

Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Anniversaries are – beside the celebration - always a suitable occasion to make reflections on the past and to challenge the future.

First of all, on behalf of the Slovenian Research Agency, let me congratulate the National Institute of Chemistry, celebrating the 70th anniversary and welcome prof. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon and his team, who are on their first visit to Slovenia.

Slovenian Research Agency is a research-funding agency. Our mission is to provide framework for scientific research, including evaluations and fostering international activities of the scientists. The work of the independent agency is advised, supervised and governed by bodies where scientists are taking a leading role, with visible participation of scientist from National institute of Chemistry, one of the most propulsive research institutions in Slovenia.

For the Agency, European Research Council is a show-case of mobilising Europe's potentials and provide the research community with the common focus – excellent frontier research that can contribute to advancements in society. The ERC – as a synonym for excellence - serves as a strong aspiration to research communities *and* research-funding organisations across Europe.

As already mentioned, the Agency is the main public funder of research and development in Slovenia. Our mission is to support excellent basic and applied research across all scientific domains in Slovenia. We actively strive to align competitive procedures with the evaluation standards set by the European Research Council. The modification of rules of procedures underway largely corresponds with this idea.

On the other hand, the Agency is encouraging Slovenian research community to apply for European Research Council's calls for proposals. Five years ago, in 2011 we have established the ERC Complementary scheme. The idea behind the instrument is fairly simple – to act as a safety net.

Applicants from Slovenian research organizations, who were positively evaluated in ERC calls for proposals but not selected for funding, can submit an adapted project. It needs to preserve the main idea of the original ERC project but shall be contextualised in objectives and scope of work. The Agency offers co-financing for up to 3 years and grant projects with up to 200.000 EUR annually.

Additionally, when setting up the scheme, we were determined that the procedure for adoption shall be light – in order to ease the decision for researchers to apply. The decision for co-financing is based on the original evaluation of the ERC. We do not carry out any additional evaluation procedures. An expert committee, comprised of eminent Slovenian researchers and chaired by the ERC Advanced Grant grantee, examines adapted project concepts.

In the period between 2011 and 2015 the Agency has co-financed 14 projects in the ERC Complementary Scheme. 10 projects are currently running; one project will start in 2016.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, as a representative of the Slovenian Research Agency I can not avoid to mention the effects of austerity measures science has experienced after the year 2011. The field of research and innovation has been profoundly affected in terms of financial backdrop. We have lost one entire annual budget in last five years. Minister in office, Prof Maja Makovec Brenčič has re-directed the trend of declining budgetary funding and in 2016 – after five years – we are experiencing a moderate, but in terms of message sent to the community, significant increase.

Benchmarks show a remarkable international presence of scientists from Slovenia. The minimal requirements to continue the positive trend, we need *first*, to achieve the level of institutional funding at least equivalent to 2011, *second*, to upgrade the competitive funding with advanced multidisciplinary projects both in size and content, and third, widening the existing international participation and exchange of scientists.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, with congratulations to the National Institute of Chemistry I am expressing my expectations for even more visible presence of researchers from Slovenia in grants of ERC. We, at the Slovenian Research Agency, are aware of our role.

Congratulations and thank you for your attention.