European Research Council

Meeting of the

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

13 - 14 October 2009

BRUSSELS

Summary of the meeting

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): Dr. Claudio BORDIGNON, Prof. Sierd CLOETINGH, Prof. Mathias DEWATRIPONT, Prof. Carlos DUARTE, Vice-Chair Dr. Daniel ESTEVE, Prof. Pavel EXNER, Prof. Hans-Joachim FREUND, Prof. Wendy HALL, Prof. Carl-Henrik HELDIN, Chair Prof. Fotis C. KAFATOS, Prof. Michal KLEIBER, Prof. Norbert KROÓ, Prof. Maria Teresa LAGO, Prof. Henrietta MOORE, Vice-Chair Prof. Helga NOWOTNY, Prof. Alain PEYRAUBE, Prof. Salvatore SETTIS, Prof. Andreu MAS-COLELL

Scientific Council members excused (in alphabetical order): Dr. Oscar MARÍN, Prof. Christiane NÜSSLEIN-VOLHARD, Dr. Leena PELTONEN-PALOTIE, Dr. Jens ROSTRUP-NIELSEN, Prof. Rolf ZINKERNAGEL

ERC Executive Agency staff present: Jack METTHEY, Pablo AMOR, Yves PATERNOSTER, Gabor Mihaly NAGY, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Thierry PROST, Theodore PAPAZOGLOU, Laura PONTIGGIA, Benjamin TURNER, Alexis Michel MUGABUSHAKA, Elisabeth SJOSTEDT, Catherine AUDOUZE, Hilde BAESKENS

European Commission, DG Research, Directorate S staff present: William CANNELL, Anne MALLABAND, Christine SIMON

ERC President's staff present: Manolis ANTONOYIANNAKIS, Isabel PETTERA

Chair of the meeting: Prof. Helga NOWOTNY, ERC Scientific Council

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency

1. Welcome, plans and goals of meeting

The Chair welcomed all participants at the meeting.

2. Adoption of draft agenda and draft point summary from the previous meeting

The agenda of the meeting, the point summary of the Scientific Council (ScC)'s 21st plenary meeting in Warsaw (29-30 June-1 July 2009), and the point summary of the *"ScC leadership meeting[1]"* (24 September 2009), were adopted.

3. Update on recent meetings

The ERC Board meeting and the ERC Executive Agency Inauguration event which took place on 24 September 2009 were reported.

4. ERC Executive Agency: state of play

The ERC Executive Agency informed the ScC on developments as regards IT infrastructure, logistics and recruitment.

A key objective is to organise a transition in ERC processes, including expert management and evaluation, from the present paper filing towards purely electronic tools. The ScC asked the Executive Agency for further improvements of the electronic system such as the technical procedure for submission of applications. It is also desirable to allow applicants to specify one or more persons whom they would not like to review their proposal.

As regards recruitment on 1 October 2009 ERC Executive Agency staff reached 225 people with a significant proportion of women (68%). All management posts have been filled with the exception of the Director, one Head of Department and two Heads of Unit. The ScC emphasised the importance it attaches to the highly qualified ERC Executive Agency staff and in particular the Scientific Officers.

5. Preparation of the Starting Grant (StG) Call-3

The ERC Executive Agency reported on the preparations for the ERC StG third call, and the relevant deadlines and budget. Special emphasis is being given to the procedures for treatment of proposals coming from "starters" and "consolidators" during the evaluation, in view of the objective of ensuring comparable success rates for the two categories. The ScC agreed that the proposed approach was adequate.

The ERC Executive Agency is continuing the analysis of the outcome of the previous StG calls taking into account the specificities of the different domains. This analysis will assist in the further optimisation of various elements of the evaluation process, given the additional demands on the panels and the administration stemming from the likely increase in proposal numbers. Given the expected increase in the number of interviews at Step-2, the ScC decided on a target of 14 members for each panel at the final evaluation stage; the ScC also considered the scheduling and running of interviews, the treatment of conflict of interest and the redress procedure.

