

Press Release



The European Research Council marks 5 years of funding to over 2,500 top researchers

Brussels, 29 February 2012 – The European Research Council (ERC), which funds outstanding researchers throughout Europe, is today turning five. To celebrate this milestone, the ERC is organising a two-day event starting today in Brussels with first-class research personalities from around the world. The event “5 Years of Excellent IDEAS” will chart the ERC's achievements to date; it will allow participants to share their thoughts on excellence and "brain circulation" in the global scientific landscape and will deem how crucial frontier research is for Europe's growth and competitiveness.

After five years of existence, the ERC has funded more than 2,500 excellent researchers of 53 different nationalities working in some 480 different institutions across Europe. The total funding allocated to date, € 4.2 billion, has given them a chance to conduct their projects in Europe, of which many will spark new and sometimes unpredictable scientific and technological discoveries. The ERC is one of the instruments that addresses the current "brain drain": it has also allowed researchers to remain in or come to Europe, to gain scientific independence, and to hire and train a new generation of young researchers recruited as team members in their laboratories. In total, the ERC has therefore contributed to supporting over 12,000 researchers, thereby helping to fuel Europe's long-term economic prosperity.

In a video message, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso said: "*The ERC has become 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.*"

The ERC funds basic research across the entire spectrum of disciplines; ranging from studying the epidemiology of diseases like malaria or the causes of Parkinson, to improving critical infrastructures such as telecoms networks or water systems, creating new prototypes of chemical robots or discovering archaeological treasures in Africa.

EU Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science Máire Geoghegan-Quinn said: "*I am always impressed by the creativity and curiosity of the many ERC grantees I meet. The ERC is now recognised within and outside Europe as a model for frontier research funding. That is why the Commission has proposed a substantial increase of the ERC's budget under the EU's next research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020.*"

In only five years, the ERC has become a label of excellence recognised by the scientific community; its peer review evaluation system, the amount and the duration of ERC grants, but also their flexibility which includes the possibility to move host institution while keeping the grant, have become key features for individual researchers to boost their careers. To date, the ERC counts four Nobel Prize winners and three Field Medallists amongst its grantees, as well as the winners of 30 more internationally recognised prizes.

Ahead of this five year milestone, ERC President Professor Helga Nowotny commented: "*The ERC's fifth anniversary is the right moment to demonstrate the experience the ERC has gained in funding*

frontier research. It is not too much to say that the ERC has changed the scientific landscape in Europe and induced the emergence of a genuine European culture of scientific excellence". She also declared: "With hard work, vigorous support from many sides and a bit of luck, we were able to create a well-functioning, first-rate funding agency which has left its indelible mark within a very short period of time. It fills us with joy to see ERC grantees flourishing in universities and research institutions across Europe. I am convinced that they will continue to make significant contributions to frontier research, spawn further benefits and stimulate competition for excellence across Europe and worldwide".

The anniversary will further be an occasion for high-level profiles to debate on "Excellence and brain circulation in the global scientific landscape", which is one of the ERC's main priorities, at a round-table with guest speakers from Brazil, India, South Africa and the US. During the evening, five outstanding grantees will present the results of their research in a very original way and demonstrate the added-value of EU funding. Tomorrow, nine more grantees will give talks in three scientific sessions, one in each ERC domain (Physical Sciences & Engineering, Life Sciences and Social Sciences & Humanities).

The full programme is available on: <http://erc.europa.eu/erc-5th-anniversary/home>.

Note to the editors

Set up in 2007 by the EU, the **European Research Council** (ERC) is the first pan-European funding organisation for frontier research. It aims to stimulate scientific excellence in Europe by encouraging competition for funding between the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age. The ERC also strives to attract top researchers from anywhere in the world to come to Europe.

It funds both senior research leaders ('ERC Advanced Grants') and younger, early-career top researchers ('ERC Starting Grants'). The funding, awarded by peer review evaluation with excellence as sole criterion, can amount to maximum €2 million for a 'Starting Grant' and €3.5 million for an 'Advanced Grant'. Two additional, more limited forms of funding were introduced in 2011: the top-up grant 'Proof of Concept' targeted at ERC grant holders to fund the gap in the earliest stage of an innovation, between "blue sky" research and commercialisation, and the 'ERC Synergy Grants', launched on a pilot basis for exceptional proposals by a few small size groups of researchers working together.

The ERC operates according to an 'investigator-driven', or 'bottom-up', approach, allowing researchers to identify new opportunities in any field of research. The ERC, which is the newest, pioneering component of the EU's Seventh Research Framework Programme ('Ideas' Specific Programme), has a total budget of €7.5 billion from 2007 to 2013. For the next Framework Programme, 'Horizon 2020', the European Commission has proposed an increase of 77% of the ERC budget. The ERC is led by a Scientific Council, composed of 22 top scientists and scholars, and the ERC President is Professor Helga Nowotny. The ERC Executive Agency implements the 'Ideas' Specific Programme and is led by Director (ad int.) Pablo Amor. The ERC Secretary-General is Professor Donald Dingwell.

Links

Conference's website: <http://erc.europa.eu/erc-5th-anniversary/home>

ERC Website: <http://erc.europa.eu>

The ERC on Twitter: www.twitter.com/ERC_Research

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