



San Domenico di Fiesole, October 19, 2010

Ms Máire Geoghegan-Quinn
Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science
European Commission
Berlaymont Building
200 Rue de la Loi
1049 Brussels Belgium

Subject: The selection process for the post of "Principal Adviser in Directorate-General Research, Director Designate of the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA) in Brussels" - COM/2009/2390 and COM/2009/10222

Dear Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn,

I understand that with the launching of your "Europe 2010 Flagship Initiative: Innovation Union" your agenda must be very busy, but allow me to raise an issue of concern to you.

A month ago I was supposed to participate in the final interview for the post of Director Designate of the European Research Council Executive Agency, with the Consultative Committee on Appointments (CCA; 16/09/2010). Due to 'unforeseen circumstances', the interview was cancelled at the last minute. I was not surprised by this sudden cancellation, since in the preceding days the Chair of the Scientific Council of the ERC had asked me to withdraw my candidacy, mentioning that in the case that I was the only selected candidate not to withdraw, the interview with the CCA was unlikely to take place. I found this sequence of events highly irregular and worrisome. Hence, I wrote to the Director General of DG Research (20/09/2010; Cc your Head of Cabinet), but a month later I still have to receive a reply to my letter.

I have been collaborating with DG Research for more than ten years, as your two predecessors can testify. First as Spanish Secretary of State for Science and Technology, and subsequently, as expert in research funding and in social science research. I have always been a 'constructive critic,' but I have never witnessed anything like this before. It's not a personal issue, but an issue of following proper procedures and, therefore, of fairness and transparency, of not changing the rules 'once the game has started'; in summary, it is an issue of 'building trust,' which is an essential element for the European Research Council.



Nevertheless, beyond this delicate procedural issue, my main concern is the full development of the European Research Council as, in the words of the 2009 ERC Review Panel, *"a world class institution that could, with time, become a continental leader in promoting and supporting breakthrough frontier science and technology"*. As you well know, it is this Panel that made the recommendation to create the position for which I applied, and for which it seems I am now the only selected candidate.

I am willing to take this challenging responsibility, collaborate with you as I did with the previous Commissioners, and transform my 'critical support' into effective independent leadership for the ERC Executive Agency. Alternatively, I could withdraw my candidacy if I were to see that by doing so I could help the process of consolidation of the ERC as an independent, properly funded and managed world-class research funding institution. Unfortunately, I do not see that the path proposed by the Chair of the Scientific Council of the ERC, that is, of maintaining the current structure (*"the current and artificial division of authority and responsibilities between programme design and implementation;"* 2009 ERC Review Panel), while possibly creating another review 'task force', provides any guarantee for such consolidation. On the contrary, I see it as a very risky path for the future governance of the ERC in these crucial years of public financial restraint and transition to a new Framework Programme.

As Commissioner responsible for the future development of the ERC, you may be able to provide guarantees for a better and more financially stable governance structure of the ERC, and even argue that the costs involved in not implementing now a key recommendation of the 2009 ERC Review Panel are worth paying (without ever justifying improper conduct). I will be pleased to know your views, although I know that 'the independent governance of the ERC' is not an easy issue to resolve within the current EU legal framework. Furthermore, I am not very keen on the idea that to achieve a future potential best, one must give up on a feasible immediate better.

Sincerely,

Ramon Marimon

Cc: Ms Irene Souka, Director-General for Human Resources and Security, Chair of the Consultative Committee on Appointments
Mr John Bell, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn
Mr Juraj Nociar, Head of Cabinet of Vice-President Maros Šefčovič
Mr Johannes Laitenberger, Head of Cabinet of President Jose Manuel Barosso
Mr Robert-Jan Smits, Director-General of Directorate-General for Research