

Text of the Address

by the President of the DFG Prof. Dr.-Ing. Matthias Kleiner
at the DFG New Year's Reception

Berlin

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— Check against delivery —



Ministers and Senators,
State Secretaries,
Members of the Bundestag,
Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Presidents and Chancellors,
Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the DFG Executive Committee and the Head Office, I am delighted to welcome you to the annual New Year's reception of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft after a hopefully relaxing and peaceful holiday season. I would like to extend to you my very best wishes for 2012 – good health, success and satisfaction, which, unfortunately, do not always go hand in hand – and new ideas and the courage to pursue these, but also productive leisure and regenerative rest, which I will refer to again later.

As every year, it is a great pleasure for me to especially welcome our international guests. Thank you very much for joining us tonight. I would also like to thank you for your greatly appreciated cooperation in the past year. I am looking forward to having interesting and fruitful discussions with you later on this evening.

Tonight I would also like to greet our successful young scientists, the 2011 “Europa-Preis” recipients in last year's *Jugend forscht* competition: Benjamin Walter from Meißen for his research on graph synthesis in semiconductor technology; Gabriel Salg and Nicolas

Scheidig from Hösbach who developed a new deodorising substance, and Danial Sanusi, Fabien Henneke and Xianghui Zhong from Bremen who conducted research in mathematics and geometry. It's great to have you with us tonight. Once again congratulations on your success! Incidentally, I understand that Mr. Henneke and Mr. Sanusi are now neighbours of the DFG: they study mathematics at the University of Bonn.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In reflecting on 2011, it may seem odd that my speech today can, or even should, pick up where I left off a year ago. Leisure and quietude were the keywords of my last New Year's address. There appeared to be a need for both in science and research even in early 2011, as the number of new recommendations, initiatives and ideas, and competitive pressure seemed to get out of hand. Of course it is important to keep a close eye on the research system, to identify and promote opportunities early on, and to be able to detect and minimise shortcomings and risks. Indeed, the DFG also considers this as one of its main tasks as it represents the interests of all researchers in Germany.

This vigilant attitude and focused attention provide the basis for important projects and plans in our research system. Take the Excellence Initiative, which I will address more in a moment: It arose from the critical insight that the dogma of the equality of all universities was a path to mediocrity. By spurring competition and differentiation, the Excellence Initiative has triggered one of the most consequential shifts in decades. Other changes in science and research have their origins in the work of individual researchers and research groups; they happen along the way when scientists and scholars exchange practices and approaches. But all changes, whether they are intended or occur as consequences of scientific processes, must be established and implemented, and they must evolve. Changes take time to settle in, to be effective and gain acceptance. They require the productive leisure and regenerative rest I referred to earlier — in science and academia as elsewhere in life and in the world.

Over the last year, I may have given a bit more thought to researchers as individuals. This has led me to talk about situations that are particularly conducive to the free development of ideas and topics that subsequently inspire projects, unlock knowledge, and are formulated as findings.

Just recently, *ZEIT online* asked four *Kreative*, or “creative individuals”, about their sources of inspiration:¹ “Quietude and contemplation” is the answer given by a composer. A screenwriter says that she spins her stories before she goes to sleep and picks up the thread right after she wakes up; she refers to her work as an “inner dialogue”. A scholar² talks about “sufficient time to read and think” and how he’s at his most creative outside of everyday routines and commitments. And a writer experiences “momentary flashes of openness” less often when he’s under stress. Over the last year, I’ve talked quite a bit about leisure and the idleness of the individual — which is not about inactivity but rather about enabling ideas to get off the ground. Idleness appears to be one of the hardest things for us to do these days.

I had chosen this topic, among other reasons, to point out that even the best-intentioned initiatives and advice end up being handled, implemented and administered by the same academics who urgently require freedom for their research. Meanwhile, however, the opposite has occurred: Productive leisure and rest have become too rare a commodity. So this — let me call it a concern — this concern has taken on a systemic character. There is growing critical sentiment against unproductive restlessness, excessive competition, and external funding pressures in academia, because these are detrimental to the real thing, the essence of science and research. Some of these pressures result from our behaviour in science but science, too, can counteract these. An example is the DFG’s promotion of “quality over quantity“, a citation practice that serves to counter the “publish-or-perish” concept that is often prevalent in research. But these pressures are also found in the increasingly growing competition for diminishing resources in teaching and core funding for universities.

