Max Weber Programme

Academic Careers Observatory

National and European Funding Opportunities Conference

San Domenico di Fiesole

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Executive Summary

On the 26th of February, the Academic Careers Observatory (ACO) of the Max Weber Postdoctoral Programme (MWP) hosted representatives from various national and European research agencies, for the second time, in order to provide a platform to show-case available research and funding schemes. The Conference highlighted, in particular, opportunities aimed at early-career scholars. Delegates from the funding agencies explained their schemes and offered advice and insights on the application progress. This meeting included representatives from the European Research Council and the European Commission and from national research agencies in the United Kingdom, Austria, France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, Spain and Ireland.

The conference was divided in four different sessions. The first session of the day focused on European agencies and was chaired by a Max Weber Fellow in Law, Athanasios Psygkas. Lionel Thelen from the European Research Council and Fabio Biagioni from the Research Executive Agency of the European Commission spoke about funding for research proposals at the European level. Thelen opened the conference with a presentation on the different types of European Research Council grants, while Biagioni's presentation focused on the Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions.

The second session of the morning, chaired by Max Weber Fellow Magdalena Malecka, turned the focus of the conference to funding opportunities for early-stage researchers at the national level. This would be the theme of the rest of the conference, with eight different countries in Europe represented by delegates from the various agencies. For this session Dora Meredith from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, Eavan O'Brien from the Irish Research Council, Julia Zimmerman from the Foundation for Polish Science and Pierre-Olivier Pin from the Agence Nationale de la Recherche of France all delivered presentations highlighting research funding opportunities available within their respective States.

The focus on research funding opportunities at the national level continued into the first afternoon session. Eckard Kamper from the German Research Foundation, Martina Haug from the Swiss National Science Foundation, Clara Eugenia Garcia from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Petra Grabner of the Austrian Science Fund. Fran Meissner, a Max Weber Fellow, chaired this session.

Finally, a Plenary Session concluded the conference day. The discussion was focused on research funding in the context of financial restrain and followed by a lively discussion with the agency representatives and the audience.

Introduction, Karin Tilmans, Acting Director of the Max Weber Programme

The Acting Director of the Max Weber Programme, Karin Tilmans, opened the conference by very briefly introducing the Academic Careers Observatory (ACO), an initiative of the Max Weber Programme that is focused on providing young academics with information on the main trends in the academic job market and academia more generally. She emphasized that this year's conference on funding opportunities was already the second conference of this kind organized by ACO, in its effort to offer the Max Weber Fellows and the wider EUI community first-hand information on research grants opportunities. Tilmans reminded the conference participants that they would also be able to attend individual tutorials, during which they would have a chance to ask the representatives of both European and national funding agencies more specific questions. At the end of her brief introduction, Tilmans passed the floor to the Max Weber Fellow Athanasios Psygkas, who was the chair of the first conference panel.

Panel 1: Applying for Funding Opportunities for Young Researchers: The European Agencies.

Fabio Biagioni, European Commission, Research Executive Agency

Biagioni started the first panel with a presentation on Maria Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). He stressed that MSCA is not a stand-alone project but is a part of the more general strategy, called Horizon 2020, which runs from 2014 to 2020. This strategy is based on three pillars or priorities: excellence in science, industrial leadership and societal challenges. MSCA contributes to reaching the first priority, excellence in science; its key objective is to ensure the optimum development and dynamic use of Europe's intellectual capital in order to generate new skills and innovation. The shift from the FP7 to H2020 implies several important changes for the MSCA,[1] such as simplification of the unit's costs, rules harmonization, reconciliation of the funding levels and rationalization of the broader schemes. Another change is a stronger emphasis on principles such as mobility, career development, work/life balance and public engagement. Within H2020, MSCA also aims to encourage industry involvement in research projects and involves further streamlining of award criteria.

There are three main award criteria for the MSCA that are ordered according to their priority in the following way: Excellence (50%), Impact (30%) and Implementation (20%). Using the example of the Individual Fellowships (IF), which are probably the most interesting type of MSCA fellowships for young or mid-career academics, Biagioni explained the main elements of the award criteria. The excellence criterion focuses on four different aspects of the research proposal for IF: quality, innovative aspect and credibility of research; clarity and quality of knowledge or training transfer; quality of supervision and researcher's capacities. Impact criterion for IF implies that the research project is enhancing research- and innovation-related human resources and that its proposed measures for communication and results dissemination are effective. Finally, award criteria for implementation imply coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, appropriateness of institutional environment and competence, experience and complementarity of participating organisations and institutional commitment.

There are several main characteristics of the MSCA general evaluation process used for the different types of MSCA funding arrangements. One of these is that the research proposals are evaluated by independent experts, selected on the basis of their specific skills, experience and knowledge in a relevant area. While each expert is bound by confidentiality, where there is conflict of interest experts can be excluded. Each ranking list is established per panel and each panel is also in charge of its budget distribution, which is not pre-established but proportional to received proposals. Applicants can request a review of evaluation process in case there are certain shortcomings; in terms of timing, MSCA has a maximum of 5 months

[1] Please note that within the FP7, MSCA was called "Marie Curie Actions".

to inform applicants about the outcome of their application and a maximum of 3 months to sign the funding agreement.

Biagioni emphasized that the number of actions in MSCA has been reduced from eight to four and explained in detail the main elements, targets and objectives of the existing actions: Innovative Training Networks (ITN), Individual Fellowships (IF), Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) and Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes (COFUND).

ITN targets early stage researchers (ESR)[2] and its main aim is to train new generations of creative, entrepreneurial and innovative ESR who are able to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for economic and social benefits. ITN implies recruitment, training and secondment of several ESRs within a partnership. It offers three possibilities: joint research training, an industry-oriented doctorate and a double or multiple doctoral degrees. The duration of projects that can be funded through the ITN is maximum 4 years.

In contrast to ITN, IF targets experienced researchers (ER). The fellowship is managed by only one beneficiary and there are four possibilities within this specific action: European fellowship for mobility within Europe, for the citizens of the EU member states and associated countries; Global Fellowship for mobility outside Europe and for a reintegration period of one year; Career Restart Fellowship for researchers who want to resume their research career after a career break; and a Reintegration Fellowship, for researchers who want to come back to Europe after a period spent abroad. The main objectives of the IF action are the enhancement of researchers' creative and innovation potential, acquisition and transfer of new knowledge, and maximization of career development opportunities. Last but not least, an important feature of the Individual Fellowships is that they encourage return and re-integration of excellent researchers to Europe. Biagioni summarized the main features of the IF in the following way:

- ➔ Project duration of 1-2 years.
- ➔ ER can be of any nationality (except for Global and Reintegration Fellowships).
- ➔ ER should have a doctoral degree or 4 years of full-time research experience.
- ➔ Transnational mobility at call deadline.[3]
- ➔ Additional 3 or 6 months secondment option.
- ➔ Career restart plan option - for those not active in research in the last 12 months.

