
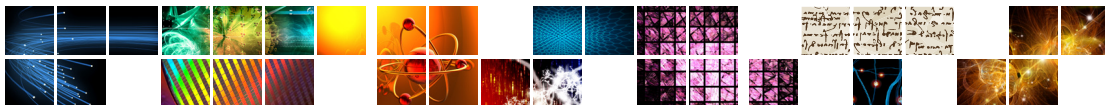




ideas

European Research Council

Newsletter of the European Research Council



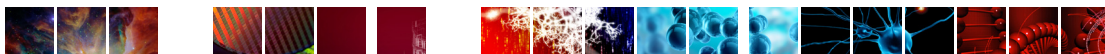
Horizon 2020
The future of
scientific excellence

Taking stock
With ERC President
Helga Nowotny

**ERC presents
its new leader**
Jean-Pierre Bourguignon

**Researchers
in the spotlight**
Did they break new ground?

Focus on
Croatia



To subscribe please click [here](#).

2013 ■ #4 (December)



Editorial

© European Commission 2012



Almost exactly two years after the European Commission presented our proposals for Horizon 2020, the programme is now a reality. *Horizon 2020* is a break from the past – a completely new, streamlined programme that will advance knowledge, boost competitiveness through innovation, and help improve quality of life.

What will not change is our commitment to excellence, and nothing embodies that commitment more than the European Research Council. After just seven years, the ERC has won a global reputation for funding the best curiosity-driven research. Nearly 4 000 top-tier researchers have now been funded, having gone through the most rigorous selection process.

Their work is vital. We face a series of complex, systemic problems affecting all aspects of our societies, such as climate change, energy insecurity and world hunger. Scientific and technological breakthroughs will play an important part in tackling these issues. That is why the ERC will receive a funding boost of almost 60%, to €13 billion, in *Horizon 2020*.

However, I am not arguing that we should simply be harnessing science to solve these challenges or produce economic growth. Beyond any practical benefits it brings, intellectual inquiry is a worthwhile pursuit in itself. Science satisfies our drive to get to the bottom of things and understand the world around us. To reveal the facts and uncover the truth.

The ERC now needs continued strong leadership and imagination to pursue these goals. That is why I am delighted the European Commission has followed my proposal to appoint Professor Jean-Pierre Bourguignon as the next President of the ERC, following the recommendation of the selection committee led by Lord Sainsbury.

Professor Bourguignon is the right choice for this task, given his distinguished academic career, international renown, and proven record of leadership. I am confident that he will defend the ERC principles of excellence and independence.

I also pay tribute to outgoing President Professor Helga Nowotny and former President Professor Fotis Kafatos. Both have led the ERC from strength to strength, showing imagination and determination.

Finally, I would like to thank all former and current members of the Scientific Council, the staff at the ERC Executive Agency and above all the ERC funded researchers, some of whose work you can read about in this newsletter. Here's to the next 4 000 grantees, and many more beyond!

Máire Geoghegan-Quinn
Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science

In this issue

3 > **Horizon 2020**

The future of scientific excellence

4 > **Taking stock**

Interview with ERC President
Prof. Helga Nowotny

6 > **Changing of the guard**

The ERC presents its new leader
Jean-Pierre Bourguignon

7 > **Going global**

ERC and Korea seal deal
to enhance cooperation

8 > **Researchers in the spotlight**

Did they break new ground?

10 > **Focus On**

Croatia

12 > **Did you miss this?**





Horizon 2020

The future of scientific excellence

Europe is about to enter a new chapter under the next research and innovation funding programme, Horizon 2020. With a budget of nearly €80 billion for the next seven years, it will be a key instrument of Europe's strategy to boost its global competitiveness and create growth and jobs. The European Research Council (ERC) will play a vital role in Horizon 2020 with a substantially increased budget of over €13 billion, compared to €7.5 billion under the previous framework programme (FP7).

In November 2011, the European Commission proposed the new framework programme for 2014 to 2020, bringing together research and innovation. After months of in-depth discussions, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU gave their green light to the proposal, just in time for *Horizon 2020* to begin on schedule in January 2014. In preparation for the big kick-off, launch events are now happening all around Europe.

With innovation as its leitmotif, *Horizon 2020* has the ambitious goal of providing seamless and coherent funding from idea to market. From scientific breakthroughs all the way to innovative products and services that can support new businesses and job opportunities. In times of economic crisis, this is more important than ever and will help to make a real difference to people's lives.