Ladies and gentlemen, let’s pause a moment to look back over the past year. We all know that it was a restless one — for science and research, but also in general. Japan, and with it the country’s researchers, were painfully and fatally hit by natural disasters. These had far-reaching consequences around the world, including in Germany, where the nuclear phase-out and the energy turnaround were agreed. And these consequences affected Germany’s scientific community. Not only are scientists increasingly called on to contribute their opinions to political decision-making processes and share their socially relevant insights and findings, they are also called on to advance innovation in renewable energies and storage options, to name two examples. This is of course a welcome and sensible development, and consistent with another genuine task of the DFG as the self-governing organisation of universities and

¹ Christian Heinrich, Franziska Bauer, Julia Nolte. Raum für Gedankenspiele: Gute Ideen sind ihr Beruf: Vier Kreative verraten, was sie inspiriert. *ZEIT online*. Retrieved 5 Jan 2012.

² Subject area: organisation studies and sociology of scientific knowledge

non-university research institutes and as the representative of researchers across Germany: providing policy advice. But it's also another activity that requires time.

Soon thereafter, the research community was shaken by reports of plagiarism in dissertations by prominent individuals, which then led to further and ultimately quite helpful discussions on doctorates and the supervision of doctoral researchers. In this sense, these unfortunate cases actually did some good, by raising awareness of the conditions under which doctorates are earned in Germany — conditions that may not always be optimal and which we are committed to keep improving. And we should rely on campaigns by the universities and departments to guarantee the quality of doctorates.

But we also shouldn't ignore — and, in fact, we should take it as an invitation to look forward with confidence — that important impulses were given in this turbulent year, not only externally, but also and particularly by the scientific community itself. Think of the inception of Science Europe last October in Berlin, which, in the midst of the so-called European crisis, stands as an explicit commitment to research cooperation in Europe and to the European Research Area. From its outset, Science Europe has brought together 50 national research and research funding organisations with annual budgets totalling approximately €30 billion, replacing other cooperation forums. The self-organisation of European science and research, which includes networks and associations such as higher education institutions, academies of sciences and humanities and other science and research organisations, has thus progressed. An essential third pillar has been created, in addition to the European Commission and the governments of member states, to design a common research area.

Inspired by this example, let us now direct our gaze ahead. The review process for the second phase of the Excellence Initiative is in full swing. We look forward to June 15th as we await what will happen, especially *after* the decisions — at universities, at previously existing and newly established clusters of excellence and graduate schools. I sense, as I'm sure you do, an increasing nervousness, which I understand. But today, as in the past years, I would like to emphasise that excellence in research and research funding did not begin with the Excellence Initiative, nor will it end there. And I hope and am convinced that, in the future, there will be mechanisms and opportunities for continuing to map research excellence in Germany.

After June 15th, there will also be a sigh of relief heard from everyone involved, including those in the review and decision-making processes, and I want to express my sincere gratitude to you: for your dedication, your care and your focus, which have been reported to me many times from the panel sessions. My thanks especially go to my colleagues at the DFG Head Office who were involved in the process.

The continuation of the Excellence Initiative offers great opportunities; this much is certain. And we, both science and government policymakers, are thinking ahead, as well we should be. Isn't it time to get to the bottom of the causes of that critical mood and the uneasiness that the DFG naturally encounters as the largest provider of external funds, which I mentioned earlier? Shouldn't we act now?

In thinking about the future of the Excellence Initiative, both from a research funding perspective and as president of the DFG, I approach the topic from at least three different angles:

First of all, to successfully maintain the progress of what has been achieved and to build on the many positive impulses in the long term, the core funding of universities, which is currently insufficient with regard to international standards and even more in research and teaching, must be increased considerably, that is by one quarter. States must be financially enabled to make use of every opportunity, including new cooperation mechanisms and a new assessment of university fees, to fulfil their constitutional tasks. The social and economic prospects for a strong education and training system require adequate funding. But the benefits to society are great. Germany's economic success last year was not only a result of the number of worldwide buyers of our exports; the success was primarily due to the well-trained workers who produce these products in Germany on a sophisticated technological level and at high quality. But the global competition continues.

In research, competition and cooperation, particularly collaboration across national borders, have proven time and again to be key drivers of scientific progress. Researchers and politicians have always acknowledged this. But when they are accompanied by continually diminishing core funding for our universities, which are after all the backbone of research in Germany and which German Federal Minister Annette Schavan recently referred to as the "heart of the scientific and research system", and when competition for internal and external funding continually increases, we run the risk that our system will go out of balance, if it hasn't done so already.

