

PRESS RELEASE

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Launch of Germany's High-Tech Agenda

Technology Transfer Thrives on Freedom

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft welcomes the official launch of the German government's High-Tech Agenda and sees it as a strong signal that innovation policy is being prioritized. Today's launch marks the start of the urgently needed rapid implementation of the program, which aims to strengthen Germany's innovative capacity and accelerate the translation of strategic technologies into practice. The key to success is the freedom to innovate.

By prioritizing competitiveness, value creation, and economic strength, the High-Tech Agenda is laying the foundation for Germany's future viability. "Fraunhofer welcomes the German government's focus on strategic markets and key technologies. The program is moving in the right direction by advancing technologies that build on Germany's strengths to boost the economy in the long term," says Holger Hanselka, President of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft. "As a bridge between research and practice, we welcome that the translation of research findings into practical applications is built in from the start. This will pave the way for innovation and long-term success."

"In the face of global upheaval and international competition, we must translate innovation into measurable value creation and market share. With our focus on and deep understanding of the market, Fraunhofer is the ideal partner to advance and implement the goals of the High-Tech Agenda," adds Constantin Häfner, Executive Board Member for Research and Transfer at the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft. "The roadmaps for key technologies must now be developed quickly. We can build the necessary bridges between research and industry. We now need large, visible innovation projects with real impact — not small projects."

Fraunhofer calls for a legal foundation for the freedom to innovate

However, Germany as a location for innovation is facing a dilemma: Despite mostly high-quality scientific results, innovations that are expected to have an economic impact often fail to materialize. In addition to other factors, current structural and legal conditions often slow down the transfer of knowledge and technology, in some cases even preventing it. We therefore need a legal framework that provides the leeway and flexibility required for modern and efficient knowledge transfer. "The German government has acknowledged this necessity and, in its coalition agreement, proposed a Freedom of Innovation Act, which now requires swift action," says Hanselka. Among other things, the law would reduce bureaucratic fragmentation in funding, create exemptions in public procurement, and remove non-profit-law hurdles across all transfer

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channels. Fraunhofer is already proposing specific reforms for an innovation freedom initiative:

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Enabling small-scale series: Non-profit law must be adapted so that research institutes can produce small-scale series, not just prototypes and pilot series. Early production stages — especially in microelectronics and pharmaceuticals — often lack commercial providers. What’s more, manufacturing processes are still immature at this stage, resulting in high scrap rates.

Software licensing: Software licensing has become essential for translating research findings into practice. Here, industry expects viable solutions that go beyond prototypes. Secondary legislation must therefore be modernized to enable legally compliant licensing of functional software solutions that are developed in research.

Facilitating spin-offs: Non-profit organizations are subject to what is called prohibition of preferential treatment, which prevents them from favoring their commercial spin-offs. To avoid hindering the establishment of new companies based on Fraunhofer technologies, the prohibition of preferential treatment in non-profit law should be aligned with the de minimis rule in EU state aid law. This aid is so small that it does not noticeably distort competition.

Acknowledging knowledge and technology transfer as non-profit purposes: This would allow funding for spin-offs, within EU state-aid limits, to qualify as a non-profit purpose.

Incentivizing commercialization teams: Inventions and the translation of innovation into practice could be supported through targeted profit-sharing bonuses for commercialization teams.

Last-mile transfer: To date, a research organization’s facilities may only be used for statutory purposes. Legal certainty could be achieved if funding conditions expressly allowed third parties — such as spin-offs — to use available capacity.

In addition, there are still significant hurdles for collaboration between non-university research institutions and universities, for example in shared use of infrastructure, funding of junior research groups, and student projects. These must be simplified. The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft also advocates for a cross-departmental harmonization of funding conditions across all federal ministries, based on innovation-friendly standards, to cut red tape and increase transparency.

“We stand ready to work with government and industry to make the High-Tech Agenda a success. What we now need is the courage to implement not only technological innovations but, above all, the conditions that best support them,” Hanselka says.



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Fig. 2 Federal Minister for Research, Technology and Space, Dorothee Bär and Prof. Constantin Häfner, Board Member for Research and Transfer of the Fraunhofer Society.

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