

ECRP Report

European Collaborative Research Projects

Scheme Evaluation and Science Policy Assessment

Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)



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1. Executive Summary

Operation of ECRP since the 2004 evaluation

1. The present assessment of the operation of the ECRP scheme from 2005-2007 has taken into account the recommendations put forward during the substantial first ECRP review undertaken in 2004 by Professor Linda Hantrais. It can be concluded that the great majority of suggestions for procedural revisions in the management of ECRP included in the 2005 ECRP Protocol have been successfully implemented by ECRP Funding Organisations (EFOs) and the European Science Foundation (ESF).
2. The availability of scheme coordination capacity (50% coordination + 50% administration) under the EUROCORES contract, which had not been available before 2005, has helped the implementation of improvements between 2005-2007 and will be of crucial importance for the future development of ECRP. It is therefore recommended that ECRP Funding Organisations contribute to the coordination costs from 2009 onwards, as the EUROCORES contract which has covered these costs up to now is coming to an end.
3. The recommendations on application handling, informing of applicants and scheme publicity have been fully implemented, and the scheme competition is running smoothly.
4. The average number of proposals submitted to ECRP from 2001-2007 is 35 per year and the average success rate is 14%.
5. The annual and final report forms still need to be made available on a secure website. More generally, procedures have not yet been put in place for the analysis of these reports and follow-up use of insights gained and this needs to be addressed.
6. Recommendations regarding the joint peer review process have been implemented and considerable progress has been made with respect to referee selection and quality assurance. Still, in comparison to some national standards, the volume of external written reviews does not seem to be satisfactory. The requirements for written peer review therefore have to be elevated to the highest national standards in terms of volume and detail, in order to allow these organisations to fully accept the recommendations of the ECRP peer review and not to duplicate the joint peer review in the national context (thus imposing a “double jeopardy” on applicants). The following concrete steps for the improvement of written peer review are proposed:
 - a. External reviewers will be asked to provide a written comment of at least 400 words for each of the first two items on the common assessment form (“Originality and Contribution to Knowledge”, “Research Design and Methods”);
 - b. EFOs should ideally provide four referee names for each proposal in which their national researchers are involved to further ensure the achievement of the target number of reviews;
 - c. The ESF Office should make use of its “Pool of Referees” database to guarantee four external written assessments per proposal.
7. Also in order to raise acceptance of the ECRP peer review, the operation of the ECRP Review Panel needs to be revised. Specifically, the composition mechanisms, the assurance of relevant high-level expertise and the geographical balance need to be addressed. These issues were discussed with the ECRP Working Group during its meeting on 16 September 2008 in Strasbourg and the following concrete steps have been agreed upon:
 - a. ECRP Funding Organisations have the right to suggest two ECRP Review Panel members to the ESF Office, which then chooses the panel members to ensure appropriate scientific and geographical balance;
 - b. ECRP Review Panel members should be recognised scholars in core social science disciplines with long-standing experience in international peer review, who could also be associated with national decision-making boards, to ensure the acceptance of the ECRP Review Panel’s decision in the national context. Due to the topical variety of proposals received in ECRP, additional experts with the appropriate expertise may be recruited to serve on the panel;
 - c. The ECRP Review Panel should consist of 10-15 members and it is proposed to maintain a core set of members on the panel to allow for consistent decision-making;
 - d. Ideally, two or three ECRP Review Panel members should come from outside Europe and an appropriate gender balance should also be observed.
8. Due to the professional handling of scheme operations, the need for consultation and problem-solving between EFOs has decreased in recent years. It is thus proposed to limit the ECRP Management Committee meetings to one per year (in early December) where scheme development questions will be discussed, and to rely on e-mail consultation for procedural steps (if needed).
9. The recommendations of this report should be discussed by the ECRP Working Group with the aim

1. Executive Summary

of developing a revised ECRP Protocol (“Terms of Participation”) for a new round of competitions in 2009-2011. The revised ECRP Protocol should be presented to ECRP Funding Organisations in autumn 2008.

