

# Philosophy of ERC

## - an opportunity valued also in Czech Republic?

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# I. Several facts

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- 2007: First ERC call
- 2011: TC Prague and Charles University organized WS for ERC applicants. Beginning of a very extensive effort continuing until now.
- 2011: Article in Lidové noviny "ERC and why is science and research in Czech Republic missing the opportunity?"
- 2017: 10 years of ERC, AB 2,2017: Opening to the world  $\times$  isolation into a local bubble labeling ERC as "an exercise in writing proposals".
- 2024: Visit of the ERC President Maria Leptin in CR, a question posed by a member of the panel: "And how is ERC going to help us?"

## II. Philosophy of ERC

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- **Frontier research**, big discoveries, accepting risk of possible dead ends as an integral part of big science.
- **Initiative** of individual researchers.
- **Honesty, trust and responsibility**. Leading scientists - responsibility for leading others. States, institutions, communities - responsibility for allowing leaders to lead.
- **Service** with minimal bureaucracy. This contradicts "science management" that intends to rule and control.

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## II. ERC philosophy works. Questions for us:

- ERC is changing science in Europe (and beyond Europe).
- Are we willing to change science in our country? Or, are we so exceptionally good in comparison to the world that there is no need for any change? Is it enough to add more money?
- We are objectively confronted with hard facts: **Using ERC standards, we are loosing as a whole country in comparison with numerous individual institutions throughout Europe, and the gap is growing.**  
Do we, as a country, care?



# III. Barriers

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- We have lost perspective.
- We are afraid of change. Therefore we do not wish to accept reality.
- Particular, local, and short-sighted interests.
- Science management tends to exercise power and control. This created a culture **reporting deliverables** instead of a culture aiming at world scale research **results** that are naturally also disseminated. We do not even make a distinction between the meaning of deliverables and results in official legal documents.
- The life of professionals who go against the stream is in our environment hard. **ERC grantees go against the stream.**

## IV. What can be done - research community level.

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- We should get out of the local bubble. We should not give up, be open to positive inspirations and foster initiative.
- Adopt practical actions that welcome scientists from abroad, Czech as well as foreign citizens.
- In research assessment, apply high international standards following DORA. We should oppose quantification of quality by "points" and "numbers".
- We should not be silent to distortions of our research environment and to persisting failures in legislation.
- We should systematically support applicants for competitive and independent individual international grants like ERC.

## IV. What can be done - state level.

- Organize an open discussion on participation in the ERC calls.
- Support Czech Grant Agency as the high national standard, which accepts also its preparatory role for possible subsequent participation of leading scientists in ERC calls.
- Motivate participation in programs like ERC in contrast to routine reliance on national grant funds. Such practice can be for leading national researchers safe, but it damages the whole funding system. Increased institutional funding should be linked with getting competitive EU funding, from ERC in particular.
- Place the revised program ERC-CZ as the most efficient tool for supporting high quality science within the country. Evaluation of quality that can otherwise not be reached is provided for free by ERC.

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- National information day.
- System of workshops (I, II, III) + Mock Interview.
- Methodological support for creating and running ERC pipelines at individual institutions.
- Individual consultations.
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- Raising undistorted ERC awareness.
- This year a very serious unexpected obstacle has appeared that endangers continuation. Many participants as well as institutions did not obey instructions and recommendations.



## VI. Further comments to consider

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- Even an unsuccessful ERC application can be very rewarding, **providing that it is prepared properly.**  
If an ERC application were considered as “giving it a try” or as an “exercise in writing”, or, in the worst, only as filling the requirement, then it could hardly be done properly.
- Considering ERC seriously is certainly rewarding over a longer time period for any institution. If we wish not to be disturbed and prefer short sighted views, then there is no help.
- ERC does the best to help. See the changes in the ERC WP2024.
- **The rest is up to us. Nobody else will do our part of the work.**

**Thank you for your valuable time.**

**We will greatly appreciate your help.**