[2] An early stage researcher is defined as a researcher who is in the first 4 years of his or her professional career and who has not yet been awarded a PhD.

[3] This implies that a researcher did not reside or carried out his or her main activity in the host country for more than 12 months in last 3 years.

➔ High level and individualized supervision.

➔ 8 panels

COFUND and RISE are the other two programmes that target both ESR and ER.[4] COFUND is focused on providing co-funds for either new or existing regional, national or international research programmes. It implies two possibilities: co-funding of the doctoral programmes for ESR and co-funding of the fellowships for ER. COFUND's main objective is to stimulate different types of programmes that foster excellence and spread best practices of MSCA in terms of international mobility, research training and career development. In contrast, RISE is focused on inter-sector and international exchanges within partnerships and one of its main objectives is to stimulate the transfer of knowledge and sharing of ideas that can be turned into innovative products, services and processes.

Biagioni finished his presentation by listing the MSCA funding rates for each of the four actions and reminding the audience of the dates for specific calls and funding available for each action.

Lionel Thelen, European Research Council Executive Agency

Thelen opened the second morning session with a presentation on the European Research Council's (ERC) grant opportunities for social scientists and humanists. The ERC, whose mission is to support excellence in research, is a relatively new kind of funding body in Europe. Its approach is both bottom-up and pan-European, with an aim to foster competition on both the individual and team level. The ERC features a Scientific Council with 22 members and is supported by the ERC Executive Agency. Its budget is significant, amounting to 1.7 billion Euros in 2014. The ERC's main strategy is to provide support for the individual scientists, foster international peer-review, fund bottom-up research initiatives, and support frontier research in all fields of science and humanities. Within Horizon 2020, a funding program created by the European Union in order to support and encourage research in the European Research Area, the ERC budget amounts to 13.1 billion, which is 17.1% of the whole Horizon 2020 budget.

Research grants available through the ERC are of three different kinds: "Starting", "Consolidator" and "Advanced" grants, each of which is linked to a different stage of an individual researcher's career development. There are several general requirements for the ERC grants applicants. The first is the excellency of researchers, which implies that applicants for ERC grants can be of any nationality, age or current place of work. The second is that proposed research project must be conducted at a host institution based in the EU or any of the associated countries. An additional requirement is that the project envisages an individual research team that will be under control of the Principal Investigator (PI). Another characteristic is that the project can be from any field of science, since there are no thematic priorities: the main condition is that the research be investigator-driven and bottom-up.

[4] RISE targets also administrative, managerial and technical staff.

Finally, an important ERC requirement is the excellency of research, which implies that submitted projects should be innovative, based on breakthrough ideas and be of high risks-high gains character.

Thelen's presentation focused on describing the two core ERC grant schemes intended for early and mid-term career researchers, "Starting" and "Consolidator" ERC grants, and on explaining the specificities of the evaluation process.

ERC "Starting Grants" are available for the "starters" i.e. researchers with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 7 years of research experience after their PhD. The main objective of these grants is to support researchers i.e. Principal Investigators (PI) at the stage of their career at which they are starting their own independent research team or programme. The PI's profile imply that the researchers have at least one publication without their PhD supervisor, a record of invited conference presentations and a record of previous funding, patents, awards and/or prizes. The maximum funding for the ERC starting grant is 1.5 million Euros for 5 years, with the possibility of getting an extra 0.5 million Euros in case of "start-up" costs on the part of PIs moving from outside Europe, need to purchase some major equipment or need to guarantee access to large facilities.

"Consolidator Grants" differ from the "Starting Grants" in that one of the main eligibility requirements is that a candidate has between 7 and 12 years of research experience since his or her PhD completion. These grants are intended to support researchers at the specific stage of their career at which they are consolidating their independent research team or programme. Successful candidates should already have certain degree of research independence (very often already working with their own group), and should also have a promising track record of early achievements, including publications with significant impact, invited conference presentations and, similar to the "Starting Grants", a record of funding, patents, awards and/or prizes. In terms of grant amounts, PIs can get 2 million Euros for a period of 5 years, with an extra 0.75 million in case of extra costs (e.g. PI's move to Europe). The main evaluation criteria are the quality of the research project, judged by its ground-breaking nature, potential for impact and methodology. The PI is expected to demonstrate a high degree of intellectual capacity and creativity, a proven track record and a capacity to go significantly beyond the current state of the art. In terms of commitment, the PI should be ready to dedicate a minimum of 50% of his or her time to work on his ERC funded project.[5]

Before moving onto the second part of his presentation, Thelen spent some time explaining the Social Sciences and Humanities (SH) domain within the ERC panel structure. This domain consists of 6 different panels, each of which is focused on a different topic.[6] He

[5] For both "Starting" and "Consolidator" grant, the PI should be willing to devote a minimum of 50% of his working time, while for the "Advanced" grant; the Pi should devote a minimum of 30%.

[6] The six panels are the following: SH1 Individuals, institutions and markets SH2 Institutions, values and behaviour; SH3 Environment, space and population; SH4 The human mind and its complexity; SH5 Cultures and cultural production; SH6 The study of the human past.

pointed that the SH2 panel is particularly interesting for sociologists, political scientists and lawyers, given its focus on sociology, social anthropology, political science, law and communication studies. Here is the list of the SH2 subpanels:

- ➔ SH2_1 Social structure, inequalities, social mobility.
- ➔ SH2_2 Diversity and identities, gender, interethnic relations.
- ➔ SH2_3 Social policies, welfare and educational systems.
- ➔ SH2_4 Democratisation, social movements, social integration.
- ➔ SH2_5 Political systems and institutions, governance
- ➔ SH2_6 Conflict and conflict resolution.
- ➔ SH2_7 Legal studies, constitutions, human rights, comparative law.
- ➔ SH2_8 International relations, global and transnational governance.
- ➔ SH2_9 Communication and information, networks, media.
- ➔ SH2_10 Social studies of science and technology

In the second part of his presentation, Thelen concentrated on the core evaluation principles of the ERC funding schemes. He first explained the submission process. Applicants submit their projects to a Targeted Panel of their own choice (they can also flag an "Alternative Review Panel").The targeted panel indicated becomes responsible for the evaluation of the proposal. For the host institution, applicants can choose any type of legal entity (universities, research centres, and business research units) in one of the EU member states (MS) or associated countries (AC). The submitted proposals are evaluated by the panel members and remote referees.[7] There are 12-15 members in each panel, all of whom are high-level scientists who are recruited by the ERC scientific officers. In most of the cases, they come from the MS or AC, but around 15% of panel members are usually non-Europeans (coming from the US or other countries in the world).

