Thinking about the Future of the European Research Council (ERC)

Prof. Dr. Andreu Mas-Colell
ERC Secretary General

Information and Strategy day for the heads of German Universities
Strasbourg, 19-20 January 2010
ERC Calls 2007 – 2009: an overview
I would highlight four issues:

- What is the ERC and what does it add?
- Consolidation and development of the current schemes
- The ERC towards the 8th Framework Programme
- Institutional development of the ERC
What is the ERC and what does it add?
What is the ERC?

ERC is a new type of funding body in Europe to support excellence in future research open, individual-team designed competition

**Legislation**
- A Scientific Council with 22 members
- Support by the ERC Executive Agency
- A significant budget (1.1 billion €/year)
- Excellence is the only valid criterion

**Strategy**
- Support for the individual scientist – no networks!
- International peer-review
- No predetermined subjects (bottom-up)
- Support of frontier research in all fields of science and humanities
The ERC paradigm

- A radical shift in policy: pan-European competition to advance excellent ideas of individuals
- Support for excellent individual researchers to push the frontiers of science
- Support for the early independence of young researchers
- Industry participation is welcome
ERC offers a new partnership in Europe

- From individual to institutional excellence: committed to scientific excellence while helping dynamic institutions that successfully attract high-level researchers

- Raising standards throughout Europe: ERC acts as a catalyst for reforms in research funding policies in Europe
No distinction made between basic research and basic technology

- “Frontier research” responds to the blurring boundaries between basic and applied research
- “Frontier technology” emerges often in the course of basic research
- If picked up, frontier technologies travel well: across research fields and out of the lab
ERC budget increases by €250 M€ / year
ERC budget € 1 billion/year (on average)

ERC budget
Averages to € 1 billion/year
Less than 0.5% of R&D spending
In Europe

Annual R&D budget

ERC
European Commission (other programs)

Europe
(national & regional funding agencies, industry, local institutions)

Compare with US institutions

NSF → $ 6.85 billion (2009)
NIH → $ 30.5 billion (2009)
The ERC keeps its strategy simple, flexible and focused!

- “Starting Grant”: Support young(\*) researchers \( (*) \text{ 2-10 yrs post-PhD} \)
- “Advanced Grant”: Support leading(\*) scientists \( (*) \text{ in past 10 yrs} \)
- Promote excellence irrespective of nationality, age, or field
- Trust the dynamic of science
  - The ERC funds the individual PI (and his/her individual team)
  - Grants are portable
- Encourage interdisciplinarity by mainstreaming interdisciplinary projects
The ERC paradigm

- Frontier research based solely on scientific excellence

- Open competition of outstanding individuals of all nationalities and ages willing to move, stay and do research in Europe
  
  (*) minimum 50% time in Europe, 30% time on project
  
  Europe = 39 countries of European Research Area (ERA)

- Generous funding for ambitious projects
  
  (up to €2 mil / €3.5 mil)

- No quotas per country/region, gender, etc.

- All fields supported: 3 Domains
  
  (Life Sciences, Physical Sciences & Engineering, Social Sciences & Engineering)
Consolidation and development of the current schemes
ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls 2007, 2008 & 2009
Submitted proposals by domain

Number of proposals

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- 73%
+ 15%
- 27%
?
ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls
2007 - 2010

Submitted proposals from researchers with nationality from a Third country

[Diagram showing distribution of submitted proposals by nationality from 2007 to 2010, with a peak in 2010.]
ERC StG 2007 and StG 2009
Share of selected proposals by country of host institution

2007: 31 StG grants
2009: 28 StG grants

Country of host institution

UK    FR    DE    ES    NL    IT    IL    CH    BE    SE    FI    DK    AT    HU    EL    PT    IE    PL    CY    EE    BG    CZ    NO

% of grantees

Starting grant 2007
Starting grant 2009
ERC StG 2007 & ERC StG 2009

Success rate by country of host institution
(i.e. ratio submitted – selected proposals)

ERC Starting Grant 2007

3%

Source: All submitted proposals (9167) and 299 selected projects

ERC Starting Grant 2009

11%

Source: All proposals (2003) and 242 top listed proposals
ERC AdG 2008 and AdG 2009
Share of selected proposals by country of host institution

2007: 27 StG grants
2009: 31 StG grants
ERC AdG 2008 & ERC AdG 2009

Success rate by country of host institution
(i.e. ratio submitted – selected proposals)

ERC Advanced Grant 2008

Source: All submitted proposals (2167) and 282 selected projects

ERC Advanced Grant 2009

Source: All proposals (1584) and 236 top listed proposals
StG 2009

Number of projects vs. R&D intensity

242 StG 09 proposals

Source: Eurostat, Reference year 2007, or latest year available. Missing data: IL
* Total intramural R&D expenditure (GERD) in billion Euro
Number of projects vs. researchers population
242 StG 09 proposals

Grants per 1000 researchers (FTE)

Source: Eurostat, Reference year 2006/2007, or latest year available. Missing data: IL
FTE (Full-time equivalent) corresponds to one year's work by one person
ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls
2007 - 2010

Share of submitted and selected proposals of German host institutions by domain

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% of total proposals

Submitted  Selected

DE host-Submitted  DE host-Selected

ongoing
ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls
2007 - 2010

Share of submitted and selected proposals of German nationals and German host institutions

