

FONAS statement against undermining the separation of civilian and military research*

February 2025

FONAS demands:

1. *maintaining and strengthening the separation of civilian and military research,*
2. *clear and vocal statements of the universities and research facilities,*
3. *strengthening of the civil clauses.*

FONAS, the research network on science, disarmament, and international security is concerned about how scientific academies, national governments and the European Commission are increasingly launching initiatives that support a civil-military dual-use research funding policy and that want to blur or remove (partially) existing dividing lines between military and civilian research funding. Particularly worrisome initiatives are the "White Paper on options for enhancing support for research and development involving technologies with dual-use potential" of the European Commission (EC) of January 2024 and a position paper of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research of March 2024.¹ The EC paper aims to abolish the separation of civil and military EU research funding in order to "improve the integration and cross-fertilisation of civil and defence technologies". The Federal Ministry of Education and Research is pursuing a revival and deepening of dual-use funding programs, which have a long-lasting tradition in Germany.² To this end, it aims to undermine the civil clauses that universities and research institutions have adopted for themselves.

FONAS fears that the realization of these plans leads to the deliberate creation or expansion of civil-military gray areas in research and development. The offered funding creates

* This statement is an edited version of a machine translation of the official statement (in German), which can be found here: http://www.fonas.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/fonas-stellungnahme_DualUse_202502.pdf.

¹ European Commission. 2024. WHITE PAPER On options for enhancing support for research and development involving technologies with dual-use potential. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0027>.

Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung. 2024. Positionspapier des Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung zur Forschungssicherheit im Lichte der Zeitenwende. (*Position paper of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research on research security in light of the Zeitenwende*). <https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/2024/positionspapier-forschungssicherheit.html>.

FONAS released a statement on the EC White Paper, see: European Commission. 2024. Feedback from: Research Association for Science, Disarmament and International Security (FONAS). https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14060-RD-on-dual-use-technologies-options-for-support/F3464511_en.

² Liebert, Wolfgang, Rainer Rilling, and Jürgen Scheffran (eds). 1994. Die Janusköpfigkeit von Forschung und Technik: zum Problem der zivil-militärischen Ambivalenz. Marburg: BdWi-Verlag.

incentives for civilian research institutions and universities and can thus be a back door to the militarization of research and universities. Militarily relevant research orientations would be concealed. Many researchers would be left in the dark as to where the research paths should ultimately lead. Ethical dilemmas for researchers are foreseeable.³ The conscious decision to participate in military research or to be active in science exclusively for civilian purposes would be made more difficult or undermined. FONAS considers the hardly recognizable influence on young scientists through early contact with militarily relevant fields of work as highly problematic.

FONAS emphasizes that science crucially depends on transparency and public accessibility of research results and data. This is the only way to independently review results and ensure the quality of research, to maintain public confidence in science and its findings, and to let insights and data develop their full potential and be used by as many people and institutions as possible. The European Commission's Open Science Strategy is also based on this foundation.⁴ In contrast, military research is classified, which counteracts publishing research results. When mixing military and civilian research, this culture of confidentiality can also endanger the transparency and publication of the civilian research results.

Other central building blocks of science are cooperation and internationality. Foreign specialists contribute significantly to research at German universities, especially in mathematics and the natural sciences. According to a DAAD report on international academic mobility and international researchers in Germany, nearly every fourth university employee comes from abroad.⁵ More than half of the international staff at German universities come from non-EU countries. Strengthening this international cooperation and increasing Germany's attractiveness for foreign researchers are declared goals in the Federal Government's Future Strategy for Research and Innovation.⁶

These objectives cannot be achieved while intensifying military and dual-use research at universities. The increased security and confidentiality requirements of these research branches can exclude a significant part of the international staff from the outset. The fact that one is willing to impose such restrictions on projects with dual-use potential has already been made clear, for example, in the White Paper of the EC. Without a clear separation of civilian and military research, Germany runs the risk of unnecessarily restricting researchers and research projects. This harms the entire research site.

Civil clauses do not always prohibit research that takes place in cooperation or under the leadership of military actors and appropriate funding.⁷ However, they create a reference

³ Liebert, Wolfgang. 2021. Dual-use-Forschung und -Technologie. In: Handbuch Technikethik (Armin Grunwald and Rafaela Hillerbrand, eds), 289–294. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler.

⁴ Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. Open Science. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/open-science_en.

⁵ Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst and Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung (eds). 2024. Wissenschaft weltoffen 2024. Daten und Fakten zur Internationalität von Studium und Forschung in Deutschland und weltweit. Bielefeld: wbv Publikation.

⁶ Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung. 2023. Zukunftsstrategie Forschung und Innovation. https://www.bmbf.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/DE/1/730650_Zukunftsstrategie_Forschung_und_Innovation.pdf.

⁷ On the diversity of civil clauses in Germany, see for example: Nielebock, Thomas, Simon Meisch, and Volker Harms (eds). 2012. Zivilklauseln für Forschung, Lehre und Studium. Hochschulen zum Frieden verpflichtet. 1st edition. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

point at which the scientific institutions take responsibility for the direction of their research efforts. In addition, they create a framework in which the researchers themselves can consider, discuss and evaluate their project in a differentiated way based on different perspectives and criteria and can derive responsible decisions from it. Such a process can take place in advance, during the project and in the exploitation of results, at best with experts from ethics, arms control research and technology assessment. Thus, one may determine the added value of the research, and how it may support a peaceful conflict resolution, also taking into account the International Humanitarian Law.

By abolishing or even prohibiting nuanced civil clauses⁸, the space for discourse for the assessment of military, militarily relevant or dual-use research at the universities would be removed. Individual scientists would be left on their own. Being under pressure to publish and to solicit third-party funding, there is a risk that insufficiently reflected problematic projects will be pursued. Thus, the necessary accountability and assumption of responsibility within science should not be shifted solely to the individual researchers.

Instead of a planned dual-use research funding, which wants to ensure a convergence of civil and military research paths, a divergence of civil and military programs is to be sought from FONAS' point of view. Instead of creating civil-military gray areas, their unbundling is desirable, as far as possible.⁹ This requires the targeted promotion of appropriate technology assessment, preventive arms control research and ethical discourses. On this basis, it would be possible to create transparency about development trends, employment opportunities and normative guidelines that could prepare or support appropriate and morally acceptable decisions within research and policy.

FONAS believes that efforts to separate civilian and military research remain important and should be strengthened. This also applies to the institutions: Universities and publicly funded civilian research institutions should continue to be focused on civilian purposes and the treatment of relevant urgent future issues. Military research institutes or defense companies may pursue the other side of the research spectrum and dual-use research as long as war as an institution is not banned.

FONAS calls on universities and research institutions to position themselves and stand up for this very separation. This would also protect the individual researchers. Responsibility would not be shifted to the purely individual level.

FONAS also advocates strengthening the civil clauses and speaks out against the abolition or prohibition of these clauses. With their help, institutions can give themselves general research guidelines. They also offer individual researchers support and a discourse space to analyze and evaluate the research projects in relation to possible military use.

⁸ Bayerische Staatsregierung. 2024. Gesetz zur Förderung der Bundeswehr in Bayern. München. <https://www.verkuendung-bayern.de/gvbl/2024-257/>.

⁹ See, for example: Liebert, Wolfgang. 2006. Navigieren in der Grauzone: Kontrolle oder Gestaltung von Forschung und Technik? In *Einstein weiterdenken: Verantwortung des Wissenschaftlers und Frieden im 21. Jahrhundert* (Stephan Albrecht, Reiner Braun and Thomas Held, eds) 143–160. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.