



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

Address

**by the Federal Minister of Education and Research,
Dr. Annette Schavan, MdB,**

**on the Occasion
of the Reception for the Launch Event
of the European Research Council
in Berlin
on
26 February 2007**

Check against delivery!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A new chapter of European research funding is being opened with the launch event of the European Research Council and the constituent meeting of its Scientific Council.

I would like to welcome you cordially to Berlin and I am pleased that this important European event is taking place under our EU Council Presidency.

The work of the Scientific Council will be characterized by something that has proven to be positive in Germany: the independence of science in selecting talents and projects to be funded. It is the prerequisite for scientific excellence as the only criterion for awarding funds. The best ideas will succeed in the European competition. This justifies the sovereignty of science vis-à-vis politics.

But politics also benefits. It is freed from inappropriate expectations which are detrimental to the criterion of excellence. Politics is gaining sovereignty by trusting science.

Politics and science have worked hand in hand in the development of the European Research Council. Science provided the kick-off; politics put it into practice. Outstanding personalities of the science community in the Member States form the Scientific Council. I would like to thank the colleagues in the Member States of the European Union for this important signal to science and I would like to thank the members of the Scientific Council for their willingness to become active in this central body of European research policy. I am optimistic that the European Research Council will become one of the most important science institutions of the European Union.

The new chapter in European research funding can at the same time become a new chapter in the development of the European Union, because research and innovation are important strategic factors for Europe's competitiveness. This was agreed in the Lisbon strategy. Its implementation stands or falls on the greater commitment of the Member States and of industry in Europe to invest in research and development. This is the key to our future role, to more prosperity and social participation. We are looking at the entire value-added chain and are building new bridges between research and innovation.

There will be room for visions, for risk, for the best brains and for talents in Europe – this is how we understand the new possibility of funding basic research. Europe is in the midst of an international competition for talent. We therefore need successful structures and ideas for how to strengthen the common European Research Area and increase its attractiveness. The European Research Council is part and parcel of internationally competitive research in Europe.

To begin its work, the Scientific Council has taken the important decision of funding young, promising talents. The application period for young researchers ends in April. This funding line is an important signal to young talents in Europe. We want to offer them a perspective in the European Union and to promote research in Europe in the international competition for talent.

This course the Council has thus set will have a lasting impact, as will the fact that for the first time ever in the history of the Research Framework Programme the emphasis of European research funding is no longer on industrial research only but also puts basic research on the European agenda.

By funding open-topic projects in the sense of frontier research, we are creating an instrument in the European Union for identifying the most creative minds. The best researchers will be selected and funded in a targeted way. In this way, the European Research Council will trigger an unparalleled dynamism in Europe and beyond.

With the 7th Research Framework Programme, we are pooling European research efforts and are creating a central platform for the most important research topics. The 7th Research Framework Programme is not only the largest research funding programme worldwide but, above all, constitutes an important contribution to successful innovation and research policy in Europe. With a budget of 54 billion Euro, it is the longest and best equipped Framework Programme to date. However, this does not answer all desires in research policy. We need further growth rates in the time after 2013.

The longer duration of the Framework Programme will ensure greater continuity of topics and processes. We now have a good basis for the further development of the European Research Area.

"We cannot stand still when the world around us is moving", wrote Jean Monnet in his memoirs. 50 years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, concentration on the innovative powers of research and development in Europe has become part of the process of enhancing the European Union which strengthens its inner stability and appeal in international competition. This is why I said that the new chapter of research funding is also a new chapter in the further development of the European Union.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to this development. I am pleased that Professor Winnacker has accepted the position of the first Secretary General of the European Research Council and wish him all the best – just as I wish you, Professor Kafatos, the President of the Council, and the members of the Scientific Council all the best and every success.