Science Policy assessment of the ECRP scheme

10. The ECRP is still perceived as a unique scheme in the social sciences funding landscape, addressing an important funding gap. The main reason for this is its strictly bottom-up approach. The regularity and flexibility of the scheme contribute to this positive impression.
11. The main opportunities lie in the perceived demand (despite fluctuating numbers of applications). This opportunity should now be used by including additional funding agencies from Europe (e.g. France, Italy and Eastern European countries) as well as participants from overseas (e.g. USA and Canada).
12. Central perceived weaknesses and threats are the consistency of the peer review quality and procedural efficiency. Concrete proposals to overcome deficiencies are the improvement of the written peer reviews and the establishment of a dedicated ECRP Review Panel (cp. 4.2). As a consequence ECRP Funding Organisations (EFOs) should accept the decision of the ECRP Review Panel and dispose of the “double jeopardy”, thereby also reducing the project selection duration. In order to accommodate this, EFOs should look into ways of having more flexible financial and procedural arrangements to support ECRP.
13. Along with the double jeopardy, the duplication of application efforts (individual national requirements) is reducing the attractiveness of the scheme by complicating the application process. Instead the ECRP Common Application Form should be brought up to a standard that is acceptable to all participating agencies.
14. These important improvements should then be actively communicated on a broad scale, in order to increase the quantity of applications and hopefully also the quality of researchers applying. Until now, the lack of targeted publicity is connected to a lack of a clear profile for ECRP in funding agencies as well as within ESF; ECRP is for the moment only available in the social sciences, which is also hindering its impact. EFOs and ESF should work together to develop a clearer profile.
15. It is also felt that the bilateral and multilateral schemes developed by EFOs pose a threat to ECRP. The ECRP Working Group has been asked to examine the rationale for the development of these schemes and suggest ways for ECRP to accommodate these needs within the scheme.
16. Summarising the aspects above, the participating organisations will need to make a fuller commitment to ECRP in terms of procedural and financial support, in order to have it realise its full potential and therefore achieve significant impact.

2. Background of the evaluation

The European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP) scheme was developed in 2000 and had its first call for proposals in 2001. It was designed to promote problem-driven research and to offer an innovative mechanism for European research collaboration in the social sciences. At the same time, the scheme was intended to provide a stimulus for multilateral cooperation between research councils in developing links between national research programmes, in the spirit of Article 169 [COM(2001) 282 final) of the European Union's Consolidated Treaties, foreshadowing ERA-NETs and the proposed European Research Council (ERC).

After three years of operation, the ECRP scheme was evaluated in the spring of 2004. Subsequently, it was decided to form a Working Group on ECRP in order to implement the recommendations made as a result of the evaluation process. The Working Group prepared common application and reviewing procedures and submitted a proposal to the ESF Executive Board meeting of 23 September 2004, to define the ECRP scheme as one of the ESF EUROCORES Programmes. The proposal was approved, enabling ECRP to benefit from scientific and administrative support linked to the EUROCORES Support Contract of ESF with the European Commission.

The second generation of ECRP Projects (2005-2007) came to an end in 2007. The ESF Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS) and participating Funding Organisations called for a second evaluation to analyse the development of the ECRP scheme within the EUROCORES framework. The continuation of ECRP during an interim year (2008) was agreed upon by the ECRP Funding Organisations (EFOs) in order to allow the ESF Office to conduct the review.



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3. Conduct of the evaluation

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the 2008 evaluation of the ECRP Scheme were developed by the ESF Office in collaboration with Professor Linda Hantrais who had previously conducted the 2004 evaluation, and were approved by the Core Group of the SCSS during its session on 31 August 2007 in Paris, France. The document reference for the ToR can be found in the References section of this document (cp. References 6.1.2).

