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Press release

New Vice Presidents and members of the ERC Scientific Council

17 February 2015

Professors Sierd Cloetingh and Mart Saarma have been appointed new Vice Presidents of the European Research Council. This news was coupled with the European Commission's appointment today of three new members of the Scientific Council.

Sierd Cloetingh, who also serves as a President of Academia Europaea, is a Dutch professor of Earth Sciences and Tectonics at the Utrecht University. He will be in charge of supervision of the ERC activities in the domain of Physical Science and Engineering. Mart Saarma, an Estonian national, is a professor and a director of the Centre of Excellence in Molecular and Integrated Neuroscience Research at the University of Helsinki. He will take over the Life Sciences domain. Both were already serving as ERC Scientific Council members (Sierd Cloetingh since 2009; Mart Saarma since 2011).

ERC President Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon said: *"I very much look forward to working closely with the two new Vice Presidents, elected by the ERC Scientific Council. One of the key tasks of the Vice Presidents is supervising the selection of the peer review panels, which lies at the heart of the ERC."*

These appointments come after the term of office of the former Vice Presidents, Professors Pavel Exner (Doppler Institute for Mathematical Physics and Applied Mathematics, CZ) and Carl-Henrik Heldin (Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, SE) came to an end in December 2014. Prof. Núria Sebastián Gallés (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, ES) will remain ERC Vice President in the domain of Social Sciences and Humanities. The Vice Presidents are elected by the members of the ERC Scientific Council, in accordance with its autonomy.

At the same time, the European Commission appointed today three new ERC Scientific Council members:

- Prof. Tomáš Jungwirth (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, CZ, and University of Nottingham, UK)
- Prof. Dame Janet Thornton (European Molecular Biology Laboratory - European Bioinformatics Institute, UK)
- Prof. Fabio Zwirner (University of Padua, IT)

Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation Carlos Moedas said: *"The European Commission places great importance on appointing accomplished, top-level scientists to the Scientific Council, the governing body of the European Research Council. The independent committee tasked with identifying new members has done an excellent job as demonstrated by the calibre of today's three nominations."*



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President Bourguignon added: *"I would like to warmly welcome three new members of the Scientific Council, who will have the challenge of living up to the standards set by their predecessors. With their engagement, I'm sure they will offer new perspectives at a critical time."*

These new members have been selected by an independent [Identification Committee](#), composed of six distinguished scientists appointed by the European Commission. The scientific community was consulted in this process. The Committee will announce further new members in the first half of the year.

The ERC Scientific Council represents the European scientific community, and decides the ERC strategy and distribution of funding.

Note to the editors

Set up in 2007 by the EU, the **European Research Council** is the first European funding organisation for frontier research. Every year, it selects and funds the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age to run five-year projects based in Europe. Since its launch, the ERC has funded over 4,500 researchers in any field. Under Horizon 2020, the new EU research programme (2014-2020), the ERC has a budget of over €13 billion.

The ERC consists of an independent Scientific Council and an Executive Agency. The **Scientific Council**, the ERC's governing body, is composed of the ERC President and 21 eminent scientists and scholars who define the scientific funding strategy and methodologies. They act on behalf of the scientific community in Europe to promote creativity and innovative research. Since 1 January 2014, Prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon is the ERC President and the Chair of the Scientific Council. The ERC Executive Agency implements the ERC component of Horizon 2020 and is led by Director Pablo Amor.

New ERC Scientific Council members are appointed by the European Commission, on the recommendations of the Identification Committee, following an independent and transparent procedure for their identification. This includes a consultation of the scientific community.

The standing Identification Committee, appointed by the European Commission in May 2014, is chaired by Sir Leszek Borysiewicz (University of Cambridge, UK), and includes as members Professors Alice Dautry (Institut Pasteur, FR), Hans-Joachim Freund (Fritz-Haber-Institute, Max-Planck-Society, DE), Louise J. Gunning-Schepers (University of Amsterdam, NL), Xavier Vives (IESE Business School, University of Navarra, ES), Joseph Weiler (European University Institute, IT), and Agnieszka Zalewska (Henryk Niewodniczański Institute of Nuclear Physics of the Polish Academy of Sciences, PL).

Biographies of the new ERC Vice Presidents

Sierd Cloetingh

Current position: Head Tectonics Group, Dept. of Earth Sciences, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University

Sierd Cloetingh is Head Tectonics Group, Dept. of Earth Sciences, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University. He was recently a visiting Professor at the University Pierre and Marie Curie (2008), at the ETH Zürich (2009), at the IFP Rueil-Malmaison (2009). He published more than 250 papers in international peer-reviewed journals and has been promoter of 55 PhD students of 18 different nationalities. He served the Earth Science community in various functions, including Presidency of the European Geophysical Society. He is currently the President of the International Lithosphere Programme, Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal "Global and Planetary Change" and Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the European Large Scale Collaborative Research Programme



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(EUROCORES) TOPO-EUROPE. He received honorary doctorates from four European universities and numerous honours and awards, including the Stephan Mueller Medal of the European Geosciences Union, Fellow and Honorary Fellow of the American Geophysical Union and the Geological Society of America and the Leopold von Buch Medal of the German Geological Society. He recently received the Alexander von Humboldt research Prize (2010). He is member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and Foreign member of the Royal Norwegian Academy of Sciences, the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, the Heidelberg Academy and the Bavarian Academy. In 2004 he was distinguished as Chevalier de Legion d'Honneur for his contributions to science and European scientific cooperation in research and education. He was elected member of Academia Europaea in 1994 and served Academia Europaea as Chair of the Earth and Marine and Earth and Cosmic Sciences Sections, and then as its Vice President. In July 2014 he was elected the President of Academia Europaea.