To achieve this goal, *Horizon 2020* is built on three pillars:

1. **Excellent science** – to strengthen the EU's position in science, attracting the best talents from around the world. The ERC is a key part of this pillar.
2. **Competitive industries** - to strengthen industrial leadership and innovation, including major investment in key technologies, greater access to capital and support for SMEs.
3. **Tackling societal challenges** - to create a better society through research and innovation, facing challenges shared by all Europeans (climate change, food safety, ageing etc.).

Under *Horizon 2020*, it will become easier for researchers and companies to access funds thanks to simpler procedures, partly inspired by the ERC's way of working.

Building on Excellence: the ERC in Horizon 2020

Under the new programme, the ERC's mission remains unchanged: providing attractive, long-term funding to the best, creative scientists and their teams to pursue ground-breaking, high-risk/high-gain research in any domain. The ERC will continue its highly successful core schemes (Starting, Consolidator and Advanced grants) according to its 'trademark' principle of scientific excellence alone.

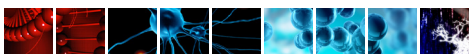
By increasing the ERC budget to over €13 billion during a time of economic austerity, the Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States have recognised that funding the best frontier research – which often leads to the greatest innovations – is critical for economic recovery and Europe's well-being. In President Helga Nowotny's words this is "a vote of confidence for the ERC". As a key feature of the pillar 'Excellent Science', 17% of the total budget of *Horizon 2020* is allocated to the ERC, whilst, under FP7, it was 15%.

However, despite the major increase to the ERC's budget, its calls will remain extremely competitive and only exceptional proposals will be funded. Researchers are therefore encouraged to take the time to develop the strongest application they can and avoid submitting premature proposals. More on this and upcoming calls on p. 13.

Under *Horizon 2020*, the ERC will continue to contribute to the training of a new generation of excellent scientists. Through the funding, grantees on average employ around six other researchers as part of their teams. Under the new programme, an estimated 7 500 lead researchers and a further 49 000 project team members will benefit from the funding. The majority of these team members will be early-career researchers at doctoral and postdoctoral level.

Finally, the ERC will also maintain its international outlook, continuing to promote global 'brain circulation', inspire scientific exchange and attract the best researchers to Europe.

[Statement](#) from President Nowotny on European Parliament vote on *Horizon 2020*





Taking stock

Interview with ERC President Prof. Helga Nowotny



Helga Nowotny, ERC President and distinguished social scientist, has a passion for science. Her unconventional career, which started in law and took her to Columbia University, Cambridge and ETH Zurich, among others, has given her a unique vantage point to observe science. She was part of the small group that made the ERC happen in 2005. At that time, it was hard to imagine the success story they were laying the foundations for. Her talent and endless energy have served the organisation well. Now that her mandate is coming to an end, we took the chance to speak to her.

Since the very start, you have been highly involved in the creation of the ERC; could you share some of the highlights from the early days?

In 2005, the members of the Scientific Council all met for the first time in Brussels. Most of us did not know each other. After the welcome speech by Commissioner Potočnik, a somewhat erratic discussion started. Everyone threw in bits from their experience, but there was no structure. After an hour, one member, a distinguished scientist and Nobel Laureate, declared that if it continued in this way she would not participate in this group. To everyone's amazement, the intellectual dust quickly settled after this emotional outburst, and we found that we were all in agreement on the basic principles. These have since become the hallmark of the ERC: keep it simple; follow a bottom-up strategy of scientific excellence with the individual Principal Investigator at the centre; and

let the panel members, whom we would appoint, decide whom to fund. So, in a nutshell, the idea of the ERC was born in this very first meeting.

Of course, it was not all over then. In the early days, it was a constant challenge to make sure that Commission rules would not bend our principles. We insisted on having a Secretary General working for us in Brussels, as none of us had the time to follow, on a day-to-day basis, how our scientific strategy would be implemented in practice. I vividly remember our encounter with President Barroso in Portugal in July 2007. We had just been told that, for some unspecified reason, the ERC would not be able to invite the applicants of the first Starting Grant call to come to Brussels for interviews, even though we had decided to do so. We went to Barroso and told him that without these interviews we could not run a world-class funding agency, and that, what we saw as obstruction from his services, was detrimental to our mission. Barroso - I must say I am grateful till this day - just turned to the Commission official in charge and said: Solve the problem. And that's what happened. Unfortunately, such a quick fix remained the exception for other obstacles in the early years.

