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ERC Highlight:

ERC President underlines need for frontier research at European Parliament hearing 13 February 2014

In a keynote speech at a public hearing in the European Parliament yesterday, ERC President Professor Jean-Pierre Bourguignon highlighted the success of the European Research Council, citing the ERC as proof that the European Union can make a difference. The presentation, which took place in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), turned the spotlight on 'The European Research Area - from Framework Programme 7 to Horizon 2020'.

At this hearing - chaired by Amalia Sartori, the ITRE Committee Chair – ERC President **Jean-Pierre Bourguignon** spoke about 'The ERC under Horizon 2020: Why do we need, and how can we achieve, excellent fundamental and frontier research in Europe?'. He acknowledged the role of the scientific community in initiating the ERC, as well as the subsequent support from national governments, the European Commission and the European Parliament, which he praised for its "*brave decision to support basic research*". He also took the occasion to touch on the substantial budget increase the ERC has received for the next seven years, which he said will enable the organisation to develop further.

In his speech, Prof. Bourguignon took stock of the ERC's strengths and emphasised the recognition received from the scientific community. However, he also pointed to challenges such as gender balance and the geographical distribution of grants. He noted that countries with a less developed research infrastructure still have a good potential for training young top scientists. Calling for "*joint efforts across the European scientific community to set up new targets in these countries*", he also underlined the role that structural funds can play to make these countries more competitive at a European level.

Asked about the need to harmonise rules and procedures in research within the EU member states, Prof. Bourguignon stated that "*uniformity is not the answer, compatibility is the key*". "*For scientists, political boundaries do not exist - the quality of work is more important than the procedures*", he said. In his opinion, "*the European Research Area can be the common denominator for the multitude of instruments and institutions currently supporting research*".

Also speaking at the session, Professor Emeritus **Carlos Salema** (Instituto Superior Técnico of Portugal) praised the simplification rules introduced by *Horizon 2020*, which, as he put it, "*will make participation easier and available for less developed Member States*". He insisted on the importance of efficiency and said that "*excellence should be the decisive [selection] criterion because potential impact is extremely difficult to evaluate*".

Referring to the issue of gender balance in research, President Bourguignon said that "*We need to analyse any obstacles that may discourage women from applying*".



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On this topic Ms **Sasha Bezuhanova**, Chair of the High Level Advisory Committee of the European Centre for Women and Technology, presented the outcome of the study on gender in R&I from an Eastern European perspective and stressed the need to integrate more university educated women into a professional active role in order to increase competitiveness and growth in Europe.

The business representative at the hearing, Dr **Detlef Müller-Wiesner**, from Airbus, spoke about the importance of research in the European industry, and also mentioned the role of frontier research in creating innovation.

Background

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.

From 2007 to 2013 under the seventh EU Research Framework Programme (FP7), the ERC's budget was €7.5 billion. Under the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Horizon 2020, the ERC has a substantially increased budget of over €13 billion. Since its launch, the ERC has selected over 4,500 researchers for funding.

The ERC consists of an independent Scientific Council and an Executive Agency. The Scientific Council, the ERC's governing body, is composed of 22 distinguished scientists and scholars, including the ERC President. They define the scientific funding strategy and methodologies, and act on behalf of the scientific community in Europe to promote creativity and innovative research. Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon has been the ERC President since 1 January 2014. The ERC Executive Agency implements the ERC component of the EU Programme Horizon 2020 and is led by Director Pablo Amor.

More information

[Parliamentary ITRE Committee Meeting Video](#)
[The ERC at the European Parliament](#) (May 2011)
[ERC website](#)

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