In addition, a working group was established by the ECRP Management Committee in order to oversee and support the scheme evaluation. Members of this working group were: Michael Schuster (DFG), Rudolf Bolzern (SNF), Craig Bardsley (ESRC), Eili Ervelä-Myrreen (NORFACE), Carlos Ciosa Montero (University of Zaragoza and Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, Madrid), Falk Reckling (FWF) and Berry Bonenkamp (NWO). The task of the working group was to assess the draft evaluation reports produced by the ESF Office in order to ensure the high quality of the review. Moreover, they were specifically asked to provide recommendations based on the ESF analysis, therefore assuring a broad reflection of current trends and developments.

The ToR foresaw an analysis of the scheme in two stages. Work on the first part, which commenced in November 2007, focused on the implementation of recommendations made during the 2004 evaluation. In order to assess the implementation level, the changes made to the ECRP Protocol following the 2004 evaluation recommendations were highlighted and contrasted with source materials such as website information, office procedures for processing and reviewing of applications, Management Committee and Review Panel minutes. Moreover, responsible administrators in Member Organisations were consulted through telephone interviews and e-mail exchange. The ESF Office focused particularly on Member Organisation representatives who had been involved with the scheme since its inception and were therefore well positioned to comment on the evolution of the scheme. As far as possible, other available feedback was used in this context.

Following the pattern of the 2004 evaluation, emphasis was put on the effectiveness of the operation of the common application process, procedures, criteria for peer review of proposals and deadline for decisions. New developments were taken into account by analysing the ECRP Review Panel that was introduced in 2006.

The second part of the evaluation contained considerations of, and recommendations on, science policy issues regarding ECRP, and started in early 2008. The aim was to present a progress report to the SCSS Core Group on 8 February 2008 in Oslo, Norway and the final version of the complete ECRP evaluation to the ECRP Management Committee on 29 May 2008 and also to



the SCSS Core Group on 5 June 2008 in Kiel, Germany. Discussion and comments on the evaluation outcomes were invited from both groups and recommendations about the future of the scheme were made to ECRP Funding Organisations (EFOs).

The appropriateness and salience of ECRP was examined in light of changes in the European Research Area (ERA) in recent years, such as the arrival of ERA-NET and the European Research Council (ERC). The need for further refinement of the current ECRP Scheme, including its funding model, was analysed using the input of EFO representatives retrieved from a SWOT analysis questionnaire.

4. Stage One: Operation of ECRP since the 2004 evaluation

The analysis of the operation of the ECRP Scheme within the EUROCORES framework from 2005 to 2007 is based on documentary analysis and regular consultation with EFO representatives in the ECRP Management Committee, SCSS Core Group and Plenary meetings. The first section lists the recommendations made during the evaluation and introduced to the Protocol by the ECRP Working Group, and analyses the degree of their implementation. The second section deals with the degree of effectiveness in daily operations with ECRP Funding Organisations that resulted from these scheme improvements, again based on EFO science managers' input as well as general statistics on the scheme provided by the ESF Office. Subsequently, the results are summarised.

4.1 Implementation of recommendations included in the revised ECRP Protocol

The following paragraphs summarise recommendations made during the 2004 evaluation of the ECRP scheme by Professor Hantrais which were subsequently introduced into the ECRP Protocol by the 2004 evaluation Working Group¹ and describe actions taken by the ESF Office to implement these recommendations.

4.1.1 Processing of applications

The process for receiving and logging applications needs to be centrally coordinated to avoid applications being mislaid. The ESF Secretariat should draw up a full list of all the applications received by the closing date, showing the titles of projects, names and e-mail addresses of coordinators, names and e-mail addresses of lead applicants for each participating organisation and the funding requested by each applicant.

This template has been provided by the ESF Office and is updated with the requested data for every competition starting from 2005. The template is listed under 6.1.3 in the Reference section of this document and can be made available upon request. The following request for a fixed timeline has also been addressed.

