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European Research Council awards its first prestigious grants to top researchers

Today the European Research Council (ERC), a new research funding body created under the EU's 7th Framework Programme for Research, announced the outcome of its first competition for Starting Independent Investigators. About 300 up-and-coming research leaders, between two and nine years after their doctorate, will receive grants. The first Starting Grants will be signed in February next year. The successful candidates represent over 30 nationalities and are based in some 170 host institutions in 21 different countries. Today's announcement concludes a successful first year of operation of the ERC, which will expand considerably its research funding programme in 2008, including the introduction of the Advanced Grant, for experienced researchers.

"This highly successful first year of the ERC, a European body still in its infancy, demonstrates Europe's capacity to move ahead and meet the challenges of international competition in science and research" said European Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik. "The EU's research framework programme plays a vital role in developing a first class science base, on which the continent's future depends. The shared commitment to science and research across the European institutions, the member states and the scientific community has enabled the ERC to establish itself in record time and to make a tangible contribution to the careers of researchers as well as to Europe's attractiveness to the very best scientific talent. I congratulate the successful grantees and look forward to the fruits of their work."

ERC President Prof. Kafatos said "The scientific community, alongside the EU political institutions, helped develop the vision of a pan-European Research Council dedicated to excellence at the frontier of knowledge in all fields of research. Representing that community, the Scientific Council of the ERC has worked intensely for two years, together with dedicated Commission staff, to convert this vision into an exemplary institution serving the competitiveness and cultural development of Europe. Selection of some 300 talented and independent investigators, to be supported by the ERC for 5 years, represents an exciting milestone in this endeavour. Recognising all contributors to this success, I thank particularly Commissioner Potočnik for his unwavering support; the more than 9000 candidates who took on the challenge; and over 800 scientists and scholars from throughout the world who participated as peer reviewers for the ERC. We are committed to further improve the procedures, which worked well despite the unprecedented number of applicants, and to adapt them to the requirements of the recently announced second ERC programme, the Advanced Investigator Grants."



ERC Starting Grants are designed to boost the careers of researchers, who may be working in any area of science or scholarship, at the time they are establishing themselves as independent research leaders. The Starting Grants competition - the first ERC call - stirred great interest throughout the research community. Over 9000 applications were submitted by the deadline of 25 April 2007, by Principal Investigators (PIs) of 88 nationalities, in conjunction with host institutions based in all parts of the EU and countries associated to the research framework programme. Of the 559 successful candidates at the first stage, 554 investigators of 38 nationalities in 21 countries submitted full proposals, of which 431 passed the quality thresholds for excellence.

The ERC hopes to fund some 300 of these already prioritised quality proposals, representing 32 nationalities of PIs and around 170 host institutions in 21 countries. The average age of successful grantees is 35 and 26% are women. Candidates will be notified individually in the coming days. The first grants will be signed in February 2008.

The ERC Scientific Council will evaluate the process and the outcome in order to fine-tune this grant scheme for the next Starting Grant call, which will be published by the summer of 2008.

Background information:

MEMO/07/586-Statistics

<http://erc.europa.eu/pdf/memo.pdf>

The 22 Members of the ERC Scientific Council:

<http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicID=62>

Previous Press Releases on Starting Grants:

<http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicID=26>

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