

Conclusions of Workshop on the Topic of “European Research Council” (ERC)

The ERC workshop organized as a satellite meeting of the international conference 8th Czech Days for European Research, which took place in Prague on 25 October 2010, dealt with the European Research Council, its vision of future, and the Czech Republic's support of frontier research and of the possible general strategies for the support of frontier research. Both ERC high level representatives and key players of Czech R&D presented their thesis related to the topic. Moreover, the Czech ERC grant holders shared their experience of ERC. Based on their presentations and the rich panel discussion the workshop arrived at the following conclusions:

The ERC is **a unique and very successful tool for the support of frontier research** within the European Research Area. Projects are submitted by researchers, and the only evaluation criterion is their scientific excellence. ***ERC activities should be further developed and supported during FP8.*** *It is necessary to strengthen ERC autonomy, especially in terms of creating a new set of rules suitable for frontier research. Frontier research is in many ways different from research motivated by society's needs, which receives most of the framework programme funding. At the same time, ERC needs a substantial budget increase* to satisfy the challenges which can be resolved by frontier research only and thus make a significant contribution to preserving and strengthening global competitiveness of the European Research Area (ERA).

Although the ERC has a short history, it has now become the standard for measuring quality, excellence, and performance of host institutions and individual EU countries in the area of R&D. The level of success in the competition for ERC grants is undoubtedly among the most important indicators of the quality of an R&D institution. The success rate of Czech applicants gradually grows and the attractiveness of Czech host institutions and the CR itself is beginning to be comparable to that of other European countries. It is therefore necessary to start providing effective support to this trend on a national level: evaluation of institutions and individuals needs to follow international standards, international peer-review of national projects should be strengthened, and building up capacities must be aimed at reaching global excellence of Czech R&D institutions in rightly selected scientific disciplines. Thus, despite of the gap in the success rates between the Old and the New Member States in the ERC, the Czech Republic supports the uncompromised emphasis on global excellence of the ERC grant holders.

Czech universities and research institutions should be more open to international environment, and actively seek new talents, especially the young ones. They should motivate their current outstanding researchers to grow professionally, and provide them with adequate environment and maximum possible support. This strategy will be reflected by a higher rate of success in ERC grant applications in the long-term.

On the national level, activities and initiatives leading to increasing FP participation, especially in the Ideas (ERC) programme, need to be supported. In view of the growing importance of ERC supported research, it is necessary to start the national grant scheme for young researchers to support their professional growth and strengthen their ability to independently and autonomously formulate relevant research topics. At the same time, it is necessary to initiate a national-level programme for highly evaluated ERC applicants who have not been financed on EU level due to budgetary reasons.