This information should be posted on the secure web-site within 3 days of the closing date for MOs to check and confirm against their own returns within one week of the deadline. Before the meeting on 15 June 2004, MOs should check the eligibility of the applications

1. The original quotes from the ECRP 2004 final evaluation report by Professor Hantrais are noted in italics. They are taken from p. 21ff of this report. The report is listed in the Reference section of this document under 6.1.4 and can be made available upon request.

received and inform the Secretariat of their status. The ESF Secretariat should then check for any projects that do not have the requisite number of partners to be eligible for funding under the scheme. The revised list should be posted on the web 4-5 days before the meeting.

As the annual launch of the ECRP Call has been moved forward to 1 February of a competition year in order to achieve a higher response rate from international reviewers, the above-mentioned dates are not accurate anymore – the principle, however, has been implemented as a routine procedure. The ESF Office integrates the proposals received into the ESF database and automatically makes applications available online to the EFOs within ten days. Prior to this, the ESF Office performs a first eligibility check (since 2007, as applications are made online, the system itself has a few automatic checks implemented, e.g. minimum number of IPs, matching country of residence and Funding Organisation, etc.) without getting back yet to the applicants. The results of this first eligibility check are then communicated to EFOs. The posting of the proposals enables the Management Committee to go through the list of applications during its regular June meeting and to inform ESF on the eligibility of the national parts of the proposals. Should any national eligibility check result in collaborations no longer being viable (i.e. where fewer than three eligible partners remain), the ESF Office gets back to the Project Leaders shortly after the June meeting.

This procedural change has been included into the ECRP timeline which summarises the entire annual ECRP competition (cp. References 6.1.3). This timeline as well as the ECRP manual was produced in 2006 when ECRP was able to benefit from coordination capacity supported by funds from the EUROCORES contract with the European Commission.

Following the mid-June meeting, applicants should be sent an acknowledgement of receipt of their applications by their MOs, and ineligible applicants should be advised accordingly, with copies to ESF. At the same time, since the ESF guidelines refer to the process being carried out within MOs, applicants could be informed that new arrangements are being phased in for peer review.

ECRP applicants receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a provisional application number at the end of the proposal submission by way of an automated e-mail. The ESF Office then integrates the information into the ESF database. At the end of this process, the project is fully recorded in the ESF database and a definitive project number is created. A second automated e-mail is generated informing the Project Leader (PL) that this number should be used in further correspondence.

4. Stage One: Operation of ECRP since the 2004 evaluation

4.1.2 Peer reviewing

Recommendations based on the experience of the pilot scheme should be implemented for a transitional, tailor-made, coordinated review process, which will remain separate from the decision-making arrangements operated by MOs. (...) the SCSS Core Group should agree on a common list of scientific criteria, which will be sent to all reviewers, together with the proposal and the national instructions to referees.

The list of common criteria has been agreed upon and is published with the annual call. The annual call can be accessed at www.esf.org/ecrp. For convenience the selection criteria for the ECRP scheme are listed below:

- Scientific quality;
- Originality and potential contribution to knowledge;
- Research design and methods;
- Competence and expertise of the applicants;
- Added value of the collaboration;
- Feasibility and value for money;
- Planned outputs.

Agreeing on these selection criteria was the major prerequisite to establishing a common application form which was also recommended as a result of the 2004 evaluation. In line with the selection criteria, applicants are asked in this form to describe the main aims of the Collaborative Research Project (CRP), the potential impacts and the added value of the collaboration. After a general outline of the CRP, including research design and methods, Individual Projects are described including budget and planned outputs. In order to assess the competence and expertise of the applicants, CVs are requested from Principal Investigators (PIs) and Project Leaders (PLs). A sample form can be found in Annex 7.1. A question on data handling aspects was included in the Common Application Form for the 2007 competition, under section one, and was phrased as follows: "1.4 Data handling aspects (if relevant): quality assurance, storage, access (*Max. 200 words*)".

MOs should constitute a "coordination committee" with responsibility for coordinating the review procedure, and making funding recommendations on the basis of the reviews received, serviced by the ESF Secretariat, and chaired by the Chair of the SCSS or Head of the Social Science Unit.