The ScC encouraged the ERC Executive Agency to pursue more detailed analysis which could be helpful in monitoring a rigorous and consistent approach across the panels.

[1] A meeting attended by the Scientific Council Chair, Vice-Chairs, Secretary-General as well as available Scientific Council members

The ScC confirmed the importance of the extended synopsis as the basis of the Step-1 peer review and expects applicants to submit a convincing extended synopsis in order to maximise their chances of proceeding to Step-2

The ScC confirmed its commitment to fair and consistent assessment by the panels of women researchers and researchers with unconventional careers, and an appropriate and consistent treatment of proposal budgets. The ERC Executive Agency was asked to monitor future evaluations in these respects.

6. Update on the Advanced grant (AdG) Call-2

The ERC Executive Agency described the state of play of the evaluation of the AdG-2 call, which will be concluded at the beginning of November 2009. Following a discussion of the preliminary evaluation data, the ScC reflected on the IT system for submission/evaluation, noting that a more user-friendly approach should be explored with regard to submissions (need for better feedback to applicants regarding the completeness of proposals) and to the management of referees.

7. Panel chairs briefing

The ScC discussed the briefing document which is to be provided to panels prior to the start of evaluations. ScC members were invited to provide comments in writing to finalise the document, which would then be circulated to the panel chairs/members.

8. Update on the granting process

An update on the granting process covering the period 15 July- 12 October 2009 was given by the ERC Executive Agency, including information on the overall budgetary situation and the impact of the Agency's transition to autonomy. The ScC welcomed the report and asked for more detailed analysis on the process of ethical scrutiny and the impact that the latter may have on the granting process. Since not only the LS domain, but to a considerable extent also the SH domain is subjected to ethical review, the ScC asked to be better informed about the composition of the ethical review panels and the criteria upon which they base their work.

9. Update on Communication issues

The ERC Executive Agency presented a concept for an award ceremony for Starting grantees as a possible recurring yearly event and invited the ScC to comment on it. The ScC encouraged the notion with the promise that the Starting Grantees themselves will be the protagonist of the event. Against this background, the ScC discussed possible channels for dissemination of the outcome of funded projects. The ScC encouraged the use of electronic and multimedia means of communication without neglecting more traditional methods, such as the participation in information events and press releases.

10. Update on scientific follow up of projects

The ScC decided to postpone discussion on this point to the next plenary meeting in December 2009.

11. Review of the ERC Structures and Mechanisms (closed session)

12. Organisation of the ScC's work in light of the Review of the ERC Structures and Mechanisms

The ScC considered the three recommendations that were made by the ERC Review panel and were directly applicable to the ERC ScC, namely:

- Publication of the summarized minutes of the ScC's plenary meetings.

- Establishment of a subcommittee of the Scientific Council to steer and control the construction of a database for the selection of Reviewers and panellists; and

- The establishment of a permanent committee of the Scientific Council dealing with conflicts of interest issues.

It was decided that summarized minutes should be published, starting with the minutes of the present meeting.

On the general question of ScC sub-structures, the ScC acknowledged that the constitution of standing committees along the lines of the Review Panel's recommendations will assist in consolidating and professionalising its work.

The ScC approved the establishment of the two Committees, the members – see below - to serve for 2 years. They will define their own rules and working methods. Notwithstanding their independent operation, it is expected that their conclusions/decisions will always be confirmed by the ScC in quorum. The ScC also requested that these Committees are assisted by ERC Executive Agency staff.

Both sub-committees will be chaired by the ScC Chair who may delegate this task to a Vice-Chair.

The Committee on Panel recruitment will consist of the ScC Chair, the three current domain co-ordinators and three further members, each representing one of the scientific domains:

- Chair, Fotis Kafatos; Helga Nowotny, Daniel Esteve, Carl-Henrik Heldin, Alain Peyraube, Hans-Joachim Freund, Carlos Duarte.