In the last part of his presentation, Thelen explained the specific structure of the research proposals for ERC grants, including some of the recent changes. He also explained the the different stages of the proposal selection process. Thelen then gave some advice to all those considering applying for the ERC grants in the future, such as:

- Synopsis of Part B of the proposal should be carefully written!
- Budget figures should be coherent!

[7] Remote referees evaluate only a small number of proposals.

- Be aware as PI that individual reviewers are not harmonised!
- Evaluation reports may not be necessarily convergent!

As regards the interview, which takes place once the PI's proposal has passed step 2 of the selection process, Thelen stressed that the panel members are looking for the following characteristics on the part of the candidate and his or her proposal: maturity, leadership and vision; ability of the proposal to stand on its own; capability of answering technical questions and facing uncertainties; and mastery of details.

Thelen concluded his presentation by reminding the EUI researchers and Max Weber Fellows about some of the important advantages of the ERC grants. The grants are very competitive (with 10% success rate) and therefore very prestigious; they are significant (offering 1.5-2 million Euros depending on the grant type), flexible (can be re-budgeted if necessary), portable (can be moved anywhere in Europe) and can certainly boost a researcher's career.

Questions:

The first question came from one of the EUI PhD researchers, Jerneja Penca, who asked Biagioni about the percentage of the funding going to humanities and social sciences. Biagioni responded that approximately 10% of the funded proposals belong to this field, emphasizing that there is not a specific budget for each panel, but rather a global budget. Aleksander Zaklan, a postdoc Jean Monet Fellow, then asked about the ERC Starting Grants, which are aimed at scholars with 2-7 years of experience after the completion of their PhD. Aleksander's question was: When do people actually tend to apply and what advice would you give about when to do so? Thelen responded saying that there is a trend to apply late, at the end of the eligibility period. He said they think this is a mistake as applying earlier can be very useful. Applicants who get to the second step, i.e. the interview in Brussels, can defend their project and receive very attentive feedback from top experts in their field, whether or not they actually receive the grant, and this can be extremely useful. Speaking on behalf of the European Research Council he stated that "we push applicants to apply as soon as possible," adding that "the earlier you start applying, the more experience you get. If you do not risk, you do not get."

Fran Meissner, a Max Weber Fellow asked: How is the 2-year minimum period after PhD calculated? And for calculating whether one is an "experienced researcher"? What about the transnational mobility requirement? Thelen responded by saying that the two years are calculated from the day of the defence until the opening date of the call. Biagioni responded to Fran's other two questions by saying that "experienced researcher" for MSCA is defined as someone with more than four years of full-time experience from the date on which the PhD degree was obtained until the call deadline. As regards the transnational mobility requirement, Biagioni said that the researcher should meet the requirement at the moment of the call deadline, and that for the MCSCA, they do not take into account the legal residence of the applicant but where he/she is actually working: the applicant cannot have been located

in the country for which he/she applies for more than one year out of the last three years before application.

Another audience member asked: What is the timeframe from the proposal deadline to the final decision for the starting grant and then from when the decision is taken to when you can actually start the project? Thelen responded saying that from the deadline to the decision, it takes usually between 7-8 months. When you get the decision, you have 6 months to start the project from that date (the exact starting date depends on you). Normally you need a few weeks or a couple of months to able to hire the people you want; if necessary, it is possible to ask for an extension for this purpose. Biagioni responded to the same question saying that the time period to sign the grant agreement has been reduced to 8 months from the end of the call. In case of the Marie Skłodowska Action, you can start your project within one year, or even beyond one year.

The next question came from Ingo Linsenman, from the EUI's Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, who asked about the training networks (since EUI does not have much experience with this); he also asked whether industrial doctorates could be relevant for the EUI. Biagioni responded, saying that industrial doctorates do not mean necessary 'industry' in a strict sense. In case of MSCA, fellows are recruited by an academic organisation which is awarding the degree. At the same time the fellow should be seconded/supported by another organisation which is not academic, but necessarily industry-based, it could be a private company or small enterprise.

Ylenia Brilli, a Max Weber Fellow, asked about the criteria that determine the funding levels and amounts paid to members of the research team. In response to this question, Biagioni said that the gross amount is fixed as a minimum; there are additional amounts for your mobility. The flat rates are the same for all countries except for those linked to salaries, which are calculated according the collective policy of that country; the differences, however, are not so substantial.

Finally, one of the researchers asked about the success rates for the ERC starting grants. Thelen responded saying that this depends on the year, but that it is roughly between 8 and 12%, depending on the panel and also the country of submission, because some countries, even if you are not granted but have project of qualified excellence, accept to fund your projects. Thelen also said that this creates some level of discrepancy among the countries and also on the bureaucratic level.

Panel 2: Applying for Funding Opportunities for Young Researchers: National Agencies (United Kingdom, Ireland, Poland and France).

Dora Meredith, Economic and Social Research Council, United Kingdom

A presentation by Dora Meredith, who joined the conference via video conference call, kicked off the second panel. Meredith first offered a short introduction to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), emphasising that quality, impact and independence are

some of the Council's core principles. Meredith first concentrated on the different types of grants for different stages of research careers, from the very early stage of the PhD all the way to the Professorial Fellowships. She said that one of the best ways to apply for ESRC funding is through Research Grants open call, which awards projects worth 2 million £. In terms subject areas, she listed strategic priorities of the ESRC and strongly recommended interested applicants to consider these strategic priorities when preparing their projects. The ESRC also offers guidelines on its website about how to write the grant application and other useful information. Candidates from any country can apply, because ESRC aims at supporting international research and since 2007 has supported investigators from anywhere in the world. Meredith mentioned other opportunities such as Centres and Large Grants competition, opening in mid-April. They fund research areas that belong to strategic priorities, offering four awards for big sectors, and single awards worth around 10 million £, which go to research teams and institutions.

She also put special emphasis on the impact-oriented character of the ESRC grants. She explained that one of the main objectives of the ESRC is to support excellent research that has an economic and/or societal impact. This impact-oriented character of the ESRC is the main reason why creating, assessing and communicating impact became one of the Council's central activities. There is detailed guidance and a toolkit on the ESRC website on how to fill in the impact-related part of your application. This is particularly relevant for the Research Excellence Framework, which stresses the impact dimension. The Council also offers an annual prize of 10.000 £ for achieving economic and/or societal impact.

Meredith concluded saying that the best way of being informed about the ESRC funding opportunities is by following the ESCR on Twitter (#ESRC) and by subscribing the ESRC newsletter, which is issued every two months.

