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Highlight:

Next generation of scientists meets with peers in Vienna

28 February 2013

“Birds of a feather flock together”, as the adage goes. This could well be the theme of the event organised jointly by the European Research Council (ERC), the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST), the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, and the Representation of the European Commission on 28 February and 1 March 2013 in Vienna. This event is a pilot initiative which aims to gather around a hundred scientists, including around 20 ERC grantees, with the view to facilitate debates and interactions among researchers from different domains and countries, in particular countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Austrian Federal Minister of Science and Research, Prof. Karlheinz Töchterle said: “*The ERC has undeniably become a success story within a very short period of time. Austrian researchers do not just profit from funding by the ERC, but Austrian research has become increasingly international through ERC grants. I am delighted about the presence of highly distinguished members of the scientific community at this conference in Austria*”.

ERC President Prof. Helga Nowotny declared: “*I am pleased to initiate this pilot event in Vienna. One of my aspirations is that young scientists from Central and Eastern Europe further explore the possibilities for funding offered by the ERC. I hope that this ‘widening participation’ event, which gathers ERC grantees and a new generation of researchers, will influence their future career path*”. She added: “*In the ERC, we have launched a reflection on the measures that need to be taken so that the pool of high calibre scientists present in this region is encouraged to successfully apply to ERC grants. That is essential to build a truly European culture of competition in science*”.

IST Austria President Prof. Thomas Henzinger noted: “*IST Austria is proud to host the ERC conference ‘Widening Participation’. As a newly established research institute operational only since 2009, IST Austria has benefited tremendously from ERC funding schemes; with 12 of our 28 professors being ERC grantees. The ERC’s standard of excellence ensures that basic science in Europe can compete globally*”. He added: “*Since many of our faculty and graduate students come from Central and Eastern Europe, we are especially happy to share our experiences with the ERC, with scientists and research institutions from these countries*”.

The number of ERC grants awarded to researchers based in different countries varies greatly. For example, while researchers based in the UK have received 765 grants, researchers in Latvia have received only one. There are also large variations in terms of success rates (awarded/evaluated proposals) which range from 16% and 14% in countries such as France, the Netherlands and UK to 2% and 1% in countries such as Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Slovenia. The number of ERC grants awarded to researchers based in a country mainly reflects the large differences between the sizes of the populations and economies of the different countries. But this number and the different success rates also



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reflect the various levels of investment in research and the quality of the scientific publications in the different countries (see [annex](#)).

The ERC has had a growing impact on national research systems. For instance, it has influenced the Austrian research and innovation landscape and 83 Starting (for junior researchers) and Advanced (for established researchers) grants have now been awarded to researchers in Austria since 2007; with a total amount of around € 137 million. The ERC has become a model for, or has influenced, a number of national funding agencies in Poland, France and Spain. In Slovenia and other countries, national funding goes to the best runners-up in ERC competitions.

The performance of Austrian ERC grantees is in line with a well-established funding and support structure at the national level; the highly visible funding instruments of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) like the START Programme and the Wittgenstein Prize have had a positive impact on the performance of ERC awardees in Austria. In addition, the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) provides researchers with information for applying to European research funds. Minister Töchterle emphasizes that the neighbouring countries in Eastern and South Eastern Europe have traditionally been important partners for Austria; especially in the field of science and research. The Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research has taken every effort for supporting the dynamic development of research in Central and South Eastern Europe, for example by establishing close partnerships and by stimulating cooperation on a bilateral as well as on a multilateral European level, particularly within the EU-Framework Programmes.

By hosting this event in Austria, the ERC expects that it will foster the dynamism of scientists from Central and Eastern Europe in applying for ERC funding, and ultimately improve their performance in ERC competitions.

More information for press:

An **ERC story** on the project of Dr Nedjeljka Zagar is accessible at:
<http://erc.europa.eu/erc-stories/better-chance-predicting-weather>

All **other ERC stories** (including story on [OGLEIV](#) project) are available at:
<http://erc.europa.eu/erc-stories>

Members of the ERC Scientific Council, Prof. [Pavel Exner](#), Prof. [Isabelle Vernos](#), Prof. [Mart Saarma](#), Prof. [Tomasz Dietl](#) and Prof. [Eva Kondorosi](#) as well as ERC Secretary General Prof. [Donald Dingwell](#) are ready to take up media questions.

A **video clip** (6 minutes) featuring several Polish researchers funded by the ERC, including Justyna Olko and Marcin Nowotny who will be present at the event, will be available at:
<http://erc.europa.eu/multimedia-library> (section “testimonials”)

A visit of IST Austria with possibilities of interviews and filming is scheduled on Thursday 28 February from 13:30 to 17:00. **Please contact us if you wish to participate in the visit, to interview grantees and/or to film during the tour.**



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The press programme is available at:

<http://erc.europa.eu/widening-participation-event-0>



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Website of the Representation of the European Commission in Vienna

http://ec.europa.eu/austria/index_de.htm

Website of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research

<http://www.bmwf.gv.at/home/>



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