

Event: ERC 5th anniversary
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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[1. A part of European history]

Dok nr. 2237663

Commissioner, distinguished scientists, ladies and
Gentlemen.

It was a historic moment for the EU, when the European
Research Council was established in 2007.

The establishment of the ERC was a new tool in
supporting frontier research.

But even though the ERC was a new element in an EU context, and even though the ERC is only 5 years old, it is still part of a European history and tradition stretching back hundreds of years.

The oldest universities in Europe are Bologna and Paris.

They were recognised as institutions before 1200.

After that European universities quickly spread throughout Europe.

Oxford, Cambridge and Montpellier were not far behind.

And soon after, universities were founded in Germany, Ireland, Scotland, Hungary and Poland.

And at that time, there was also close links between professors and academics at the different European universities.

Universities were more or less by definition European.

By the year 1400, there were 64 European universities.

Today there are more than 4,000 higher learning institutions in Europe.

So the ERC is really building on a long European narrative of striving for knowledge and innovation.

And in my view the ERC is a distinguished milestone in this story.

[2. Celebrating the ERC]

It's a great honor for me to be here today and be part of the celebration of the European Research Council.

For at least three reasons:

First of all, the initial steps towards establishing the ERC were taken during the previous Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Although I am sorry to say that we cannot take all the credit for the creation of the ERC.

But during this period, the principles of the ERC were discussed.

The second reason why I am proud to be here today is that the ERC's main visions have been implemented.

In fact, implemented with great success!

The ERC has been established and consolidated as an important part of the European Research Area.

The ERC has brought a new definition to European added-value, by allowing researchers to compete with each other based on the sole criterion of excellence.

The third reason why I am proud to be part of this celebration is that the ERC, in my view, is one of the best examples of an integrated European Research Area.

The ERC's grants are offered in pan-European competition.

That in itself helps strengthen scientific excellence in Europe.

The ERC contributes to researcher mobility as researchers can apply for ERC grants with a host institution in another country.

A grant can move from one institution to another, both within the same country and between EU countries.

It is exactly that kind of approach and flexibility that creates a true European Research Area.

[3. The Future]

Regarding the future: As with all successes, we should think ahead and strive towards even better solutions.

There is still room for improvements – even for the ERC.

Let me reflect on three dimensions, which in my view could be improved in the future.

Firstly, we need to raise the number of female researchers applying for ERC grants.

We need to utilise the full potential of all researchers in Europe.

A better inclusion of women will improve the quality, objectivity and relevance of knowledge, technology and innovation for the benefit of society.

Secondly, I would very much like to see the distribution of ERC grants to be less concentrated with regard to institutions and countries.

Not by compromising on the principle of Excellence, but by initiating efforts to raise the level of scientific excellence in low research intensive countries.

A more even distribution of grants shall be a welcomed sign of successful efforts to develop excellence throughout Europe.

Thirdly, as the Scientific Council has rightly identified and attempted to tackle, the international dimension of the ERC needs to be strengthened.

The number of researchers from outside Europe receiving ERC grants needs to be increased.

We need to attract the best scientists from around the world, which in itself adds value to the European Research Area.

In my opinion, the ERC grant schemes are perfect instruments to attract researchers to Europe.

I welcome the ERC's efforts to promote Europe as an attractive knowledge region.

And I hope that we, in the future, will see more events like the one organised in Boston in January this year.

[4. Conclusion]

The ERC is an outstanding continuation of Europe's historical pursuit of knowledge and science.

Let me now conclude by underlining Denmark's and the Danish Presidency's full support to the ERC and its mission.

In our view, we need a strong, independent and visionary European Research Council.

And let me convey my sincere congratulations to the ERC and to Europe for this great achievement!

With these words – ladies and gentlemen - I would like to thank you for your attention.