A "coordination committee" for the review procedure as such is no longer required. The review procedure – including external written reviews and the review panel – is handled centrally by the ESF Office with referee recommendations for the external review from ECRP funding agencies. This procedure is well documented in the ECRP

timeline (cp. Annex 7.2) and is running smoothly. The external written review is followed up by a Review Panel meeting in October (since 2006) which generates funding recommendations to EFOs. As a standard procedure the ECRP Management Committee goes through all projects in order to discuss eligibility at its spring meeting and makes funding decisions at its December meeting, but as the procedure is now quite clear to all parties involved, the need for consultation is decreasing. The work of the ECRP Management Committee is increasingly focussing on scheme development rather than operating the actual competition. Hence, the ESF Office is proposing to limit the ECRP Management Committee meetings to one per year where scheme development questions will be discussed, relying on e-mail consultation for, for example, procedural steps such as exchange of eligibility information. Concretely, this would mean eliminating the May meeting of the Management Committee and retaining the meeting in early December.

Reviewers should be alerted to the fact that the submission is part of a collaborative scheme and be asked to complete the summary assessment sheet in addition to national forms.

From 2001-2003 referees were not always clear as to the purpose of the ECRP scheme. Now there is one common assessment form (cp. Annex 7.1) which needs to be completed in English and is made available to reviewers online. This form emphasises the collaborative aspect. Referees are asked to comment specifically on the quality of each of the Individual Projects (IPs). In addition, some ECRP Funding Organisations, like the German Research Foundation for example, invite their applicants to submit a proposal in English which is more substantiated than the common application form and therefore meet their national standard this way. This application is then used to provide their national review panels with additional information. These concessions had to be made in the past in order to make ECRP workable for varying national procedures. However, the common application form in English to ESF is the standard and needs to be submitted. If additional national requirements apply, potential applicants can retrieve this information from the ECRP website (www.esf.org/ecrp). Updates of national requirements are collected from ECRP Funding Organisations by ESF before every new competition and are published on the web together with the Call for Proposals.

Language permitting, at least one of the reviewers selected, where feasible a reviewer proposed by the coordinator's MO, should be invited to comment on all the national texts for a given project.

As all applications have to be submitted in English, there are no longer any national texts. Every referee is

invited to comment on all the Individual Projects (IPs). Currently, ESF is aiming to obtain four external referees' reports per proposal although it has been decided that three assessments per proposal are also acceptable. Moreover, the ESF Office has developed a so-called "keep-it-rolling system" to avoid over-and under-refereeing. In this system, a larger number of referees (around seven or eight) is selected by the ECRP coordinator based on recommendations from participating funding agencies and drawing on the ESF Pool of Referees if needed. This ensures that even if some referees decline to provide an assessment, the target number of three to four can be reached and under-refereeing is mostly avoided.

Reviewers should be asked to submit their reviews to MOs as early in September as possible, and preferably electronically, to enable them to coordinate returns for each of their proposals and pass on overall assessments to the SCSS Secretariat to record on the secure website. Where MOs are able to supply copies of fuller reviewers' reports, these will also be made available on the secure website in preparation for a meeting of MOs on 1 October, thereby enabling the Coordination Committee of MOs to make recommendations to their boards/councils in time for meetings between October and December.

Since 2005, the collection of external written reviews takes place from June to September of a competition year. In June, the referees are contacted by e-mail, and given an identification number and a password to a secure website where they are able to read and download the proposal they are asked to assess, and get a preview of the questions asked in the online assessment form. Referees are invited to enter their assessment into an online form which directly feeds into the ESF database. Subsequently, the ECRP administrator and/or coordinator quality-check assessments for five criteria and record their evaluation in the ESF database. This system was introduced systematically in 2007 and the following five criteria are checked:

- Timely (Was the review sent before the second deadline?)
- Language (Is the language used respectful of proposers, i.e. can it be anonymised and sent back to the proposer as is?)
- Completeness (Are all questions graded as well as substantiated?)
- Substantiated (Are grades sufficiently substantiated?)
- Useful (Did the Review Panel rapporteur find the assessment useful?)