Eavan O'Brien, Irish Research Council

Eavan O'Brien started her talk explaining why Ireland is an attractive destination for young scholars. The country has 7 universities, 14 institutes of technology and other research performing organisations. It also has 5 different research funding bodies and a number of public agencies that fund research in specific areas. These and other characteristics of Ireland help explain why the country's institutions appear in the top 1% of research institutions in the world in no less than 18 different research fields. Ireland also has a number of the research publications per capita that is higher than the per capita number of the United States and Canada.

O'Brien's presentation focused more specifically on the Irish Research Council (IRC), an organisation whose main aim is to enable and sustain a vibrant and creative research community in Ireland. The IRC offers opportunities to researchers of any nationality, based in Ireland, and is the main funding agency. It focuses on excellence and on early stage career development. The success rate for the post-doctoral schemes is 12% and has been relatively stable over the years.

O’Brien distinguished between the different IRC funding schemes for 2014 and then dedicated most of her attention to three postdoctoral fellowship grants that she thought would be of most interest to the Max Weber fellows and the EUI PhD researchers: Government of Ireland (GOI), Enterprise Partnership Scheme (EPS) and Elevate Marie Curie International Mobility Fellowship (Elevate). GOI and EPS offer postdoctoral fellowship funding for all disciplines and for interdisciplinary types of research, with salaries up to 45.895 Euro annually. The fellowships have to be full time and held at a recognized Irish higher education institution or research organisation. In terms of eligibility, candidates for GOI and EPS fellowship grants have to have completed their doctoral degree within the five-year period before the call deadline. They are also expected to have authored or co-authored at least one published peer-review research publication or equivalent international property output or present samples of other written work. The other eligibility criteria are that they have not held a GOI or EPS postdoctoral fellowship before, that they have not been postdocs for more than 5 years and that they are not permanent members of staff at any of the Irish higher education institutions or research organisations. The GOI fellowships last either 1 or 2 years.

Focusing in more detail on the Enterprise Partnership Scheme, O’Brien explained that this type of grant implies a 2-year postdoctoral fellowship which is jointly funded by the IRC (which provides 66% of the funding) and an Enterprise Partner (33%). Researchers funded through this scheme should be based in Irish higher education institutions and are expected to have placement opportunities in the company of the Enterprise Partner, which can be based anywhere in the world.

The Elevate fellowship implies a Marie Curie co-funded postdoctoral fellowship award. This fellowship lasts for three years and, while during the first two years research is supposed to take place at the international host institution, in the last year of the fellowship the researcher is based at an Irish host institution, maintaining links to the international host. In order to receive an Elevate Fellowship, a researcher has to fulfil a set of eligibility criteria, one of which is that the candidate is an experienced researcher (ER) who has spent no more than 40% of his or her time during their ER career carrying out research outside Ireland.

Toward the end of her presentation, O’Brien provided some very practical advice for potential applicants for the IRC grants. Here is the list of her suggestions:

- ➔ When preparing an application, read the Terms & Conditions and Guide for Applicants.
- ➔ Formulate a proper plan of action and think about the purpose of your study.
- ➔ Talk to Irish academic mentor/international academic mentor/enterprise partner/two referees.
- ➔ Keep prose simple, declarative and precise in all sections – do not write in ‘essay mode’. Use jargon-free language.
- ➔ Focus on funding excellence, originality and potential.

➔ Think about the following: How can you make your application stand out?

➔ Think about potential outputs/dissemination.

O'Brien concluded with the comments of the general assessors on why applicants do/don't get funded outlining the following reasons: awareness of ethical considerations; feasibility; need for clear methodological approaches; relevant skills e.g. language; choice of mentors and higher education institution; proofreading of the application before submitting.

Julia Zimmerman, Foundation for Polish Science, Poland

The third speaker in the second panel was Julia Zimmerman from the Foundation for Polish Science, the largest non-governmental organization in Poland supporting science since 1991. Zimmerman started her presentation with a general overview of the different funding programmes offered by the Foundation, while in the course of her presentation she focused on two specific programmes: Ideas for Poland and Programme Homing Plus.

The main objective of the Ideas for Poland is to encourage young researchers from all over the world to choose Poland as a place to carry out their research projects submitted for the ERC competition. Thanks to this programme, the winners of the ERC Starting Grant are offered a scholarship of 10,000 Polish Zloty (PLN). In contrast, programme Homing Plus encourages young Polish scholars abroad to return to Poland and invites young international researchers for a postdoctoral fellowship in Poland. The core idea of this programme is to provide support to researchers who are at a very early stage of their careers (up to 4 years after obtaining their doctorate). Supporting projects which last from 1 to up to 2 years, Homing Plus offers research grants of 80 000 PLN a year and personal stipends of 5 000 PLN a month.

With the slogan "Supporting the best, so that they can become even better", the Foundation also runs a webpage for the job offers from their programs and organizes a series of training workshops and networking activities which include, among others, interdisciplinary meetings and conferences, mentoring and coaching programmes, popular lectures and internships.

Pierre-Olivier Pin, Agence National de la Recherché, France

The last speaker of the panel was a representative of the French national agency for research (ANR), Pierre-Olivier Pin. Pin's presentation kicked off with a brief introduction to the ANR. The ANR was established by the French government in 2005 in order to organize the competitive funding of research projects across different scientific disciplines. Some of its main objectives are fostering of the creativity and openness needed to stimulate new ideas and partnerships, targeting of researchers focused on economic and social priorities, encouragement of inter-disciplinary actions. Pin stressed that the ANR offers funding instruments adapted to the various challenges and needs of the French scientific community.

After this brief introduction, Pin presentation was divided in two main parts. In the first part, he explained the main elements of the ANR's renovated framework for action, put in place

through “2014 Work Programme”, while in the second part of his presentation Pin elaborated on the details of both generic and specific calls being offered by the ANR in the course of 2014.

ANR’s “2014 Work Programme” is consistent with the “France Europe 2020” agenda, which is a national strategic agenda for research, technology transfer and innovation. As a whole, “Work Programme” has four main components, each with its own specific budget and governance: “Major Societal Challenges”, “At the Frontiers of Research”, “Building the European Research Area (ERA) and France’s International Attractiveness” and “Economic Impact of Research and Competitiveness”. Two main changes introduced by the Work Programme are simplification of submission and funding processes and streamlining of funding supply. The fundamental principles of project-based funding - international standards, competitive selection, peer-review and fair treatment - remain unchanged, but what is new is simplification of the application process. Another novelty is a single generic call for proposals, which has replaced most calls for proposals issued during the previous years, and the introduction of a limited number of additional specific calls.[8] The new calls for proposals also have a different structure: while generic calls are evaluated in two steps, specific national and international calls for proposals are evaluated in only one step, without changes in the evaluation process. Finally, Pin also explained that there are two entry points and two types of entries for post-docs. In terms of entry points, there are generic and specific calls, while in terms of entry types for post-docs, one can become a post-doc either as a coordinator of a proposal or as a post-doc hired within a proposal submitted by a more senior researcher.

