



Scientific research thriving in Cyprus

By **Katherine Pollard**

Cyprus was characterised by the Financial Times' most influential woman in the field of Technology & Science, Helga Nowotny, as "an island of scientific excellence despite its small size."

The president of the European Research Council (ERC) spoke to The Cyprus Weekly as the ERC met in Limassol yesterday.

"The meeting is taking place at a propitious moment when discussions on the future of investment into research are intensifying in all EU countries. I believe that a shift in thinking is needed, as even small countries can claim to excellence as long as they continue to invest in research."

Cyprus has been highly successful in ERC schemes, in spite of the relatively small size of its research system. With a total number of five ERC grants funded for the amount of €6.7m, the main domains of scientific research on the island involve two projects on physical sciences and engineering, one on life sciences and two on social sciences and humanities.

Nowotny said Cyprus is performing well, partly thanks to the University of Cyprus and the high number of applications from local researchers.

One in seven Cypriot public sector researchers have applied to the ERC for funding since 2007, the highest rate in the EU. "A pool of high calibre researchers are present in Cyprus, keen to see their country emerging as one of the next centres of scientific excellence in the Mediterranean area. Let's help them make it happen," she said.

The meeting which was hosted by the Cyprus Presidency of the European Council and the Research Promotion Foundation looked at the various ERC grant schemes and their results, while the participants of the ERC working groups discussed prospects for further research in the domains of innovation and industrial relations, gender balance and open access.

They were joined by the Rector of the University of Cyprus Constantinos Christofides and ERC grantees Dr. Elena Andreou, Dr. Antonis Kirmizis and Professor Marios Polycarpou, three leading Cypriot researchers whose projects have been funded by the ERC. In compliance with ERC policy, each researcher employs, on average, six post-doctorate or PhD students on their team, in order to help create a new generation of scientific leaders.

ERC's Scientific Council is com-

posed of 22 renowned scientists, engineers and scholars from all over Europe - including Nobel Prize winners - who are responsible for setting the strategy of the European Research Council in terms of funding.

As a funding research agency, the ERC provides funding through grants, awarded after a thorough selection procedure. Grants can be up to €3m for up to five year research and are aimed at supporting excellent scientists from all fields of research.

"I insist on excellence as this is the core principle of ERC funding - we fund the very best scientists as long as they are based in Europe. Innovation and research are key to maintain Europe's competitiveness so that it is able to compete with other global leaders such as the US, Japan, India, Brazil and China," noted Nowotny.

Since its launch in 2007, the ERC has funded over 3,000 researchers and their frontier research projects and has become a "benchmark" of the competitiveness of national research systems complementing existing funding schemes at national and European levels.

The total budget of the ERC from 2007 to 2013 is €7.5b, with a proposed substantial increase for 2014 to 2020.