Since then, the ERC has come a long way; what is the ERC's impact on the European research landscape so far?

The impact is substantial. The ERC has become a unique benchmark for European research organisations and





universities, as its grants come with the highest scientific reputation. It has become the gold standard of research evaluation throughout Europe. And its grants are regarded as the gold medals that open up bright new prospects for scientists, especially for younger researchers in Europe. As I see it, the ERC has achieved integration among Europe's researchers by offering them something that they can strongly identify with and be proud of. In a sense, this could be the backbone of the European Research Area. We now see that the ERC is also becoming something to envy for researchers outside of Europe.

What are the main challenges for the ERC in the coming years?

The main challenges are institutional inertia and a drive for efficiency without taking into account the specificity and uniqueness of the ERC. If this attitude indeed took over, the ERC would rapidly lose its exceptionality in the eyes of the research community. There is a danger that the ERC could be taken for granted. The scientific community should never forget that the ERC's achievements had to be fought for and that it is up to the community to preserve its success. Much will depend on the Scientific Council, working closely together with the ERC Executive Agency staff, to make sure that the scientific community will continue to be fully engaged with and support the ERC.

On the international side, the ERC has been met with great enthusiasm every time Secretary General Don Dingwell gave a presentation around the world. Now, with the global campaign ending, we will have to wait for the results trickling in. But the global research community has extensive communication channels – the message is out, and I am absolutely certain that Europe has already become an attractive option for researchers across the globe.

What is your main message to European and national policy-makers?

I think it is essential to regard frontier research as having value in itself. We need to continuously push the kind of science that is inherently uncertain as we do not yet know where it will take us. It needs confidence to take risks and we must fight against risk aversion, as it

hampers innovation. Everyone should understand that we must allow failure to happen in research. Seemingly useless knowledge will turn out to be very useful, as many examples have proven repeatedly in the history of science.

Top researchers are what I like to call competent rebels. They call into question the work of the previous generation or of what passes as mainstream. However, space must be given for a large variety of new ideas. The pressure on younger researchers to publish is enormous. We must be careful that this does not turn them into thinking only in terms of mainstream ideas. Their curiosity must be cherished and preserved as it will take them into unknown territory. This is the reason why policy makers and funders should have patience and greater confidence. Frontier research is more than a turn-key to future economic growth. It is more than an indispensable part of the innovation chain – which is no chain at all, but a dynamic and complex process. Frontier research offers a vision for the next evolutionary steps that humanity could take.

What are your own plans for the future?

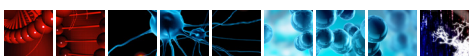
It is too early to be specific. I certainly want to have the time to write a book again, but not about the ERC. I have no plans to retire. My own professional field – social studies of science and technology – has given me a wonderful and advantageous position to observe, analyse and participate in the dynamics of contemporary science. In one way or another, I will continue to explore the exciting potential of science and its relations with wider society.

[Video Interview](#) with Prof. Helga Nowotny

The ERC under FP7 *

- €6.5 billion to nearly 4 000 top researchers
- 58 nationalities represented
- in over 500 host institutions in 29 countries
- some 28 000 team members supported
- over 20 000 publications in scientific journals
- more than 40 000 project proposals evaluated

* figures as of Dec. 2013





Changing of the guard

The ERC presents its new leader - Jean-Pierre Bourguignon



© Jean-François Dars

As Horizon 2020 comes into force in January 2014, the European Research Council will continue to fund excellent frontier research through its well-established grant schemes and methods. However, on the governance side, some changes lie ahead. After President Helga Nowotny's invaluable contribution to the organisation, distinguished Professor Jean-Pierre Bourguignon will succeed her in the new year.

After seven years at the frontline of the ERC - first as founding Vice-President and then, from 2010, as President - Prof. Helga Nowotny will be succeeded by top scientist Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon as the new President from January. Like his predecessors, he will head the ERC and chair its governing body, the Scientific Council. However, he will be the first ever ERC President based at the ERC's headquarters in Brussels,

as foreseen in the new *Horizon 2020* legislation. This change will allow the ERC's two main bodies, the Scientific Council and the Executive Agency, to work even more closely together, on a day-to-day basis.

