

European Commission President José Manuel Barroso

*Video message at the
European Research Council's fifth anniversary
Brussels, 29 February 2012*

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Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regret not to be able to be with you in person, but I am very pleased that technology is allowing me to join you on this very special day.

Exactly five years ago, the European Research Council was launched in Berlin by Chancellor Merkel, fulfilling a longstanding dream of Europe's research community. It was the successful outcome of a process started in 2005, when I expressed the Commission's commitment to set up a European Research Council, with independent world-class scientists, selecting research projects on the basis of scientific excellence. I am so proud that my Commission is so closely associated to the birth of this European Research Council.

And it is wonderful to see that the ERC has become such a remarkable story for Europe in such a short time. Five years dedicated to supporting 2,500 of the very best and brilliant minds - not least the younger talents – play a key role in stimulating competitiveness and growth, in the challenging times we are going through.

This is what Europe 2020 is all about: a strategy to get the economy back on track over the coming decade - to build a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. Innovation is a cornerstone of this strategy and has been given a boost through this Innovation Union initiative. History has shown time and again that growth and prosperity go hand in hand with the research-innovation-education triangle.

The European Research Council is a key pillar of this strategy. 'Blue sky' research - the curiosity-driven frontier research - often sparks unexpected results and innovation. It opens up new opportunities for scientific and technological progress, and drives both societal development and economic growth forward.

Tackling the biggest diseases of our times, such as different types of cancer, or Alzheimers, and also novel approaches to energy efficiency using improved solar cells are among the best examples of its achievements.

The European Research Council has proven to be very efficient, non-bureaucratic and cost-effective in running its programmes. It is a great example of the Innovation Union's call for "doing more, better and faster".

But the ERC has also clearly spurred on healthy competition among the top scientists at a European level, which makes Europe more competitive in the global arena. These scientists are more mobile than ever, and research transcends borders. Europe needs to be a hot spot for the best minds, whether they are already here or are attracted from further afield.

This is why the Commission has proposed to give it a major funding boost in the next European framework

programme, 'Horizon 2020', for the period 2014 to 2020. In times of crisis, it would be a missed opportunity if Europe would not invest more in research and in particular in frontier research. We count on the support of the European Parliament and of the Member States to make this happen.

Today marks five years of considerable work by the ERC's Scientific Council and the ERC Executive Agency, turning this venture into a fully-fledged funding organisation, which has already become a beacon for excellence not only on the European research landscape. Let me conclude by saying "happy birthday" to this young member of the European family. I wish the ERC good luck with the next five years and beyond!

I can assure you, you have my strong personal commitment. I believe science and research should remain as top priority for us in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to end on this note and wish you an inspiring event.