Mart Saarma

Current position: Academy professor and Director of the Centre of Excellence in Molecular and Integrated Neuroscience Research of the Academy of Finland at the Institute of Biotechnology, University of Helsinki.

Mart Saarma is the academy professor and director of the Centre of Excellence in Molecular and Integrated Neuroscience Research of the Academy of Finland at the Institute of Biotechnology, University of Helsinki. He is investigating neurotrophic factors and their receptors in development and neurodegenerative diseases. His group has discovered several GDNF family receptors and demonstrated that RET receptor tyrosine kinase is the signalling receptor for GDNF. Recently his group has discovered a new neurotrophic factor, CDFN, and shown that this protein very efficiently protects and repairs dopamine neurons in pre-clinical models of Parkinson's disease. Currently his group is investigating the mechanism of action and therapeutic potential of CDFN and also the biology of GDNF. Mart Saarma is a member of several academies and EMBO. He has received several domestic and international scientific prizes and awards including the prestigious Nordic Science Prize.

Biographies of the new ERC Scientific Council members

Tomáš Jungwirth

Current position: Head of the Department of Spintronics and Nanoelectronics, Institute of Physics, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (ASCR) and Professor, School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Nottingham, UK.

Born in Prague, Czech Republic, Tomáš Jungwirth received his Ph.D. degree in condensed matter physics from the Charles University in Prague in 1997. The Ph.D. thesis work on quantum Hall effect phenomena in semiconductors was performed partly in the Institute of Physics ASCR in Prague and partly at the Indiana University, USA. Subsequently, he worked as a NATO Postdoctoral Fellow at the Indiana University and a Research Fellow and Adjunct Professor at the University of Texas, USA. In 2004 Tomáš Jungwirth was appointed a Professor-Chair at the University of Nottingham, UK and in 2007 a Head of the Department of Spintronics and Nanoelectronics of the Institute of Physics ASCR in Prague. The fields of expertise of Tomáš Jungwirth are condensed matter physics, materials science, electronic properties of nanostructures, quantum Hall effects, magnetic, magneto-transport and magneto-optical properties of ferromagnetic semiconductors, quantum-relativistic spin-orbit coupling phenomena including anisotropic magnetoresistance, anomalous and spin Hall effects, and non-magnetic, ferromagnetic, and antiferromagnetic spintronic devices. Tomáš Jungwirth has co-authored about 200 publications including 50 papers in Reviews of Modern Physics, Physical Review Letters, Nature Publishing Group, or Science. In 2011 he was awarded an ERC Advanced Grant in the field of spintronics. He was a member of the ERC Advanced Grant Evaluation Panel from 2009 to 2014. Besides the ERC Scientific Council, he is a member of the Research and Development Council of the Government of the Czech Republic, member of the Learned Society of the Czech Republic, and member of the Academy of Europe.



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Dame Janet Thornton

Current position: Director of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory - European Bioinformatics Institute

Since 2001 Janet has been Director of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory - European Bioinformatics Institute on the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus at Hinxton, near Cambridge, UK, since 2001. EMBL-EBI provides core bioinformatics services, especially public biological data for genome and protein sequences and structures, small molecule data and integrated proteomic, metabolomics and transcriptome information. The institute also performs investigator led bioinformatics research. Janet Thornton also has a research group specialising in protein structural bioinformatics and the computational biology of ageing. She has published more than 400 scientific papers, was elected to the Royal Society in 1999 and is a Foreign Associate of US National Academy of Sciences. In 2012 she became a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to bioinformatics. Janet Thornton coordinated the ELIXIR preparatory phase (2006 – 2013) and leads the commission-funded BioMedBridges project, which clusters the biomolecular sciences research infrastructures to provide data bridges and ensure data interoperability between them.

Fabio Zwirner

Current position: Professor of Theoretical Physics, Department of Physics and Astronomy “G. Galilei”, University of Padua.

After graduating in Padua, Fabio Zwirner received a Ph.D. in Physics from the International School for Advanced Studies (SISSA) in Trieste in 1987. He was then postdoctoral fellow at the University of California Berkeley, Scientific Staff Member at CERN, Director of Research in the Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN), Full Professor at the University of Rome La Sapienza. He was Chairman of the CERN Scientific Policy Committee (2011-13) and of the High Energy Particle Physics Board of the European Physical Society (2009-11), and one of the four members of the Strategy Secretariat for the update of the European Strategy in Particle Physics (2012-13). Representing the Italian government, he chairs the Steering Committee of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, and he is a member of the Board of Directors of Scuola Galileiana, the Excellence School of the University of Padua. He was Divisional Associate Editor of Physical Review Letters (2002-8) and he is currently Editor of the Journal of High Energy Physics (JHEP). His research has mostly dealt with the theory and phenomenology of the fundamental interactions, focusing on the mass generation for the weak gauge bosons, the quarks and the leptons, and the possible unification of gravity with the other forces at the quantum level. His main contributions concern the physics of electroweak interactions and of the Higgs boson, the properties of supersymmetric extensions of the Standard Model of particle physics, the theory of supersymmetry breaking, the compactifications of supergravity and superstring theories.

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