

Collaborative Research in Horizon 2020. Promoting German-Polish Cooperation in EU Research Funding

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The conference "Collaborative Research in Horizon 2020. Promoting German-Polish Cooperation in EU Research Funding" took place in the German-Polish twin-cities Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice on May 24-25, 2018. Its aim was to discuss EU research funding opportunities as well as to foster German-Polish cooperation in this field. The conference was financed by the EU Competence Network of Brandenburg Universities [1] and co-organised by the EU Research Affairs Office of the European University Viadrina (EUV) in Frankfurt (Oder) and the Regional Contact Point for EU Programmes at the Poznań Science and Technology Park [2]. It was the first conference of this kind with an explicit German-Polish focus and attracted about 50-60 participants (about 80 had registered, including speakers). In accordance with the research and teaching agenda of both EUV and Collegium Polonicum (CP), the conference informed on EU collaboration programmes with special regards to interdisciplinary research on societies, climate and environment as well as energy-related topics.

In his opening address, Jürgen Neyer (Frankfurt/Oder) correctly pointed to the fact that (scientific) cooperation is always based on human networks, joint ideas as well as financial support. According to him, the conference "Collaborative Research in Horizon 2020" was held at the right place since one of the main tasks of the EUV is to enhance encounters between Eastern and Western Europe. His colleague Magdalena Musiał-Karg (Poznań) agreed with this opinion by stating that the twin cities of Frankfurt and Słubice are indeed a laboratory of European integration.

The first conference session was dedicated to two EU funding lines aimed at establishing networks among researchers. Bjanka Bethke (Bonn) presented some general information about the COST programme, which is not confined to specific topics but enables researchers from the EU as well as non-EU countries to set up interdisciplinary research networks. Although COST does not fund research activities, it allows for short term research stays at partner institutions and can be used to prepare further proposals for research funding. The information was completed by Christian Strauss (Berlin), who evaluates the COST programme. Both the programme staff and the evaluators take into account the same criteria, such as the SMART objectives [3], as well as excellence, impact and implementation, and both perspectives were helpful to understand the nexus between calls for proposals and evaluation. Katrin Girgensohn (Frankfurt/Oder) completed this outlook with an example of a successful project proposal for the COST programme. This trilateral view on the EU research

funding system was a great asset to the conference, since it did not adhere to official information available on the Internet only, but gave a lot of additional insights.

The first session was completed by Mareike Schmitt (Brussels) who provided information about the actions Teaming and Twinning, which are part of the Horizon 2020 section "Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation". This section explicitly aims at increasing the participation of new EU member states as well as associated countries. Twinning focuses on institutional networking in the form of joint conferences, visits etc. Teaming concentrates on institution building in eligible countries by establishing new centres of excellence. Schmitt mentioned that, in this funding line especially, a financially solid coordinator as well as well well-selected partners are key to success. At 12 percent, the success rate is slightly higher than in other EU funding lines.

The following session included two parallel events concerning Social Sciences and Humanities as well as Climate and Energy Research. Mareike Schmitt stressed that every proposal should not only focus on research (excellence), but always provide applicable solutions for some of the challenges that the EU and European societies are confronted with (impact). With regards to climate and energy, proposals should refer to fundamental EU schemes such as the European Strategic Energy Technology plan (SET-plan). Following her presentation, two research projects were introduced which had been successful in obtaining EU support. Jens Lowitzsch (Frankfurt/Oder) mentioned that it was crucial to include atypical, non-academic partners into the consortium as well as to have a lot of perseverance. His project SCORE was successful only at the third attempt after three years of conceptualising and improving. The evaluators' suggestions after the first two rejections, however, were very helpful to further optimise the proposal. Jürgen Kropp (Potsdam) from the EUCalc project confirmed a writing and optimisation process of two to three years and recommended attending information and networking events. The establishment of a consortium should be balanced and include not only science, but industry, NGOs and practitioners, too. Besides, he turned attention to the fact that EU evaluators often have a non-scientific background, which has to be taken into consideration when formulating the proposal.

