



ERC: First Experience – Next Steps

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Lisbon, 19 July 2007



ERC is a Major European Initiative: A Visionary Idea Whose Time Has Come

- **A logical development of the European Research Area**
- **Securely anchored in EU legislation**
but at the same time.....
- **A revolutionary development**



The Roadmap to the ERC

- **Scientific community long urged establishment of the ERC: role of ISE and Minister Gago**
- **Copenhagen Meeting (Danish Presidency): do we need an ERC?**
- **Surprising Unanimity: YES!**
- **Commissioner Busquin and DG Mitsos suggest FP7 as umbrella for the ERC**
- **Approved by Council of Ministers and European Parliament in December 2006; Excellence the sole criterion for selection**



Central concepts

- **ERC consists of:**
 - **Supported by a Dedicated Implementation Structure**
 - **An independent Scientific Council**
- **Commission guarantees ERC autonomy & integrity**
- **ERC under the Commission or Art. 171?**
EC solution (Executive Agency) agreed, to be reviewed 2009
- **Budget of 15% of FP7 proposed by Commission and agreed by Council and Parliament:**
 - **~ €300m in 2007 - € 1.7 bn in 2013**



ERC Autonomy

The Scientific Council

- **Commissioner Potočnik signalled commitment to autonomy by delegating selection of the Scientific Council to an independent Identification Committee (Patten Committee)**
 - **Scientific Council (ScC) nominated in July 2005**
- **All 22 nominees agreed to serve, radically changing personal plans**
- **Financial sacrifices – currently only travel and subsistence expenses for meetings, despite immense workload (almost full-time for Chair and Vice-Chairs)**



Scientific Council Preparatory work

- **ScC decision to work intensively before formal appointment (1st meeting 18 October 2005)**
- **Key mechanisms established to support independent work and close co-ordination with the implementing structure (proposed by ScC and agreed by Commission):**
 - **ERC Board**
 - **Secretary General**
 - **Support actions for Chair and Vice-Chair**
- **Full support by Commissioner; excellent staff assigned – nucleus for the ERC-Executive Agency**
- **First report of the Scientific Council to European Institutions presented on 2 February 2007 via EC**



ERC strategy

- ***Keep it simple***
 - address obvious gaps in Europe *Opportunities and independence for young scientists; substantial grants for senior investigators*
 - *The 3 “Rs” – retain, recruit, repatriate*
 - *All fields of science and scholarship are eligible*
 - *Excellence is the sole criterion*
 - *Research at the frontier of knowledge*
- ***Keep it flexible***
 - *Evaluation panels judge investment levels*
 - *Researchers can re-budget*
 - *Grants are portable*
- ***Trust the dynamic of science***
 - *Development of new disciplines*
 - *Excellence breeds excellence*
 - *From individual to institutional excellence*



Early achievements

European Research Council



- **First call launched (StG) – deadline of 25 April 2007; huge success with 9167 applications**
- **First stage of peer review evaluation completed already**
- **Enormous enthusiasm and commitment of the scientific community:**
 - **240 top quality panel members selected from around the world, close to 100% acceptance rate**
 - **International acclaim at Berlin launch conference; ERC viewed as comparable to NSF, NIH**



First call - observations

- **Researchers from all regions of Europe engaged in the competition; ditto for host institutions**
- **Modest percentage but significant number of overseas applications**
- **~ 550 top investigators selected – broadly distributed and in all research fields**
- **ScC is convinced that talent is a widely-distributed resource and that the top researchers are interested in working in their country/culture if supported to do their best**



ERC health check

- **Basic strategy and peer review processes established**
- **Working arrangements are effective**
- **But there are some key issues to be resolved:**
 - **more flexible administration is needed**
 - **autonomy must be put into practice urgently with a properly-endowed executive agency**



Administrative road blocks encountered

- **Support for chair and vice-chair staff
(now probably solved)**
- **Establishment of the ERC Secretary General
(now probably solved)**
- **Payment of interviewees for
2nd stage StG evaluation
(solution being sought to avoid a potential crisis)**



The ERC Executive agency

- The ERC executive agency must be tailored to the task and allow the ERC to meet the standards of the best national agencies in Europe and the US NSF
- The objective is not to cut costs by using low grades and unqualified staff: a high proportion of scientifically-qualified staff is essential
- This can be done with administrative costs that compare well with other similar agencies and are much lower than the 5% limit
- The ERC cannot operate in a state of limbo regarding its structure and personnel – the agency must be established urgently
- Rest of RTD Directorate need separate agency



Thank you for your attention