A one-quarter increase in core funding would equal approximately €5 billion annually. This amount would be one billion less than the tax reductions proposed for 2013 and 2014. To give you a further example, this envisioning would account for about half a percentage point of the value-added tax revenue, which currently accounts for about €180 billion per year. And to imagine further: Half a percent would be impractical, and university education is just as important as school education. So how about increasing the value-added tax in Germany by one percentage point, and investing the yield in Germany's educational system? Doing away with the cooperation ban and establishing new forms of cooperation would be to the benefit of all, for both school and university educations are considered cherished and valuable goods for us in Germany. Our shared conviction could become a common task.

But back to the prospects following the Excellence Initiative: The second angle is devoted to those who are responsible for research funding. They must also consider the future of those institutions that will be awarded approximately one-third of available funding for the first time in June. For reasons of fairness, and in keeping with those institutions awarded funding during the 2006/2007 competition, these first-time recipients should be allowed a second funding period following their initial five-year funding duration.

And that is why German science needs the additional funding allocated, even after expiry of the second round of the Excellence Initiative. This funding is about a factor of 10 lower than the estimated shortage of core funding in the universities. One way to secure these funds, or a portion thereof, for science is clear from our perspective: Graduate schools and clusters of excellence, two funding lines in the Excellence Initiative, should be permanently transferred to the DFG's funding portfolio.

Doing so would benefit all in the long term: Even beyond the Excellence Initiative, there is a need in all scientific areas for larger, purely quality-oriented, science-led, thematically open research projects that require substantial funding. And this would also enable the map of research excellence to continue to be drawn.

Third, our view must go beyond the Excellence Initiative and the time afterwards. The two pacts, which have benefitted science and academia in the recent past, must also be continued: the Pact for Research and Innovation and the Higher Education Pact. The programme allowances for indirect programme costs funded through the Higher Education Pact should be increased considerably in order to end or decrease the ruinous competition for funds between teaching and internal/external project funding.

Finally, allow me to repeat myself: An end has to be made to the dramatic underfinancing of universities. This will take great efforts and require new, innovative approaches. Dear Wolfgang Marquardt, I am confident that under your leadership, the forthcoming recommendations by the German Council of Science and Humanities will send intelligent, unmistakable signals for the future of scientific and academic systems and its financing.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can look forward to new developments and much more during the coming year. I would like to mention two events which will take place during the coming weeks and to which you are cordially invited: Beginning in March, the DFG will present an exhibition of projects funded through its Individual Grants Programme, a core programme that is sometimes wrongly said to be overshadowed by the DFG's coordinated programmes. "Von der Idee zur Erkenntnis" will open at the German Bundestag's Paul Löbe Haus on 6 March and will then tour the states and state parliaments. And on 27 February, here in the Leibniz Saal of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, we will confer the 2012 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prizes. And I would like to thank the Academy, especially its President, Professor Günter Stock, for allowing us to regularly hold our awards ceremony here.

And speaking of gratitude, I would also like to thank all of the DFG's friends: the German federal and state governments and their representatives for their support; the Donors' Association and private donors; the DFG's member organisations, the hundreds of voluntary members serving in the DFG's many committees, from the Executive Committee to the review boards, which were just recently elected last year; the tens of thousands of applicants and reviewers; my dear colleagues at the Alliance of German Science Organisations. And my special thanks go to the highly dedicated staff of the DFG Head Office with Dorothee Dzwonnek as its head. I would also like to thank Ina Sauer and all my colleagues at the DFG's Berlin Office and to all those who have contributed to the success of this evening, particularly the Supreme Jazz trio: Tilman Ehrhorn, Benedikt Reidenbach und Oliver Potratz.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming this evening. I now cordially invite you to indulge in the basic principle of science: conversation. Strike up a discussion, share your observations, and use the 2012 New Year's reception of the DFG to engage in lively exchanges and interesting conversations.

But before I close, I'd like to mention one more thing that is close to my heart. As you know, Bernd Scholz-Reiter, who has been a dedicated supporter and driver of the work of the DFG's Executive Committee since 2007, has been elected as the new rector of the

University of Bremen as of 1 September 2012. He has already resigned from his position as DFG vice president to avoid any appearance of partiality. As the saying goes, “One man’s joy is another man’s sorrow.” I congratulate the University of Bremen on this new addition, and you, dear Bernd, on your new position, for which I wish you all the best. Thank you for all your work as Vice President of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. We’re going to miss you.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I encourage you to use this opportunity also to talk to Mr. Scholz-Reiter, once more as outgoing Vice President, and as the future rector of the University of Bremen. We’ll continue to see him, to see you, in our circle.

Thank you, and have a wonderful evening.