

## Introduction: The European Research Council @ 10—What has it done to us?

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The European Research Council (ERC) was established in 2007 to encourage high-quality research in Europe through competitive funding and to support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields. The sole criterion was to be scientific excellence. The ERC was to complement other components of the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 initiative for research. Why did states and the European Commission agree to the ERC? There are several partially competing explanations (König 2017). Among the motives were concerns to secure supranational funding at the EU level for *basic research* in addition to various areas of applied research and to make European research more globally *competitive*—against the US in particular—through *competition among researchers*.

These objectives led to such imported terms as “frontier research” and “excellence,” specified in peculiar ways (Hoenig 2017). The Mission Statement of the ERC identifies several short-term and longer-term objectives and indicates some means by which to pursue these. To assess the ERC, these objectives merit extensive attention:

The ERC’s mission is to encourage the highest quality research in Europe through competitive funding and to support investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, on the basis of scientific excellence....

... to substantially strengthen and shape the European research system. This is done through high quality peer review, the establishment of international benchmarks of success, and the provision of up-to-date information on who is succeeding and why.

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The hope is that these processes will help universities and other research institutions gauge their performance and encourage them to develop better strategies to establish themselves as more effective global players.

By challenging Europe's brightest minds, the ERC expects that its grants will help to bring about new and unpredictable scientific and technological discoveries – the kind that can form the basis of new industries and markets and lead to broader social innovations in the future.

Ultimately, the ERC aims to make the European research base more prepared to respond to the needs of a knowledge-based society and provide Europe with the capabilities in frontier research necessary to meet global challenges (<https://erc.europa.eu/mission>).

Ten years have passed. It is time to ask how well the ERC has delivered on its objectives and to consider its other important effects—intended or otherwise, positive and negative, on young researchers, research institutions and the strategies of national research-funding bodies and governments. After 10 years we should be able to start to discern, research and assess some of the ERC's more immediate impacts. A decade is, of course, too short a period to assess the ERC's impact, as regards the long-term objectives of its founders and its mission. Still, the first cohorts of Starting Grant and Advanced Grant research projects are completed. The ERC has established and adjusted its funding categories and peer review processes. Some statistics are available (European Research Council 2016a), and the ERC has commissioned a review of the impact of its projects (European Research Council 2016b). Some research on the ERC has emerged, addressing its origins and early development (Gornitzka and Metz 2014; König 2017), as well as some of its impact (Hoenig 2017; cf. Ulnicane 2017 for an overview).

In ten years, how have EU bodies and national authorities received the ERC—and what does this tell us about its future? We already see some effects of the ERC on the research landscapes of European states and scholars. The contributions to this panel present findings, predictions and hypotheses and indicate some of the research themes that will merit attention in the years to come. They were first presented at a panel called “The ERC @ 10: what has it done to us?” at the ECPR General Conference in Oslo, 8 September 2017.

The three contributions to this panel address several aspects of the impact of the ERC over the last 10 years.

Follesdal (2018) reflects on some of the hopes and fears that scholars had when the ERC started: what might be the impact for social sciences and the humanities, in particular for basic research?

König (2018) takes a look at the ERC system of distributing funds to projects, with a specific interest in political science. Who are the political science scholars in the ERC evaluation panels and what political science projects are funded? Based on this descriptive analysis, the article discusses how the ERC attempts to avoid possible biases in the review process and the allocation of projects.

Beerens (2018) addresses some of the “output” aspects of the ERC. What happens to the political science scholars who get a funding for a project, in terms of



subsequent career? She finds that ERC grants improve career prospects, especially in giving visibility, autonomy and prestige to the grant recipient. Effects on research productivity seem quite modest though, conceivably due to alternative funding sources that might replace an ERC grant for able researchers. International mobility does not increase markedly. Worries that the ERC grants would concentrate funds in a few top universities seem unwarranted, and their effect on encouraging international mobility is rather limited. She also notes that there seems to be some growing resistance to the domination of competitive, large grants reviewed by a panel of peers, which may, in the future, confront the ERC funding model as well.

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