Talking about the generic calls for proposals in 2014, Pin focused on the “Major Societal Challenges” and “At the Frontiers of Research” components. Within the former, there are nine different thematic groups or nine “challenges”, and within each of these, there are different sub-lines of applications. Once you have chosen a challenge, you have to choose the instruments. Explaining the funding instruments for cooperative research projects, Pin distinguished between the five main instruments, which differ in terms of funding levels, duration, type of research they fund and consortium:

- ➔ Collaborative Projects
- ➔ Public-Private Partnership Collaborative Projects
- ➔ International Projects
- ➔ Research Networks
- ➔ Young Researchers

Explaining the main steps of the selection process for generic proposals, Pin offered a structured overview, dividing the process in two main stages (the result of the recent

[8] Such as ERA-NETs, JPIs, bilateral or multilateral calls with other agencies and specific programmes (Astrid, LabCom, Hosting High Level Researchers etc.).

simplification changes). In the first stage applicants present an outline (only 5 pages) then, in the second step, they are invited for the full application stage. All this takes places within one year.

Transitioning in his presentation to the more specific calls within the ANR's programme, Pin focused on "Building the ERA and France's International Attractiveness". With the intention to make France attractive for foreign scholars, ANR has created a special call, called "Hosting High-level Researchers". This call is open to all disciplines and scientific fields that focus on fundamental, technological and industrial research. The main objective of this programme is to host high-level junior or senior researchers from abroad for longer time periods in French laboratories. Potential applicants should fulfil the following eligibility criteria: they should be junior or senior researchers; of either French or foreign origin; have had their doctorate for at least 4 years and spent a significant part of their career abroad. The evaluation procedure for "Hosting High Level Researchers" is quite simple as it includes only one step and involves an external peer-review and a panel. Among other specific calls, Pin singled out the annual ANR-DFG Franco-German call, which since 2007 has opened in January and closed in April, is open to all Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines, and is explicitly open to post-doctoral researchers.

Pin concluded his presentation with a summary of the ANR funding instruments and singled out the following three calls as the most suitable options for young scholars who wish to be funded as Principal Investigators of their own projects: the generic call "Young Researchers" and two specific calls – "Hosting High Level Researcher" and Franco-German call for Social Sciences and Humanities.

Questions:

The first question that came from the audience was for Dora Meredith. The question posed concerned how it works in practice when you have a principal investigator (PI) from one EU member states working with the PI from a UK institution. What are the exact requirements. Do they have to be in a research team, for example? Meredith answered by saying that this depends on each call (and that details are available on the website), and that as far as she is aware, the PI has to based at a UK research organisation and can collaborate with any academic researcher holding PhD from an established international research organisation.

A second question came from the panel chair, Max Weber Fellow Magdalena Malecka, who asked Pierre-Olivier Pin from ANR whether "Hosting High Level Researchers" is open only for French researchers wishing to return to France. Pin responded saying that this grant is not open only to French researchers but to those of all nationalities and that the main idea is to bring foreign researchers with innovative approaches into French universities and integrate them with a long term plan.

The third question was again for Dora Meredith and came from Thelen. Thelen asked for a clarification of the grants available for "education neuroscience". Meredith responded saying

that these grants are available for interdisciplinary projects which cover not just education but also intersect with other fields, such as neuroscience.

Panel 3: Applying for Funding Opportunities for Young Researchers: National Agencies (Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Austria).

Eckard Kämper, German Research Foundation, Germany

The third panel kicked off with the presentation on research funding opportunities in Germany. Eckard Kämper started his presentation by explaining why the German Research Foundation (DFG) has been intensifying its promotion of young researchers and top young talents. The Foundation helps outstanding scientists and academics in optimally developing their research careers and in gaining their scientific independence early on. This help is delivered with another aim in mind - to ensure the future viability of research in Germany. The DFG's promotion of top talents aims, among other things, to ensure that outstanding German scientists from all scientific disciplines are retained in Germany, while attracting scientists from abroad to conduct their research in this country.

Candidates eligible for the DFG funding schemes are all those who have completed their scientific training, i.e. doctorate, and those who want to live and work in Germany (or go abroad in the case of research fellowships). The selection criteria are the following:

- ➔ Applicant's scientific qualifications
- ➔ Project quality (originality, expected knowledge gain etc.)
- ➔ Research objectives and work programme
- ➔ Scientific environment
- ➔ Feasibility of the project

Kämper then described some of the main programs promoting young researchers. One of these programmes is the Emmy Noether Programme, which is especially designed for researchers from abroad and lasts for five years. This programme is aimed at highly qualified post-doctoral researchers and enables these researchers to qualify for scientific leadership positions by making it possible for them to lead their own independent research groups in Germany. Another programme is the Heisenberg Programme, which includes both the Heisenberg fellowship and the Heisenberg professorship. The former is funded for a maximum of five years, enables fellows to be employed at home or abroad and is especially designed for prospective university professors. The latter is also funded for the maximum of five years but is aimed at young university teachers eligible for professorship and is limited to employment in Germany.

The selection process for the different DFG grants is clear and transparent, and consists of three main steps. In the first step, the reviewers review the proposals; in the second step, a

review board assesses the selected proposals. In the third step a joint committee makes a final decision, after which DFG notifies the candidates.

Concluding his presentation, Kämper outlined some of the main funding opportunities for cross border projects in the social sciences.

Martina Haug, Swiss National Science Foundation, Switzerland.

Following Kämper, Martina Haug delivered a presentation on academic funding in the Swiss national context. She started her presentation by explaining to the audience the overall structure of the funding opportunities offered by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Haug focused on four specific career funding programmes she thought would be of interest for the MWF and the PhD researchers at the EUI.

Marie Heim-Vögtlin (MHV) is first of these programmes. It is a special programme that aims to re-integrate and avoid the drop-out of qualified female researchers who have had a delay or interruption of their scientific career due to family reasons, such as child care or the need to support the professional career of their partner. This programme offers flexible conditions such as part-time work and lasts two years with a possibility of extension for one additional year. It requires that the potential candidates fulfil the following conditions: have a MA (for doctoral students) or a PhD degree (for postdocs), have interrupted or reduced research activities due to family commitments, have excellent scientific qualifications, and have a confirmation from a host institution which will be supporting them during and after the MHV. After providing details of the MVH grant contributions, Haug explained that the evaluation process involves two phases, the second of which involves interviews with the pre-selected candidates. She also pointed out that the plan for 2014 is to offer around 35 MVH grants and that in 2013 the success rate was 22%.