The Committee will be responsible for formulating policies and procedures concerning the selection of ERC evaluation panel members and reviewers and steering the setting up of an expanded data base of experts and its continued monitoring. Moreover, it will also prepare and approve specific proposals for panel composition and develop norms and rules for the proper functioning of the panels, and more generally, of the ERC peer evaluation system on the basis of feedback from Scientific Officers, Scientific Council delegates to panel meetings and other sources.

The Committee on Conflict of Interest will consist of the Chair and Vice-Chairs plus two further ScC members:

- Chair, Fotis Kafatos, Helga Nowotny, Daniel Esteve, Henrietta Moore, Sierd Cloetingh.

The Committee will be responsible for formulating guidelines on Conflict of Interest, Fraud and Ethical matters related to any facet of the ERC's competences, as well as clarifying criteria and considering any particular instance or situation brought to the attention of the Standing Committee. Since the ScC Committee on CoI will work in parallel to the activities of the Commission on Conflict of Interests, Fotis Kafatos accepted membership only on the condition of a future synthesis of the work of both committees, taking into account global best practice.

One of the first tasks of the Committee on Conflict of Interest (CoI) will be to examine CoI rules of other funding agencies for a review of best practices. The ERC Executive Agency was requested to present an analysis of the rules on Conflict of Interest applied by the Commission. In addition, the ScC considered that the process and criteria for ethical review should be examined in detail.

13. Future ERC strategy

13.1 Update on the activities of the Working groups (WG) on Open access, Industry and Third countries

Conclusions of the first meetings of ScC Working Groups on Open Access and third country applicants were reported.

WG on Open Access

Mathias Dewatripont (WG Chair) reported that the Guidelines adopted by the ERC are broadly consistent with current developments and good practice in this domain. However, the ScC should consider adjusting the Guidelines to require earlier public availability of "post-prints" (finalised text for publication, not necessarily formatted as the published article/monograph). Developments since the Guidelines were adopted suggest that a requirement for public access of the post-print simultaneous with publication is feasible for all areas of research. A proposal for revision of the ERC Vademecum on Open Access along these lines had been prepared by the WG.

This point will be further discussed in a Workshop to be organised with the participation of representatives of other major research funding agencies and will subsequently be tabled for decision at a forthcoming ScC plenary meeting.

WG on Third countries' recruitment

In the absence of the WG Chair Alain Peyraube (who had to leave the meeting earlier), Pavel Exner reported on the deliberations of the WG, which included a discussion on possible ways of raising awareness of the ERC and the attractiveness of European host institutions to researchers residing in third countries. A first discussion took place of the international scientific conferences at which the ERC should be presented and promoted. The ScC members were invited to contribute to this exercise.

WG on Gender Balance and WG on Relations with Industry

It was decided to present the work of the other two Working Groups, on Gender Balance and on Relations with Industry, during the forthcoming meeting in Israel.

13.2 State of play on the preparation of the Work Programme 2011

The ERC Executive Agency provided an update on developments regarding the establishment of the 2011 Work Programme (WP). It is expected that the final draft will be finalised at the Bucharest ScC plenary meeting and transmitted by the ScC for Commission adoption by the end of March 2010. The basic features of the WP (ie StG, AdG calls) are likely to be stable, however, the strategy discussions associated with the various WGs may lead to small adjustments and some fine tuning may be appropriate depending on experience regarding the new features of the StG application process and evaluation ("starters" and "consolidators") included in the 2010 WP. In addition, it was emphasised that the ScC should reflect on the future budget distribution between the two granting schemes.

13.3 General discussion

The ScC decided to dedicate a significant part of its December plenary meeting to its future strategy.

14. AOB

- Meetings of the ScC

Following a proposal by the ScC Chair, the ScC agreed to hold a plenary meeting of the ScC in Latvia, possibly in 2010.

- Specific case with one AdG project

The ERC Executive Agency requested the advice of the ScC on the future treatment of an AdG following the death of the PI. The ScC confirmed that grants are awarded to individual PIs yet, given the particular circumstances, the ScC recommended the ERC Executive Agency seek the advice of the panel, which evaluated the project and asked to be kept informed on how the situation is resolved.