

Editorial

Life Sciences in the European Research Council – the Scientist's Opinion

The possibility of establishing a European Research Council (ERC), complementary to the European Commission (EC) Framework Programmes and National Research Council programmes, to support high quality basic research, has been a matter of intensive discussion during the last few months.

In October, the Danish presidency of the EC organised a meeting in Copenhagen to discuss the initiative, as an ERC was considered to be an important instrument for strengthening the European Research Area (ERA). The Summary Report of the Copenhagen meeting (available at <http://www.forsk.dk/eng/eupresidency/index.htm>) was sent to the EU ministers for research. They, at their meeting on November 26, 2002, discussed the progress made towards the creation of ERA, as well as exploring various options for setting an ERC in motion.

The Council agreed to “continue discussions on a concrete basis, on the purpose and scope of ERA, and to explore options for its possible creation, in co-operation with relevant national and European research organisations”. Representatives from the Danish Research Councils, in consultation with other research organisations in the member states, suggested the establishment of a small group of experts to look into the matter. Following their advice, Helge Sander, the Danish Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, has now

invited professor Federico Mayor to chair such a group. The expectation is that this group, in a year's time, will present various options on how to create an ERC.

Following up this exciting development, ELSF in conjunction with EMBO, FEBS and the Division of Basic and Engineering Sciences of UNESCO, is organising an important meeting in Paris on February 19, 2003, to discuss the prospect, from the scientist's point of view, of having an ERC. Prominent life scientists, as well as representatives from national and international funding agencies, intergovernmental organisations, scientific societies, and the EC will attend the meeting (detailed information is available at ELSF's website, www.elsf.org).

The outcome of the discussions will be presented to the European Commissioner, Philippe Busquin, and will be widely circulated among the scientific community.

There is no registration fee associated with participation in the meeting, but registration is compulsory at the ELSF website (<http://www.elsf.org>). Given space limitations, participants will be selected on a first come/first serve basis.

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