

Need for a European Research Council

From being traditionally very strong, science in Europe has declined in a global comparison:

- Low funding of research in many European countries
- Suboptimal procedures for scientific evaluations making it difficult to allocate available resources appropriately
- Low mobility of European scientists
- Hierarchical academic structures making it difficult for young scientists to receive support and independence

Lisbon 2000: "EU should become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge based economy in the world by 2010"

Barcelona 2002: "3% of the gross national product in EU should be spent on science in 2010"

Aims of ERC

Enforce basic research in Europe (**retain, repatriate, recruit**)

Raise the level of ambition

Establish a model for research funding

Complement other EU support for research

Complement national support for basic research

ERC Scientific Council

- Role:**
- Establish overall scientific strategy
 - Control quality of operation and management
 - Ensure communication with the scientific community

22 members nominated by the scientific community and appointed by the commission

Chair: Helga Nowotny (Fotis Kafatos)

Vice Chairs: (Helga Nowotny)
Daniel Esteve

Secretary General: Andreu Mas-Colell (E-L Winnacker)

Meetings every 1-2 months

General principles for ERC's operation

Autonomy

Support to basic research in all fields

"Bottom up" principle

Support to individual projects

Evaluation by "peer review"

Quality and originality the only criteria

No "juste retour"

Transparency

Non-bureaucratic procedure

Flexible and portable grants

Encourage "cross-boundary" research

ERC grants

1. Starting Independent Researcher Grants (**StG**)

(2-12 years after PhD exam).

New from 2010: Separate treatment of

"Starters" (2-7 years after PhD) and

"Consolidators" (7-12 years after PhD)

100 - 300 (400) kEUR per year for up to 5 years

2. Advanced Investigator Grants (**AdG**)

Focus on the last 10 years of productivity

100 - 500 (700) kEUR per year for up to 5 years

Were did the ERC grants of the first calls go?

- **Most awards to established countries**
- **Awards to "new" countries in proportion to their support to research**
- **UK, CH and IL the most successful countries**
- **Women slightly lower success rate than men**
- **Some effect on mobility**

Experiences from the first years of ERC's operations

Positive experiences

- Overwhelming support from the scientific community
- The authority of the ERC Council to formulate the scientific strategy of ERC has been respected by the Commission
- Relatively easy to agree within the Council on general principles, type of calls, and procedures
- Skillful and committed staff at the ERC Secretariat in Brussels (both at DIS and at ERCEA)

Problems

Many problems have arisen from the subdivision of administration (being the responsibility of the Commission) and science (being the responsibility of the Council). Some examples:

- Cumbersome bureaucracy to assign panel members and external experts
- Slow reimbursement of travel expenses for panel members
- Poor treatment of panel members during their meetings
- Cumbersome conflict-of-interest rules
- Contracts rather than grants, meaning a lot of negotiations and restrictions
- Inflexibility with regard to handling of applications, etc

Vision for the future

- **Commitment from the Commission to follow the recommendations by the Midterm Review Committee**
- **Possibility for ERC to fulfil a crucial role in European science funding and to enhance the attractiveness of Europe for scientists**