

# Research RTD, 7th EC Framework Programme 2007-2013: specific programme "Ideas", frontier research

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The Commission presented a report on the European Research Council's operations and realisation of the objectives set out in the Specific Programme "Ideas" in 2009

The European Research Council (ERC), created by a Commission Decision in 2007, implements the Specific Programme (SP) "Ideas" under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).

The ERC consists of an independent Scientific Council (ScC) supported by a dedicated implementation structure (DIS). In 2007 the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) was created under the general regime of executive agencies with a view to taking over the role of DIS from the Commission.

This Annual Report of the Commission, drawn up in co-operation with the ERC's ScC, presents the Commission's assessment of the ERC's operations and the achievement of its objectives in 2009.

**1) Implementation:** the 2010 Work Programme (WP) for the SP "Ideas" was established by the ScC on 2 April 2009 and subsequently adopted by the Commission on 29 July 2009. No fundamental change in strategy was introduced via the 2010 WP, although the grant schemes were refined on the basis of experience gained. Other adjustments included further simplification in rules on re-submission and multiple applications and the introduction of measures to increase the attractiveness of the EU and the associated countries to researchers residing in third countries as well as to further encourage the participation of women scientists. Additional funding is to be made available to researchers from third countries to encourage and help them establish themselves in Europe and greater consideration will be given to previous career breaks and unconventional career paths which would be expected to encourage higher participation from women scientists.

Commitments of more than **€ 794,861,770** and payments of more than **€ 221,422,331,50** were fully executed, representing **100% of the operational appropriations** of the "Ideas" SP for 2009.

Grants are offered to the best proposals depending on the budget available. The offer is made on the basis of the proposal itself and the funding recommended by the peer review evaluation:

- **ERC Starting Grants:** the 2009 ERC StG call was published in July 2008 with deadlines in Autumn 2008 and an indicative budget of € 295.8 million. In total 2,503 proposals were received, distributed by domain as follows: 1,112 in PE, 927 in LS and 464 in SH. With the total budget increased to € 325 million thanks to FP7 Associated Countries' contributions it became possible to fund 242 proposals. The 2010 ERC StG call was published in July 2009 with deadlines between October and December 2009 and an indicative budget of € 528 million. In total 2,873 proposals were received distributed by domain as follows: 1,205 proposals in Physical Sciences and Engineering, 1,029 in Life Sciences and 639 in Social Sciences and Humanities.
- **ERC Advanced Grants:** a total of 282 applications submitted for the 2008 ERC AdG call were funded from a final budget of € 553 million including FP7 Associated Countries' contributions. The 2009 ERC AdG call was published in November 2008 with deadlines in Spring 2009 and an indicative budget of € 489.5 million. As demand was expected to be high, the ScC had decided that

the first two ERC AdG calls (2008 and 2009) would be linked. For this reason, the 2008 "Ideas" WP stated that no applicant may be associated with more than one proposal to either of the two calls. The 2009 call still attracted 1,583 applications of which, 236 were initially selected for funding. Further proposals may be funded depending on the availability of FP7 Associated Countries' contributions. The 2010 ERC AdG call was published in October 2009 with deadlines between February and April 2010 and an indicative budget of € 590 million.

**2) Review of Structures and Mechanisms:** the two major developments in the ERC's timeline of 2009 were the **granting of autonomy to the ERCEA and the Review of Structure and Mechanisms.**

In accordance with the Council Decision establishing the SP "Ideas", an independent review will also be carried out of the ERC's structures and mechanisms. The Panel presented its report in July 2009. It stated that, overall, the ERC had succeeded "beyond all expectations", its creation being a landmark in European research, generally lived up to its stated aim of academic freedom, excellence and merit and produced a "positive spill over effect" in some European national research systems.

The Panel nevertheless identified some specific problems related to rules and practices applied in the ERC's governance which were not fully adapted to the ERC's mission of funding frontier research.

The immediate measures recommended by the review include : (i) the streamlining and integration of governance structures with the fusion of the positions of ERC Sec Gen and Director of the ERCEA; (ii) adapting funding philosophy to frontier research; (iii) establishing standing committees on a number of issues; (iv) adoption of new and streamlined procedures for reviewers and panellists; (v) improvement of transparency; (vi) financial compensation for members of the ScC; (vii) and facilitation of recruitment of scientists by the ERCEA.

The review comes to the position that while the executive agency model, in its current standard form, involves a number of constraints, the difficulties and risks associated with moving to a new structure based on Article 187 of the TFEU, including the possibility of political interference with the ERC's scientific independence, would not justify a change of structure - at least until the prospects for developing and refining the ERCEA to meet the ambitions of the ERC are exhausted. The Panel recommends a further independent review in two years.

In conclusion, the Commission states that the year **2010 will see further progress related to these developments.** The follow-up to the ERC review will entail the appointment of a Director of the ERCEA. Amendments to the legislation to incorporate improvements in the ERC's construction and operations, including the management of independent experts in the peer review process, are also foreseen. A standing Identification Committee will also be set up in view of the renewal of some members anticipated for the end of their first term of office in February 2011.

The ERC grant funding is expected to maintain its current growth path, with the rising annual budget during FP7.

The Commission is delighted that the ERC continues to be extremely popular with researchers and that its reputation is enhanced by the track record that has been built. With a strong likelihood that the volume of high-quality proposals will increase, the ERC should be in a stronger position to contribute to Europe's ambitions for world excellence in research, and thereby to the objective of the [Europe 2020 strategy](#) of developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation. The objectives, as well as the main strands of the future architecture and mechanisms of EU research funding, will be further developed in the "Innovation Union" flagship initiative, that has been announced in the "Europe 2020" communication and will be presented in the Autumn 2010.