Another type of grants offered by the SNSF are Mobility Fellowships. These Fellowships are designed for young researchers who wish to enhance their scientific profile by working at a research institution abroad i.e. outside Switzerland. There are two kinds of these Fellowships: Early Postdoc Mobility (EPM) and Advanced Postdoc Mobility (AMF) Fellowship. The Early Postdoc grants are available for candidates who have obtained their PhD no more than two years before their application; these kinds of grants are available for a period of eighteen months. Instead, the Advanced Fellowships are offered to candidates who already have a post-doctoral experience but for no more than five years. This kind of fellowship is available for twelve to thirty-six months outside Switzerland but also for three to twelve months during the researcher's return phase in Switzerland. For both types of Mobility Fellowships, applicants should be of Swiss nationality, have a valid permit for Switzerland, or be married to a Swiss national. Applicants of other nationalities should have at least three years of activity at a Swiss research institution. After explaining further financial details for the two types of the fellowships, Haug also pointed out that the success rate for the EPM is 59%, while for the APM it is 47%.

“Ambizione” is a special grant that aims to create conditions for researchers to start an independent career in Switzerland. Researchers interested in applying for this grants should fulfil general criteria, which include a possession of a PhD degree and publications at a high level. There are also specific requirements which imply that the applicant has conducted his or her research activities for at least 12 months at a university different from that of his or her dissertation. The applicants should also not have more than five years of post-doctoral research experience. Host institution must guarantee the successful applicant specific conditions such as integration, workplace and access to infrastructure; scientific independence and adequate support in the funding of research expenses. The duration of the “Ambizione” programme is maximum three years. Once acquired, the grant offers its own salary at a research associate level and project funding and personnel, which usually includes supporting staff and postdocs. The success rate for the “Ambizione” grant in 2013 was lower than for the other grants, amounting to 20%, and in 2014. The SNSF offers around fifty grants of this kind annually.

Finally, the SNSF Professorship aims to enable junior researchers with several years of recognised research experience to establish an independent research team. Applicants, apart from the PhD, are required to have an excellent track record, two to nine years of postdoctoral experience, a research stay of several years at an institution different from where the doctorate was obtained and at least one year abroad, and a degree from an a Swiss higher education institution or at least two years of activity at a Swiss higher education institution by the day of the submission deadline. The SNSF Professorships last for four years, with a possible extension of another two years maximum. Evaluation of the candidates is done through a two-round process, the second of which includes an interview. The approximate number of grants available annual is forty. Haug also pointed out that the success rate for the SNSF Professorship grants is 15%.

At the end of her presentation, Haug also briefly talked about the special SNSF grants available for the international short visits. The main aim of these grants is to allow Swiss researchers to go abroad or foreign researchers to come to Switzerland, and in this way, to foster the exchange of knowledge that is beneficial for both institutions. Albeit short in duration, lasting from one week to three months, grants for international visits have no geographic limitations and cover both travel and accommodation costs.

Clara Eugenia Garcia, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Competitiveness, Spain.

Representing the Spanish Ministry of Economic Affairs and competiveness, Clara Garcia spoke about the funding opportunities for postdoc researchers in Spain. Garcia started her presentation by explaining the wider context of the Spanish investment in research and development (R&D). Spain is one of the countries facing the greatest economic challenges in recent decades. This has led to some major structural reforms which aim to increase the economic impact of R&D investments and avoid the separation between research and innovation. In order to achieve this, the Spanish government has formulated a new strategy

for R&D funding, which is supposed to foster stronger links between research and the market.

The funding scheme for 2013, based on competitive grants, is divided into four sections:

- ➔ Talent and Employability
- ➔ Excellence
- ➔ Business Leadership
- ➔ Societal Challenges

Focusing in the rest of her talk on the National Program for Talent and Employability, Garcia explained that several changes have been recently introduced into the national plan. First, the administrative procedures of the programme have been significantly simplified. Second, grants have become portable. Third, and probably most importantly, there is a set of newly introduced funding schemes. One type of scheme are grants for PhD contracts both at Spanish universities and at the institutions that belong to Severo Ochoa Centres of Excellence.[9] Another type of grants are co-funds available for Marie Curie COFUND programme and schemes based on StG. The "Talent and Employability" section also funds postdoctoral contracts of two years duration and postdoctoral fellowships for young researches of the same duration. "Ramón y Cajal" is another sub-scheme that offers research funding for five years with a set of additional benefits and incentives. Furthermore, there is a set of new initiatives to foster employability and attract talent through 1000 new employments in the R&D sector and new opportunities for young postdocs within research projects.

Another important aspect of the National Programme for Talent and Employability are funding schemes that offer financial support for PhD training of Spanish citizens at foreign universities; schemes that foster PhD mobility across universities in Spain; those that fund junior and senior faculty mobility arrangements; those that foster mobility in bilateral cooperation; finally, schemes that fund incorporation arrangements.

Concluding her presentation, Garcia emphasised that the promotion of R&D in Spain is directed at societal challenges, which arise from the need to respond to the problems currently faced by this country. Therefore, the objective of the Spanish national strategy is to promote the scientific, technological and business leadership of the country in all those segments with a high potential for growth at a global level. The search for solutions to respond to global challenges mobilizes major efforts in terms of basic scientific research, development and innovation developed by research groups in the public sector and in business and in collaboration.

[9] Severo Ochoa centres also have a programme supported by La Caixa foundation.

Petra Grabner, Austrian Science Fund, Austria.

The last conference presentation was delivered by Petra Grabner, who explained how research funding works in the Austrian national context. Grabner started with an overview of the basic procedural principles of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). In terms of eligibility, all grants of the FWF follow the territoriality principle, which implies that applicants should have residency in Austria (the only exception to this principle is the Lisa Meitner Programme). Language of the submissions is English and the application processing time is four to six months, with the decisions meetings taking place five times a year. Grabner also pointed out that there are no deadlines, except for some of the specific types of grants offered by the FWF.

There are several key features of the FWF decision procedure. One is that they follow a strictly bottom up approach, which implies that there are no prescribed research topics, no preference for specific procedures, and even no funding quotas. Another is that there are multiple party checks in all steps of the procedure and that attention is given to the close interaction with applicants in order to maximize transparency. Furthermore, independent and international peer-review is used as a basis for quality assurance and reviewers' reports, the full context of which is passed on to applicants, is used as the most important basis for decisions. Finally, Grabner stressed that one of the integral parts of the FWF decision procedure is a discussion of all projects from all the disciplines during a Board meeting with representatives from all disciplines.