This quality-assurance system, which is also applied to all other ESF instruments, increasingly puts ESF into

a position to evaluate referee performance. This meta assessment may be further refined in the future and may be used to give a higher profile of evaluation work to scientific careers. If reviews are not sufficiently substantiated, referees are asked by the ESF Office using a standardised e-mail template (cp. References 6.1.3) to revisit their assessment. Within a few days after the submission deadline for reviews, the quality-checked reviews are anonymised and posted on a secure website for further processing by EFOs. Some EFOs require a confidential list of referees attributed to the relevant proposals and receive this from the ESF Office.

4.1.3 Review Panel

Since 2006, funding recommendations are made by the ECRP Review Panel. The establishment of such a panel was foreseen by the EUROCORES procedure and implemented when ECRP became part of the EUROCORES framework in 2005. Consequently, the 2004 ECRP review does not address this issue. The ECRP Review Panel constitutes the second stage of the peer review process and has the mandate to recommend scientifically excellent ECRP proposals to EFOs for funding. Members of the Panel are currently recruited from the membership of the Standing Committee of the Social Sciences (SCSS) with additional experts as needed. Although an analysis of ECRP Review Panel recommendation usage in 2006 has shown a quite significant overlap in EFO and ECRP Review Panel funding decisions, the implementation of the Review Panel still requires improvement from various angles (cp. 4.2.3).

4.1.4 Informing applicants of decisions

In cases where whole projects or parts of them are not considered to be of sufficient scientific merit to deserve funding, applicants should be informed immediately. Where proposals receive a positive rating, and national funding decisions are taken at different dates, or where the funding requested cannot be committed, applicants in the participating countries should be informed of the outcome at the point when at least three MOs have announced a positive decision, or as soon as it becomes clear that a sufficient number of partners will not be achieved.

In all events, applicants should be informed of the progress of their application at 31 December 2004 and should receive feedback in line with national practices.

The informing of applicants has been streamlined considerably. After the ECRP Review Panel meeting

4. Stage One: Operation of ECRP since the 2004 evaluation

which takes place in October of a competition year, the boards of EFOs should take their funding decision by January of the following year at the latest. They should inform ESF about their decisions as soon as they become available. ESF maintains an up-to-date list on funding decisions and is therefore able to communicate a final list of funding decisions to science managers at EFOs. Subsequently, applicants are informed of the competition outcome by letter (cp. References 6.1.3) including anonymised assessments of their proposals. Relevant EFOs receive an electronic copy of these letters. This centralised informing of applicants at one point in time helps to avoid confusion among applicants and funding organisations alike. It marks the endpoint of the project selection process, a period of roughly one year, which is considerably shorter than the thematic EUROCORES (two years). Grants from NORFACE or ERC are hard to compare because they are not established annually (cp. section 5 for a science policy assessment of ECRP).

Applicants who receive a positive evaluation but do not achieve the required number of ECRP partners should be advised and supported in their attempts to find alternative funding sources, for example through national or bilateral schemes.

Currently, there is no systematic procedure in place. In the ECRP Scheme, it has occurred that bilateral agreements have been set up or that national projects have been funded on an individual basis, but these were rare and exceptional cases. In ECRP, the centralisation of decisions led to conditional, informal funding commitments: the EFO representatives made funding decisions conditional on a project securing the minimum three countries.

4.1.5 Monitoring of awards

The ESF Secretariat should be responsible for posting details of awards made and for updating information.

In order to make the scheme as transparent as possible, all project participants are listed on specific web pages:

- ECRP I (2005): www.esf.org/ecrp1
- ECRP II (2006): www.esf.org/ecrp2
- ECRP III (2007): www.esf.org/ecrp3

The project brochures (if available for a project) can be downloaded from these pages and all awarded projects are listed with number, title, full list of participants with contact details on the website. Relevant award information such as contributing funding organisations and award rates is also made available to EFOs. The final list of awards and the detailed funding document is circulated to funding organisations after the end of the competition



and kept up-to-date by the ESF Office (cp. Reference 6.1.3; see also 4.1.1 Processing of applications).