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Host institutions for StG and AdG in Germany

- **StG 2007, 2009 & AdG 2008, 2009**

- **Starting grant call 2007**
- **Starting grant 2009**
- **Advanced grant call 2008**
- **Advanced grant call 2009**

Source: 299 StG 2007; 282 AdG 2008; 242 StG 2009; 236 AdG 2009
ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls
2007 - 2010
Nationality and host country

[Bar chart showing the number of grantees by nationality in various European countries for the years 2007-2010.]
Selected projects: Repatriation and Recruitment
### ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls 2007 - 2010

#### Comparison of the TOP European institutions

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<td>3 Karolinska Institutet</td>
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### Notes
- **1st call**
  - CNRS
  - Max-Planck-Society
  - University of Cambridge
  - Imperial College London
  - Hebrew Univ Jerusalem
  - Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche
  - Weizmann Institute of Science
  - Univ Oxford
  - University College London
  - Free Univ Amsterdam
  - Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas
  - Univ Leuven
  - Univ Heidelberg

- **2nd call**
  - EPF Lausanne
  - Centre National de Recherche Scientifique
  - Weizmann Institute of Science
  - Univ of Oxford
  - Imperial College London
  - ETH Zürich
  - Univ of Edinburgh
  - Univ Helsinki
  - Univ Genève
  - Univ of Nijmegen
  - Max-Planck-Society
  - IN de Recherche en Informatique et en Automatique

- **3rd call**
  - University College London
  - Imperial College London
  - IN National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale
  - Uni Munich
  - Helsinki Univ of Technology
  - Univ of Utrecht
  - Weizmann Institute of Science

- **4th call**
  - Centre National de Recherche Scientifique
  - ETH Zürich
  - Univ of Cambridge
  - University College London
  - Max-Planck-Society
  - University of Zürich
  - Univ of Oxford
  - Hebrew Univ Jerusalem
  - Uni Bristol
  - EPF Lausanne
  - Weizmann Institute of Science
  - Imperial College London
  - IN National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale
  - Uni Munich
  - Univ of Edinburgh
  - Univ Genève
  - Univ Amsterdam
  - Univ Bergen
  - Univ Uppsala
  - Cancer Research UK
## ERC Starting & Advanced grant calls 2007 - 2010

### German host institution

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**Grand Total**                                    | **31**   | **27**   | **31**   | **28**   | **117**
Attracting applicants

An ERC position at Ghent University?

Are you an outstanding researcher with an innovative research idea?

Why not choose Ghent University as hosting institution for the establishment of your research team?

Ghent University wants to actively promote its participation in the ERC programme of the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7 - 2007-2013).

This programme, managed by the European Research Council (ERC), provides a distinctive funding mechanism devoted to scientific excellence for all scientific fields.

Funding is provided for the implementation of groundbreaking research for a period of 5 years. Two types of Grants are available:

- ERC Starting Grants for young postdocs (3-8 years research experience)
- ERC Advanced Grants for established early career researchers

What can Ghent University offer you?

For applicants:

- Support in the proposal writing stage: screening and review of proposal in cooperation with external supervisors.

For successful ERC-candidates:

- A 10-year research professorship
- For a period of four years, an additional PhD student with supporting bench fees
- Full administrative support by the European Office of Ghent University

Helpdesk: EU-call@UGent.be
The ERC towards the 8th Framework Programme
Current to do list!

- To increase the participation by women & new Member States nationals without compromising on excellence
- To make Europe more attractive for researchers from overseas
- To increase awareness in industry for opportunities of ERC funding
- To emphasize real “starters” (2-6 years post PhD) through an increase in the StG budget
Coming challenges

- ERC budget in FP 8
- ERC as a permanent institution
- Closer links to Universities
  - Development of an partnership with hosts, e.g. joint discussions (procedures and substance)
- New schemes
- Link to Marie Curie?
Outlook on the Future: Food for thought!

• What about funding also the mid-term research careers?

• Twinning grants for European and non-European co-investigators and their teams

• Advanced Studies Institutes/ Graduate Schools – the breeding zones of new ideas?
Institutional development of the ERC
The ERC Board
Linking strategy and operations

Prof. Fotis Kafatos
ERC President

Prof. Helga Nowotny
Dr. Daniel Esteve
ERC Vice-Presidents

Jack Metthey
ERC Executive Agency
Director ad interim

Prof. Andreu Mas-Colell
ERC Secretary-General
The ERC is a learning organisation!
Ongoing moves!

- Two standing Committees of the ScC
  - Conflict of Interest + Ethical Issues
  - Panels
- Appointment of Expert Evaluators
- Minutes of Scientific Council meetings
- Further development of instruments
- Simplification of administrative procedures
The position of the director!

- Director Designate of the ERCEA
- Merge of scientific and managerial tasks
- Publication of a vacancy for a Principal Adviser function (Grade AD14)
- Official Journal C 295 A of 04/12/2009
- Closing date: **5 March 2010**.
See you in 2020!

…… to look back and see that:

- the bottom-up frontier research funded by the ERC will have played a crucial role in new discoveries with large social, environmental and economic impact
- a satisfactory proportion of worldwide technological advances will have happened in Europe