In terms of the review procedures, Grabner stressed that the FWF insists on quality standards which require that the review is done by the international rather than Austrian scientific community. For this reason, peer-reviewers come from exclusively outside Austria.

Most of Grabner's presentation focused on explaining the FWF funding categories according to career level and the specific FWF funding programmes. One of these is the Lisa Meitner Programme (LMP). The LMP is part of the FWF's "Cultivating Talents-Development of Human Resources" grant schemes and aims particularly at the creation of international contacts and strengthening of the quality and the scientific know-how of the Austrian scientific community. The main target group of this programme, which lasts from twelve to twenty four months, are highly qualified scientists of any discipline who are not Austrian residents. There is no age limit for applicants. One of the main eligibility requirements for this programme, beside the standard ones such as a PhD degree and a publication record, is a reverse principle of territoriality, which implies that applicant has been based in Austria for fewer than three years during the last ten years, or that he or she has worked continuously as researcher in Austria for less than two consecutive years before his or her application submission. Another very specific characteristic of this programme is that there should be a co-applicant at the Austrian host research institution; this also implies a letter of recommendation and justification for selecting the applicant. Success rate for applications to the LMP is around 30% and applications are accepted on a rolling basis, without a deadline.

In contrast to the LMP, the START Programme belongs to the FWF's "Top-quality Research" grant schemes and aims on creation and expansion of independent research groups. Offering financial security for a significant period of six years, the purpose of the START programme is to qualify researchers for leading scientific positions both in Austria and abroad. Its main target group are outstanding young researchers of any discipline. Applicants interested in START have to satisfy a list of eligibility criteria, such as project being based in Austria, a previous research stay abroad, proof of scientific independence and outstanding track record of publications in international top journals. The success rate for this specific programme is 10-15%; the call is published annually at the end of July.

Concluding her presentation, Grabner outlined some of the main facts and figures of the FWF for 2012. She showed that the volume of funding requests has increased, while the approval rates have witnessed only a slight increase. She also showed that in the period from 2006 to 2012 approval rates have fallen both by funding volume and by number of the applications.

Questions:

The first question came from a EUI PhD researcher who asked Gerhard Kämper whether there are any funds available for PhD students conducting fieldwork or doing experiments for their dissertation i.e. whether there are specific funds for data collection. Kämper responded saying that the applicant must have at least a doctorate, so it is not possible for PhD students to apply, but he also said that it is possible to apply together with a project team led by a professor.

The next question came from a PhD researcher, Anna Auf Dem Brinke, who asked about the success rate for Emmy Noether Programme and the three year-long project grants; she also asked whether there are specific programmes for women. Kämper responded saying that the answer to the last question is "no" and that the overall success rate of the DFG applications is around 30%. This is also true for the three year projects, while for the Emmy Noether Programme the success rate is lower (he was not sure about the exact percentage).

A third question was addressed to all the panellists and referred to the fact that in some cases the reviewers have to be academics coming exclusively from outside the country. Is this typical? Kämper answered, saying that for DFG, this is more of an exception, and that reviewers come both from Germany and abroad. Martina Haug also replied, noting that, since the project proposals for SNSF in Humanities and Social Sciences have to be written in German or in French, it is often difficult to look for reviewers from abroad so proposals are reviewed by both Swiss reviewers and those from abroad.

David Do Paço, a MWF, asked Martina Haug about the impact of the Swiss referendum vote on immigration and its impact on the SNSF's. He also had a more practical question, asking in which language one should apply for the SNSF grants. Haug replied saying that the first question is difficulty and that that the SNSF hopes that the vote will not have a negative impact. She also added that SNSF has to wait and see for the outcome of the negotiations between the Swiss government and the EU. She also stressed that the SNSF schemes are open

to all the candidates who fulfil the criteria and that the agency has also funded many excellent non-European researchers in the past. As for language, she replied that proposals can be submitted in English for social sciences: in some disciplines it is mandatory, such as psychology and economics; in other disciplines, proposals can be written in English, French, Italian or German.

The next question from the audience was addressed to Haug and regarded how important an institution is in the evaluation process; the query also concerned how long it takes SNSF to process the applications. Haug responded that the quality of the host institution does play a role, since it is important that you are independent there but also collaborate. It is also important in regard in mobility. For example, if you did your PhD in Geneva and you want to go back to Geneva, this is, as Haug said “”not particularly appreciated”. As for the time needed for the processing of the application, Haug responded that the deadline is mid-February and then the first phase lasts until May, when you are either rejected or invited for an interview. Interviews take place in June and final results are published in September.

Plenary Remarks: Research Funding in the Years of Financial Restraint.

Chair of the plenary session was David Do Paço, a Max Weber Fellow. David opened the session by highlighting two trends that have emerged in the recent years. One is the externalization of funding from universities to national and EU funding agencies, resulting in increased competition for research funds in certain national academic markets. Another is the development of European funding, which in practices leads to the disconnection between two academic levels, the national and the European level. Do Paço also raised the issue of the impact of the crisis on the research funding and opened the floor for the discussion.

The discussion kicked off with a Thelen’s comment that the ERC has put a lot of effort into explaining to the European Parliament the necessity of not cutting the budget because in most of countries there have been cuts in education and culture funds, so the ERC has done its best to speak to the Parliament to get it to understand the need to preserve at least the big programmes. Thelen stressed that this is important because in some countries, there are little or no opportunities for funding apart from the European grants. As indicator of this, he referred to the fact that the number of the ERC applications is gradually increasing. Biagoni added to this, commenting on the second trend emphasized by Do Paço: he observed that, as far as MSCA are concerned, with COFUND the MSCA tries to influence national agencies to apply the same rules: transparency in the selection process, international peer review, feedback for applicants, high standards in terms of social security. He also commented on the externalisation of funding, saying that the main issue is to create a European Research Area in which researchers can circulate, abolishing the boundaries between the European countries. This, of course, should be complemented with the same kind of actions at the national level. Biagioni emphasized that there should be a synergy between national and European funding, adding that he does not see externalisation as a negative but rather as a positive phenomenon. Do Paço responded, clarifying that that he too did not see externalisation as negative but was just pointed to the emerging practice. Biagioni concluded

by noting that what should be important, in the case of MSCA, are the synergies between a researcher presenting the research proposal and the supporting institution, synergies that should be created before the submission of the proposal. This, in his view, is a key way to strengthen the links between the European and the national level.