This streamlining was recommended by the ERC Task Force in 2011, to help clarify and strengthen the governance of the ERC. The Task Force built on the recommendations of the independent 2009 Review of the ERC. This means that the positions of President and Secretary General will effectively be merged. From now on, the President will ensure close cooperation between the Scientific Council, the Executive Agency and the European Commission, as well as monitoring the implementation of the Scientific Council's strategy. Thus far, this was the role of the Secretary General, as the Scientific Council's permanent representative in Brussels. Another governance change for the ERC as of next year is that there will be three ERC Vice-Presidents instead of two, who will assist the President; each in charge of one of the three ERC domains.

Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon

The new ERC President was appointed by the Commission after being selected by an independent search committee. The Scientific Council also had its say in the selection.

Jean-Pierre Bourguignon is a renowned French mathematician with an international profile. During the past two decades, Prof. Bourguignon has been the Director of the *Institut des Hautes Etudes Scientifiques (IHES)*, near Paris, France. He is well-known for being a strong defender of creative and excellent research. In addition to his mother tongue, French, he is fluent in English and German.

Prof. Bourguignon received the Prix Paul Langevin and the Prix du Rayonnement Français in Mathematical Sciences and Physics from the Académie des Sciences de Paris. He is a foreign member of the Royal Spanish Academy of Sciences. In 2005, he was elected honorary member of the London Mathematical Society and has been the secretary of the mathematics section of the Academia Europaea.

Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon is no novice in the ERC, as he was the chair of the first ERC evaluation panel in Mathematics for Starting Grants. His in-depth knowledge about the workings of the ERC and its principles will be valuable when he takes office next year. Prof. Bourguignon's mandate lasts for four years.

- Video: [Exclusive interview](#) with Jean-Pierre Bourguignon (also in [French](#))
- Video: [Exchange of views](#) with Helga Nowotny and Jean-Pierre Bourguignon (also in [French](#))
- [Press Release](#) and Prof. Bourguignon's [biography](#)



Going global

ERC and Korea seal deal to enhance cooperation

© Courtesy to Pierrick Fillon-Ashida



Korea and the ERC have signed an agreement to encourage 'brain circulation' and stimulate cooperation by bringing the best researchers together. This initiative – the second of its kind and the first in Asia – will foster opportunities for top researchers from Korea to be hosted as part of ERC grantees' teams in Europe. This is very much in line with the ERC's international outlook. The dedicated two-year global campaign, led by Secretary General Donald Dingwell, has now come to an end, but efforts will go on and contacts will be further strengthened to ensure that the ERC is well-known globally.

During the EU-Korea summit in November in Brussels, the agreement was officially signed by the Commissioner of Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, and the Korean Minister of Science, ICT and Future Planning, Choi Mun Kee. The ceremony took place in the presence of the Korean President, Park Geun-hye, and EU Presidents Herman van Rompuy and José Manuel Barroso.

ERC President Helga Nowotny, who also attended the signing ceremony, said: “The agreement is a further important step in the mission of the ERC to make Europe an attractive place for frontier research”. Korean Science Ministry Director-General Sun Ok Kim defined it as “a watershed moment for the partnership between Korea and the EU”.

The scheme will enable bright young scientists from Korea, supported by their Science Ministry, to become part of an ERC-funded team for up to twelve months.

All ERC grantees can participate in this programme and invite Korean researchers. This will allow scientists to exchange ideas and experiences, which will benefit both sides.

Prior to the agreement, in July last year, Secretary General Donald Dingwell visited Korea to meet counterparts and raise awareness amongst top researchers there. The initiative comes after a similar agreement signed last year with the US National Science Foundation (NSF) ([read more](#)). This type of cooperation is also in the pipeline for other countries.

Global mind-set

Since its inception, the ERC has had a mission to fund talented scientists working in Europe, wherever they come from worldwide. The ERC reinforced its efforts by launching the “ERC goes global” campaign in 2011. As the ambassador for this cause, Donald Dingwell has tirelessly spread the word about the ERC around the world, highlighting the importance of frontier research and promoting Europe as a destination for science. Originally from Canada, Prof. Dingwell has fostered relations with research communities during his tour that took him to five continents, 14 countries and more than 120 institutions. A string of countries (South Africa, Taiwan, Argentina, Brazil and Korea) have since set up national contact points to relay information about the ERC.

