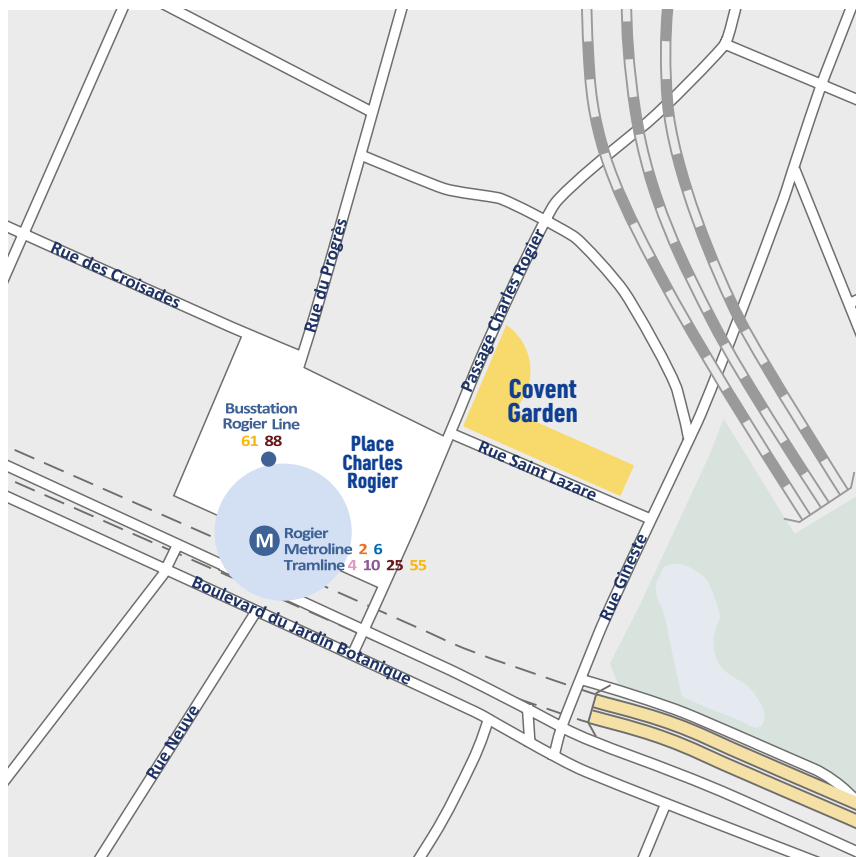
 www.academyofcyprus.cy

Logistics

Venue

European Research Council Headquarters

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