



SVERIGES UNGA AKADEMI



Die Junge Akademie

an der Berlin-Brandenburgischen
Akademie der Wissenschaften
und der Deutschen Akademie
der Naturforscher Leopoldina

To the Heads of State of Europe:

Keep European Science Competitive – Don't Cut the European Research Council (ERC) Budget!

Sveriges Unga Akademi (Sweden), Det Unge Akademi (Denmark), Die Junge Akademie (Germany) and De Jonge Akademie (The Netherlands) recognize the great positive impact of the European Research Council (ERC) on the research climate in Europe. As young European scientists we wish to express our concern that the budget for the ERC within Horizon 2020 is under threat of down-sizing. Rather, few actions would serve better to strengthen European competitiveness than to further develop this highly successful funding instrument for discovery.

Since its inception in 2007, the ERC has offered scientists in Europe grants for pursuing science at the highest level. Despite this brief existence, the impact of ERC-funded research is already impressive. Previous framework program funding schemes have been directed towards larger consortia of researchers. The ERC has, for the first time, offered individual grants to research of the highest quality similar to that available to our colleagues in North America for example, and, as such, significantly strengthened our ability to compete internationally. By setting a standard of excellence in science across the Union, the ERC has also served to harmonize criteria for research quality across the continent. The transparent and quality-focused peer review process serves as an inspiration for national funding bodies.

Nowhere has this effect been more dramatic than in the grants for junior research leaders. Across Europe, talented young scientists now know that there is a funding body that will support their development to independence with the necessary financing for this transition, rather than being forced to rely on more senior benefactors. This will truly allow novel ideas for human health, practices in society, environmental decisions and numerous other fields to emerge. By providing internationally competitive grants for establishing one's own research group, the ERC not only provides a means to retain junior researchers who might otherwise feel compelled to emigrate outside the Union; it also offers a golden opportunity to recruit the most promising scientific young minds from all over the world. As such, it has served to connect young European scientists to each other and to the Commission.

The ERC constitutes a relatively small proportion of the Commission's budget for research and development. Cutting down on this successful program at this critical time would have deleterious effects on the Union's ability to remain scientifically competitive and would discourage many talented recent graduates to pursue a career in research on our continent.

The Young Academies of Sweden, Germany, Holland and Denmark consist of some of the most accomplished junior research leaders (up to approximately 10 years after receiving a PhD) in their respective countries. The members are elected on the basis of scientific excellence and their commitment to work to strengthen the understanding and role of science in society. Young Academies interact with policy makers, communicate science to school children and the general public, and serve as interdisciplinary forums where scientists and ideas from different fields can meet and develop.