Since 2007, around 290 non-European nationals have received ERC grants; the large majority of which are Americans. Most of them were already in Europe, but may well have stayed thanks to the ERC grant. The funding in particular seems to strike a chord with Europeans overseas: over 80 have returned home to Europe with the ERC grant thus far.

Now that Prof. Dingwell's mandate is ending, the campaign also comes to a close. However, the ERC's drive to go global will not stop here. International awareness is constantly growing, but it is still a work in progress. Increasing the number of excellent researchers in the ERC competitions from outside Europe remains a priority for the ERC.

[Press release](#) on ERC-Korea agreement



Researchers in the spotlight

Did they break new ground?

The ERC bets huge sums of money on the best researchers and their risky, ground-breaking ideas. So what is the outcome of this daring enterprise? With the first 150 ERC-funded projects to be finished by the end of the 2013, the results are finally in. Three passionate Starting grantees share their views on what their ERC grant has brought them, and what makes this research a desirable experience.

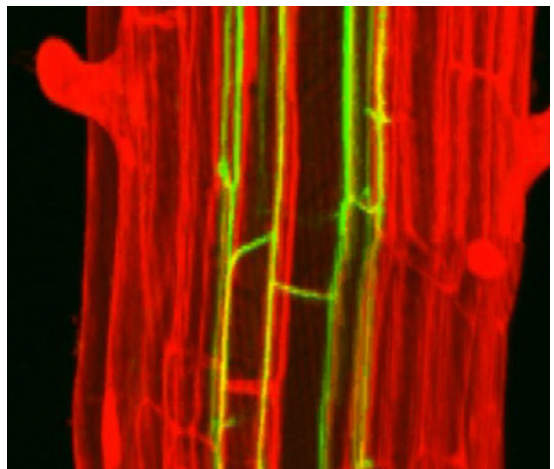
A retrospective look at ERC projects should start with the researchers' impressions when they were first confronted with the ERC. "What I remember from my interview is that I was about to engage in a fierce competition with exceptionally talented people to obtain the few grants that were available" says Dr Niko Geldner from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland), with a voice still buzzing with excitement. "I knew it would be pretty hard to do science in a very good lab without an ERC grant and I did not want to do second rate science" continues the biologist who was finally awarded a €1.2 million grant for his project on the endodermis, or cell membrane, of plants.

Like Dr Geldner, many other scientists fear the difficulties of a scientific career punctuated by the ever-present threat of not having a salary or a permanent position, the pressure to constantly produce results and papers, and, of course, the knockbacks from famous institutes and universities. This is why the ERC funding really makes a difference, not least for the younger generation of talented researchers.

After five years of funding, the enthusiasm is certainly still there amongst ERC grantees. Dr Sari Wastell, from Goldsmiths' College in London, works on the impact of legal activities in peace-building efforts and without hesitation describes her ERC project as "the most extraordinary experience in my science career". She elaborates: "Without my grant, I would never have been able to work on 18 field sites in Bosnia-Herzegovina or to collect the incredible amount of stories and testimonials we got from widows, orphans, soldiers and medical practitioners, among others, in post-conflict societies".

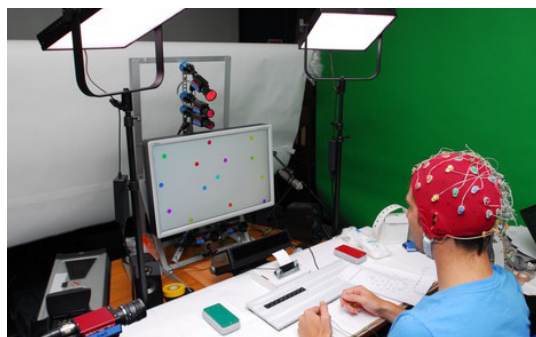
Another grant holder, Dr Maja Pantic from Imperial College London, explains that scientific discoveries often span several years. She says that there is a general tendency to reward scientists for the novelty and immediate impact of their work over the quality or long-term contribution to the field. With her five-year ERC grant, she has been able to develop a methodology in computer vision to detect human facial expressions "as they exist in real-world settings - under much more challenging observation conditions, of a much more subtle nature, than was originally thought possible". She adds: "Our team has also released software tools and a set of databases for direct use by the scientific community, although our methodology is not yet fully mature for use in commercial applications".