Day one was concluded by a special session for speed networking and project idea building. Ten participants presented their ideas for potential EU research projects with a poster to an audience of about thirty people.

The second day, taking place in Słubice, was opened by Krzysztof Wojciechowski (Słubice), director of the CP. Among others, he mentioned the latest cooperation project between the EUV and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, aiming at establishing a bilateral faculty focusing on digital societies. Then, Anna Stachowiak-Szrejbrowska (Poznań) introduced another EU funding line for networking. The Innovative Training Networks are part of the Marie-Skłodowska-Curie Actions and are funding the establishment of PhD training groups. The funding line is not topic-related and aims at enhancing the internationalisation of doctoral programmes and the mobility of Ph.D. students. In contrast to other funding lines, the budget is automatically calculated by the application system based on the included consortium. Stachowiak-Szrejbrowska, too, stressed the importance of including partners from non-academic sectors, especially the industry. This should enable the transfer of scientific knowledge and the mobility of scientists to non-academic sectors. However, according to her, the cooperation with commercial actors entails new challenges due to different working conditions. Ralph Richter (Erkner) and Łukasz Rogowski (Poznań) introduced the project RURAction as an example for an

Innovative Training Network. Again, the proposal was only successful in a second attempt and after a lengthy process of rewriting and improvement. Richter stressed that the focus should be less on targeting research gaps and more on societal challenges. Since a cross-sectoral and international cooperation includes additional risks, a well-planned risk management has to be part of every proposal. Richter's colleague Rogowski turned the audience's attention to issues such as open access, communication strategies, and professional data management, which are obligatory for every proposal.

The last session of the conference was opened by Corinna Amting (Brussels), who works at the European Commission's Research Executive Agency. She described the evaluation process, including external experts, consensus reports and discussions in expert panels. At the following round table, she also highlighted that publications do not suffice as a final project product. The aim of EU funded projects is to bring together people from inside and outside the EU to discuss and disseminate the results in all possible ways. According to Amting, proposals should be self-confident, but credible. Working on the project idea and establishing the consortium should start as early as possible. Moreover, project partners should provide the expertise necessary to realise the undertaking. Since large amounts of tax money are involved, measurement, quantification, and monitoring are very important. These points were confirmed by the two other participants of the round table, Iwan-Michelangelo D'Aprile (Potsdam) and Joanna Bosiacka-Kniat (Poznań). As both of them work as evaluators, they discussed the evaluation process in detail and confirmed that proposals should not be over-scientific, but explicit and clear – also with regard to the layout. Since a lot of top-researchers are involved in proposals themselves, the EU is constantly searching for additional evaluators. Due to this fact, the participants of the round table agreed that working as an evaluator can be a good starting point to acquaint oneself with the application and evaluation system.

The two-day conference brought together researchers, evaluators, EU research affairs staff as well as representatives from European funding institutions and national contact points from both countries. Thanks to this, the conference was a highly instructive event, as it extended beyond the information already available on the Internet. It provided interesting insights into some of the EU's many funding lines, especially with regards to international networking. All participants agreed that in order to receive further information, interested researchers should not hesitate to contact the staff of national contact points. Often, larger institutions such as universities employ experts who can provide further information and help with research proposals. In this sense, the conference was a helpful starting point regarding the preparation of EU research proposals.

[1] EU-Kompetenznetzwerk der Brandenburgischen Hochschule,
<http://www.euk-brandenburg.de/index.php/start.html?language=de>.

[2] "Regionalny Punkt Kontaktowy Programów Ramowych UE, Poznański Park Naukowo-Technologiczny,
<http://rpk.ppnt.poznan.pl/kontakt-kontakt.php>.

[3] A proposal should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely.

<https://www.pol-int.org/de/node/6961?j5Q6rewycZ5HtUDXTWpx7UZE=1&cr=7026>