

Rede

von Professor Dr. Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker,
Präsident der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft,

anlässlich der
Verleihung des European Young Investigator Award
(EURYI)

am 26. August 2004

in Stockholm

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort !

BEGRÜSSUNG

Today is an important day for research in Europe. We want to honour the EURYI Award holders of the year 2004.

Our ceremony today takes place in the context of the first Euroscience Open Forum. This is, I would say, an appropriate setting:

To celebrate the first EURYI Awards at the first pan-European scientific meeting!

I hope that the Euroscience Open Forum will become a regular event and that it will be a trade mark for scientific conventions in the tradition of the long-established annual AAAS meetings in the United States, indeed that it will be regarded synonymous with top quality and new and exciting ideas in European science and research.

We are gathered here to present the very first winners of the European Young Investigator Award with their personal diplomas. The EURYI award recipients are 25 top young researchers selected from almost 800 scientists and academics from all over the world who applied under the EURYI scheme. They promise to form the next generation of leading researchers in Europe and to contribute to scientific progress on our continent.

Before we invite the awardees to come up here to receive their diplomas, let me first tell you about the ideas behind the EURYI Award programme:

Excellence in research is possible only under conditions of open exchange and international competition. Science is -- by definition -- international. Researchers as well as their discoveries cannot, and should not, be restricted by national boundaries. Researchers choose to work where they find the best conditions to do their research. If, in Europe, we want to attract and maintain the best scientists, we have to provide them with an attractive research environment and outstanding working conditions.

In order to be able to compete with other leading scientific nations, Europe has to combine its talents and resources to overcome potential internal weaknesses. For this reason, EU research commissioner Philippe Busquin introduced the concept of the European Research Area. European politicians adopted this idea of one unified research area and agreed upon an ambitious aim: By 2010, Europe is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, and its research spending will be increased to three percent of its gross domestic product.

With the politicians improving the general conditions for research and development, the national research organisations felt the need to respond with concrete proposals and initiatives of their own. One such initiative is the EURYI programme proposed by the EUROHORCs, the European Heads of Research Councils. Many of our national research organisations have developed specific strategies to attract and support highly qualified young researchers. We share the conviction that these researchers need to be offered excellent research conditions which will enable them to carry out their own independent research at an early stage. Thus, we decided that by joining our efforts we could achieve an added value with regard to the common goal of realizing the European Research Area.

To bring the EURYI programme about, the EUROHORCs in May 2003 signed a Memorandum of Understanding. In this document, the heads of 18 organisations in 15 EU member states agreed to provide 5.2 million euro per year over a period of five years. They decided to finance 25 awards from this shared fund and agreed on the programme's eligibility requirements. Applications were accepted from highly qualified postdocs from all over the world. The EURYI scheme – as it was proposed and carried out -- creates an open competition. That is to say: there is no proportional distribution of the awards to the individual countries, there is no "juste retour". The *sole* criterion for participation is *excellence in research*.

In mid-September 2003 the first Call for Proposals was launched and, from our point of view, was a huge success. When the deadline ended in mid-December of last year, close to 800 applications had been received by the participating organisations. The 25 awards cover the salary of the award holder as head of his or her independent junior research group, the research group itself with two to three staff and allowances for consumables, travel expenses and minor equipment.

What was expected of the applicants? They had to have an outstanding scientific track record and demonstrate the potential to play a leading international role in their particular field of research. There was no age limit. Instead, postdoctoral research experience of between two and ten years was required. Other criteria for EURYI Awards included

- the research quality and potential of the applicant,
- the originality as well as the groundbreaking character of the research proposal,
- and the potential of the applicant and the proposed research programme to improve the position of European research at world level.

By signing the Memorandum of Understanding for the first Call for Proposals, the European Heads of Research Councils agreed that the review process should be organised in two steps, the first being at a national level and carried out by the participating research organisations according to their own rules and procedures, and the second on the European level, organised by the European Science Foundation on behalf of the EUROHORCs.

In mid-July, the chairs of the panels drew up a slate of 25 candidates on the basis of ranked lists prepared by the reviewers' panels. The EURYI programme committee, which consists of the presidents of the participating organisations, made its final decision shortly afterwards, and a month ago, the list of the 2004 European Young Investigator Award recipients was presented.

With the EURYI programme, we intend to contribute to building the European Research Area and possibly even to explore how a European Research Council might work. That is why we will continue the EURYI scheme. In May we decided to launch a second Call for Proposals, beginning on September 1, in five days from today. I am very happy to announce that three more organisations have since joined the EURYI scheme: the “Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche” and the “Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare”, both of which are from Italy, and -- which I am especially happy to announce here today in Stockholm -- the Swedish Research Council.

From September through November, scientists *from all over the world* are called upon to apply for the 2005 European Young Investigator Award. We are again looking for the best, most innovative and ingenious young researchers to promote European research excellence.

This excellence which we want to promote and honour is an excellence described in the poem “The road not taken” by Robert Frost. “Two Roads”, it says towards its end,

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference”.

We have taken care to detect among the most promising researchers those who are willing to search for the unknown, those who, hopefully, make all the difference. I wish you success for your projects, and I am looking forward to the results, and to see you again in Stockholm to receive another, even more prestigious prize.

Many thanks.