To complete this research, Dr Pantic now plans to move a step further and observe human face behaviours (e.g. stress), in much more difficult and uncontrolled environments (with less or variable light), such as cars. Apart from the automotive industry, she also foresees several applications in medical healthcare. For instance, she hopes to be able to assist hospitals in their daily work by measuring pain and distress through a computer analysis of patients' faces ('human-computer interaction'), which could alert staff quickly and remotely to a patient's needs. (Learn more about Dr Pantic's project in her [podcast](#) and watch her [video](#) showing face tracking results on famous actors).



© unilich





© iBug Group

Dr Geldner's results in cell biology are also incredibly promising. In contrast to all academic expectations, his team showed that plants are able to count on some sort of back-up system when their endodermis, which filters nutrients from toxins, is defective.

“I knew it would be pretty hard to do science in a very good lab without an ERC grant”

The mutant plants he and his team created were in fact able to filter the nutrients they needed to grow properly (e.g. phosphate or iron) with a deficient endodermis, except in stressful conditions, such as a rise in temperature or change in light conditions.

All three grantees commented that ERC funding is often the starting point of another scientific quest and many complete their projects with more exciting questions and topics to explore. For instance, Dr Geldner's discovery opens new ways of thinking in cell biology and in agriculture. Anticipating a second “green revolution”, the biologist has hopes for a modern agriculture less dependent on fertilisers. Through a physiological approach that would improve the functions of roots, it could be possible to replace fertilisers and help plants to grow better in infertile soils. (Learn about Dr Geldner's project and career in his [podcast](#)).

An ERC project can also be a way forward for those who aspire to applied research. That was the path taken by Dr Sari Wastell who, following her Starting Grant, applied for a top-up Proof-of-Concept grant

in 2011. After a year, she is glad to have been able to get her results beyond purely academic circles. Not only has she gained a higher profile, but she is now working in partnership with the UN Development Programme and other actors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, such as the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees.

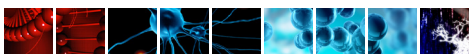
Most people agree that science is a noble pursuit, but when it comes to running a lab, many Starting grantees highlight that they have little experience. *“We're trained in doing research and being top of our field, but we have zero experience in terms of how to manage a lab, which is like running a small business”* says Dr Wastell. She explains that her ERC grant helped her to *“resuscitate her accountancy and managerial skills”* and *coordinate a large team of up to 20 people*. (Learn more about Dr Wastell's project and career, in her [podcast](#)).

When asked about their future careers, the three grantees remain optimistic. *“Many strange words and phrases are thrown at scientists to measure their career: H index, impact factors, citation numbers - but with our ERC grant, we go much further than that. The science we do enables us to observe the wonders of our world, but it also allows us to make sense of it and to truly advance scientific knowledge”*, concludes Dr Niko Geldner.

So, was it worth the investment? Did ERC grantees break new ground in the end? These were just three personal perspectives, but the answer seems to be enthusiastically positive: the ERC has given researchers confidence, prestige, independence and the freedom to explore world-changing ideas.



© Sari Wastell





Focus on



Croatia



© www.shutterstock.com

On 1 July 2013, the European family became bigger as Croatia joined the European Union. Following the successful fulfilment of all the accession criteria and a determined 'Yes' to entering the Union by its citizens, the Republic of Croatia became the 28th EU Member State, and the first country from the Western Balkans region to join the EU. Whilst most people know the country for the events around the breakup of Yugoslavia that have marked its more recent history as well as for its picturesque coast line, there is much more to Croatia than initially meets the eye.

Homeland to some renowned scientists and inventors such as Ruđer Bošković, Slavoljub Penkala and Nikola Tesla, this small country – with a population of only 4.3 million – has a long-standing dedication to knowledge, research and scientific discovery. The country has recently been working hard to further enhance its research performance and catch up with its European counterparts. Croatia's new national 'Economic Programme' has set an ambitious goal of 1.4% of GDP investment in R&D by 2020, which would constitute a significant increase from 0.75% in 2011. In addition, the country's upcoming 'Strategy for Education, Science and Technology', planned for adoption next year, is set to put an emphasis on excellence and competitiveness, as well as creating

stronger ties between research and economy as crucial 'ingredients' of growth and progress.