The next question came from Tamara Popic, research assistant at the ACO, who asked whether some of the novelties introduced into the national and European funding programmes could be seen as responses to the financial constraints generated in the context of crisis or as responses to other factors specific to given national contexts. Garcia responded to this question, highlighting that the main novelties introduced in the Spanish Ministry's programmes were not related to the economic constraints. They had been introduced, instead, with the aim of incorporating resources from abroad. The Ministry also focused on the ERA and on the creation of synergies between instruments on the national and European level. O'Brien from the IRC responded to the same question, noting that what is becoming pressing for candidates is career development planning; the need for the candidates to be aware of the future opportunities, i.e. where the postdoc is going to lead them. An increasing emphasis is also put on dissemination, on the sharing of research findings. In sum, it is important for the candidates to be able to show how the postdoc prepares them for the future.

Fran Meissner, a Max Weber Fellow, asked two questions. The first was about the idea of research as a public good. More concretely, she asked: In how far are the outputs of research perceived to be a public good that is transmitted through our teaching duties? Fran's other question was related: Are there funding schemes for early career researchers that place importance on research that makes data available to future researchers or to the general public? Do Paço added to this, asking to what extent teaching experience counts in the funding applications. Biagioni was the first to respond to this question, saying that, as for MSCA, teaching activities are considered a substantial part of the applicant's training and therefore can strengthen the grant proposal. Kämper from the DFG responded to Fran's question on data availability. He said that the issue is complicated, since it is sometimes taken for granted that data that have been created with public money must be available for public use. However, making data available requires resources and, in Kämper's opinion, it would be important to incorporate checks as to whether the data are so promising that appropriate to invest resources in making them public. He also added that he does not think that it is a good idea for researchers to submit data they have collected to an archive, but that there should rather be an investment in studies and projects that have an impact in terms of infrastructure. As examples of this kind of project, he gave a study on family dynamics, currently funded by the DFG, which is designed for data re-use. Haug from the SNSF also responded to the question about data availability, saying that the SNSF does not provide support for data storage, the preserving the data *per se*, but promotes massive publications and collaborations on the projects. She also responded to Do Paço's question on teaching, saying that for the SNSF professorships it is very important to have previous teaching experience. For other individual grants, it is expected that successful candidates will spend 80% of their time for their project and 20% on other tasks including teaching, so, yes, teaching is important and is

encouraged. Petra Grabner from the Austrian Science Fund added that the AWF schemes are similar to the SNSF, since the AWF encourages principal investigators to publish their results. Regarding teaching, she said that the AWF's idea is that the funding is for research projects, so it is not necessary to include teaching in the application. One exception is the doctoral programme, since it implies involving PhD researchers in the teaching. Lionel Thelen from the ERC said that teaching is forbidden in the ERC's funding schemes since the focus is on the research project. Finally, Biagioni said that for the MSCA, there is mandatory open access so that fellows are obliged to provide links to their publications.
The next question from the audience regarded whether, in the context of crisis, there is a tendency to fund postdoc programmes more than doctoral programmes or whether it the other way round. Since PhD students, in terms of the number of students, are more costly, would it make more sense to absorb into the market the PhD researchers who are already there? Garcia responded to this question by commenting that in Spain the effort is to try to plan strategically for ten years from now. The demographic profile shows that the average age at researchers and faculty members in Spanish universities is 54, which indicates that in several years there will be a lot of job opportunities. Haug added to this comment by noting, that even though there are fewer postdoc positions overall, it is still important to offer PhD positions since they are relevant for society as a whole, not only for academia; for this reason it is important not to diminish opportunities for the PhD programmes. Biagioni said that the MSCA spends 40% of its budget for early career researchers and 30% for individual fellowships, so the main focus is on early stage researchers.

The plenary session proceeded with the Do Paço's question about project implementation, since in social sciences this is more complicated than in the other sectors; specifically, he asked whether the funding agencies have developed any programmes focused on the implementation of social science projects. Biagioni was first to respond to this question, pointing out that the MSCA funding schemes do not exclude collaboration with the non–academic sector (which is very broad), given their inter-sectorial approach. O'Brien agreed with Do Paço that in social sciences implementation is more complicated: to address this, the IRC formulates bi-lateral agreements (intellectual property agreements) with the academic bodies in order to satisfy the implementation aspect of the research projects.

Zoe Lefkofridi, a Max Weber Fellow, asked about the special funding programmes for women and about the agencies' experiences with these special funding schemes. She also asked about the statistics when it comes to women applying for the different funding schemes. Haug, speaking from the Swiss experience, said that for schemes directed at early career academics, i.e. for the mobility fellowships at the doctoral programme level, there is high number of applications from women, especially in human and social sciences. However, this number significantly decreases when it comes to the Ambizione programme, where there are many fewer women applying. The SNSF has introduced several measures to solve this problem, such as the possibility of applying for child allowances, but they still have to see whether these measures will help. Garcia offered a Spanish perspective, observing that, even though Spain has measures that encourage women's involvement, the main problem is

managing to implement them. Therefore, recent efforts have focused on the institutional level, in order to encourage implementation of these measures. Kämper responded saying that the DFG is looking for flexible solutions for women (as in case of child birth), even though this agency offers no specific programmes for female researchers. From the ERC perspective, Thelen said that the gender dimension is becoming increasingly important and that the ERC is putting efforts into reaching a gender balance in different scientific fields (even though this balance is less of a problem in Social Science and Humanities Panel than in the Physics Panel, for example). Biagioni said that gender balance is a legal obligation for the MSCA and that they are fully flexible when it comes to the events that can affect women's career trajectories, such as maternity leave, for example. Grabner also responded to the question, saying that the AWF aims at least 1/3 of women researchers, and that they also pay attention to the gender dimension in terms of research topics (even though the latter orientation has led to problems since some researchers claim that their research has no gender dimensions). The AWF has adopted this approach for two reasons: first, because they want to promote women in academia and, second, because they have faced criticism from some of the partners for not considering more female researchers i.e. for not being more aware of the existence of good female candidates in certain departments.

One of the last questions raised in the plenary session was posed by Charles Brandon, a Max Weber Fellow, who asked whether the representatives have noticed any biases emerging in the funding trends as a consequence of the financial restraint. Garcia responded by observing that there had been huge budget and policy adjustments in the last four years because of the crisis, but that the response to this had to try to make spending more rational. For example, in the previous years, spending was not adapted to the capabilities of the system, which created huge problems. A second issue are the institutional rules applied in Spanish research institutions. She concluded by saying that constraints and cutbacks are part of the problem, but they are not its main source, since ultimately what is at issue is the problem of the governance of Spain's public universities, which is currently under reform. Thelen responded by observing that the ERC had received more than 11 000 proposals last year, which quite high; he also pointed out that in some countries an application to the ERC is a preliminary step before applying for the national programmes. This is becoming more and more frequent since countries are trying to save money as much as possible. He commented on this trend saying that, for now, the ERC has been able to deal with this trend, but how long they will be able to cope with the situation is an open question.