In terms of research cooperation at EU level, Croatia has been successful so far: its network of research performers – primarily its 25 public research institutes and 7 public universities – has been actively involved in the EU Framework Programmes since FP5. During FP7, a total of 309 Croatian partners in 248 projects have been supported by European co-financing – amounting to over €70 million in total. This surpassed the national contribution by 40%. Croatia is also no stranger to the ERC: 13 Croatian researchers hold 10 Starting and 3 Advanced grants, two of which are based in Croatian Host institutions. One of these projects is currently on-going at the University of Rijeka and the other is scheduled to start early next year at the University of Zagreb.

The ERC Scientific Council has recently received an invitation from the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, to hold a plenary session in Zagreb in October 2014. This will present a good opportunity for the Council to personally welcome Croatia to the EU, on behalf of the ERC, and to foster the interest of Croatian researchers to apply for ERC grants.



Interview with

the Croatian National Contact Point (NCP)



© Ida Skevin

We asked the Croatian ERC National Contact Point (NCP), Ida Skevin, a few questions as Croatia recently joined the EU.

How would you describe the Croatian research landscape?

During the last 20 years the research and higher education systems in Croatia have undergone significant transformations. Reforms have been implemented to respond to European standards, with the main aim of strengthening capacities, contributing to national development and being able to compete globally.

The overall slowdown of the national economy during the last years also affected the national R&D system. The Croatian Government has tried to respond to present challenges by adopting a series of measures to improve work conditions, employment procedures and continuous development in the research system.

Improvements are needed, however, in order to strengthen knowledge transfer and collaboration between industry and academia. There are a lot of excellent researchers and smaller research groups and it is crucial to team them up to compete on a European and global level.

Your country entered the EU this year; in your view, will this have an impact on Croatia in terms of R&D?

At the beginning of 2006, Croatia became an associated country in the EU Framework Programme for research, which meant that partners from Croatia could participate in it on an equal footing with any EU Member State. Over the last few years, the success rate of Croatian partners improved and reached the level of 17% which is not significantly lower than the EU average of 21%. Therefore, we can consider Croatian researchers to be already an integral part of the European research landscape and competitive on a European scale.

Without any doubt, being an EU member state will improve the visibility of Croatian research groups in international cooperation and help them attract EU and international funding. Further active participation in European research programmes is of crucial importance for Croatia as it allows sharing of best practices and enhanced mobility.

So far, two out of 13 Croatian ERC grantees carry out their projects in Croatia. Why, and what could be done about it?

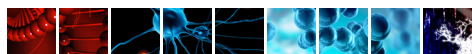
The ERC grants are still not well enough known within the Croatian research community. Potential applicants are sometimes intimidated by high competition and requirements in terms of the scientific track record. They often think that applicants from countries with larger and wealthier research communities are more likely to succeed in the evaluation process.

Furthermore, research institutions outside Croatia where Croatian ERC grantees are based are often more familiar with ERC grants and have the necessary support, both administrative and financial, to generate successful applications and to help grantees manage their funding.

We are extremely happy that this year, the first ERC grants (one Advanced Grant and one Starting Grant) have been awarded to researchers based in Croatia. I hope this will encourage other excellent researchers to apply. Necessary support and training will be provided by the NCP network and there are also plans to provide funding to successful project proposals that, in the end, did not win an ERC grant.

Why should Croatian researchers apply for ERC grants?

An ERC grant is first of all a means to obtain significant funding which could not be received from state budget sources. But above that, it is a mechanism which allows outstanding researchers to build up their own research groups, to choose the institution which can provide the best environment to carry out their research activities and finally to boost their career and professional development.





Did you miss this?

Synergy Grants awarded *Horizon 2020 launch events*

The ERC has announced the winners of 13 Synergy Grants, who will share €150 million in total. The projects, at the crossroads of many disciplines, will each receive funding of up to €15 million for the coming six years. Each project brings together two to four outstanding researchers, which means 45 scientists based in 11 countries will be supported through these prestigious grants. This is the second competition for Synergy Grants, which is a pilot scheme introduced in 2011.

See the [press release](#)

From October to February, the ERC is participating in national events around Europe to launch the new EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon 2020. ERC delegations have explained the opportunities offered by the ERC and highlighted the countries' participation in the ERC funding schemes, as well as the changes foreseen under the new programme. Some grantees are also attending these events to share their experiences and present their projects. The ERC will go to launch events in Greece, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and the UK in the next weeks.

See the calendar of [events](#)



© www.shutterstock.com



© www.shutterstock.com



© Francisco Esposito MEF



© Madelaine Drielsma

Città della Scienza *ERC Scientific Council meets in Utrecht*

At the end of October, the ERC organised an information day on the premises of the museum Città della Scienza in Naples,

Italy. Addressing more than 150 researchers, including some 70 ERC grantees, President Nowotny highlighted the importance of supporting young researchers for the future of Italy and of Europe. She also discussed the current situation of scientific excellence with national and local authorities.

Several ERC grantees presented their projects in a range of research fields. This event followed the solidarity message sent earlier this year after a fire devastated the site.

See the [press release](#)

The ERC Scientific Council gathers up to five times a year, in Brussels and around Europe, to discuss its strategy. In October, the plenary meeting was held in Utrecht; for the first time in the Netherlands. The Commission's R&I Director-General Robert-Jan Smits, and the Dutch Science State Secretary, Sander Dekker, also attended the meeting. The Scientific Council discussions focused on the preparation of Horizon 2020. A seminar on "Research impact on society" also took place with several grantees from Utrecht University as speakers.

See the [press release](#) (in Dutch)





Future Calls

On 11 December, the final ERC [Work Programme for 2014](#) was published, including the ERC calls for 2014 with a total budget of almost €1.7 billion; the first under the new EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020.

Call openings and submission deadlines of 2014 ERC calls (including grant sizes):

Call for proposals*	Publication date	Deadline	Budget	Funding
ERC 2014 Starting Grant	11 December 2013	25 March 2014	€485 million	Up to €2 Mio per grant
ERC 2014 Consolidator Grant	11 December 2013	20 May 2014	€713 million	Up to €2.75 Mio per grant
ERC 2014 Advanced Grant	17 June 2014	21 October 2014	€450 million	Up to €3.5 Mio per grant
ERC 2014 Proof of Concept Grant**	11 December 2013	1 April 2014 1 October 2014	€15 million	Up to €150 000 per grant

*Researchers who wish to apply to one of the ERC's calls can do so through the [Participant Portal](#).

**Calls open to ERC grantees only

There will be no calls for Synergy Grants in 2014. The ERC Scientific Council will analyse the pilot phase of this new scheme before deciding on future calls.

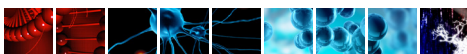
New rules on re-submission of proposals

As a result of very high and constantly rising demand for ERC grants, the ERC Scientific Council has decided to extend the current restrictions on submission of proposals. These rules are viewed as a means to maintain the quality and the integrity of the ERC's evaluation process. They should also allow unsuccessful researchers the time necessary to develop a stronger proposal.

For details on these rules, see [ERC Work Programme 2014](#) (pp. 18 and 19).

Stay informed on the [ERC website](#)

[Press highlight](#) on new calls





Editorial Board:

Massimo Gaudina, Madeleine Drielsma

Noélie Auvergne, Samantha Christey, Maud Scelo

Scientific Council members: Pavel Exner, Danny Dolev, Isabelle Vernos

Thanks to:

Dr Niko Geldner, Dr Maja Pantic, Dr Sari Wastell

Barbara Kolaric, Olga Sarrado, Jenny Skene, Ida Skevin, Benjamin Turner

For comments:

erc-info@ec.europa.eu

European Research Council Executive Agency

16 Place Charles Rogier

BE-1210 Brussels

Belgium

ideas is a quarterly electronic newsletter published by the European Research Council.

The newsletter is available in English. Subscription is free. You can subscribe online by clicking here.

Next issue: March 2014

ERC National Contact Point in your country, [click here](#).

To receive ERC News Alerts, [click here](#).

EuropeanResearchCouncil   @ERC_Research



BRINGING GREAT IDEAS TO LIFE
<http://erc.europa.eu>



European Research Council
 Established by the European Commission

The European Research Council may not be held responsible for the use to which this information may be put, or for any possible errors. Brussels, European Research Council, 2012. © Illustrations: www.shutterstock.com. Reproduction of the text is permitted provided the source is acknowledged. Reproduction of the photographs is prohibited.