It should request short progress reports from coordinators of successful applications, make them available on the secure website, alert MOs of their availability and pursue any queries raised.

ECRP award holders (i.e. the Project Leaders) are currently requested to fill out a brief yearly report form in order to keep ESF and participating agencies up-to-date. At the end of the project duration, ESF invites applicants to submit an overall project report (the report templates are listed in References 6.1.3). These reports are for the moment designed for the ESF Office and there is no distribution procedure yet in place. It is however foreseen to channel them back to EFOs pending the development of an ECRP Extranet.

4.1.6 Publicity and information

The ECRP should be actively promoted for its uniqueness as a scheme designed to fund responsive-mode projects. The scheme needs to be badged and made more visible on the ESF web pages. The ECRP Working Group should redraft the web publicity and guidelines to clarify and simplify the information supplied about the scheme and the instructions for applicants.

The ECRP website has been revised and is kept up-to-date constantly. The Protocol and guiding principles were updated by the ECRP working group in 2004. In early 2007, ESF had a re-launch of its website, of which the ECRP website is part. To make the site more accessible, a short cut (www.esf.org/ecrp) has been created. In recent discussions of the Management Committee (cp. ECRP MC Minutes, December 2007, References 6.1.2.2), the special importance of ECRP scheme promotion through participating funding agencies was stressed. A short PowerPoint presentation was created

for science managers in the social sciences to support intra-agency knowledge about ECRP. In addition to the web information, printed publications are now being generated. Since 2005 there have been general leaflets for every ECRP competition year, with information about projects awarded, including funding agencies involved and project abstracts. Project Leaders, Principal Investigators and Project Members are listed with their affiliation and contact information. Moreover, the ESF offers the opportunity to Project Leaders to generate brochures dedicated to their specific Collaborative Research Project (CRP) featuring, for example, information on scientific events in the CRP and general progress. All printed leaflets are made available for download as PDF on the ECRP website.

More extensive use should be made of the ECRP web page to keep MOs and applicants informed of developments.

The internet is now used extensively to cover two main aspects. Firstly, the ECRP website holds all the relevant information for potential applicants including:

- ECRP Protocol;
- guiding principles;
- FAQ;
- guidelines for applicants;
- financial details and national requirements;
- list of ECRP Funding Organisations (EFOs);
- information on awarded projects in past ECRP competitions 2005-2007;
- summary information on funded CRPs under the old protocol from 2001-2004;
- contact information.

Secondly, the web is used to host the secure website for communication with EFOs and referees. For example, the entire external refereeing process is currently handled via the secure website and is directly connected to the ESF database. The procedure is hence almost fully digitised which increases efficiency to a large extent.

4.2 Effectiveness of implemented recommendations

Partially, the effectiveness of implemented recommendations has been commented on directly in section 4.1 where appropriate. This section is intended to summarise the crucial changes implemented in 2005-2007 and to provide evidence for their effectiveness where applicable. The most notable changes applied in the 2005-2007 competition cycles are listed below:

1. Implementation of a common application form;
2. Centralised processing of applications at ESF;
3. Comprehensive digitisation of application and peer review management;
4. Implementation of a common assessment form;
5. Availability of ESF capacity to coordinate and develop the scheme;
6. Development of award monitoring forms;
7. Extension of web use for information and publicity.

When looking at these changes and imagining the scheme as it was in 2001-2003, the word “centralisation” comes to mind, i.e. the majority of the management is now done at ESF on behalf of EFOs. Following the structure of section 4.1, more information on effectiveness is provided in the subsequent sections.

4.2.1 Processing of applications

The submission and handling of applications was still a major concern after the first round of the scheme. The creation of a common application form can be described as the basic prerequisite which made the lives of applicants easier. A review of the ECRP Management Committee meeting minutes also shows that the comprehensive process of application logging, acknowledgement of receipt, the two-stage eligibility check, and the publishing of all relevant proposal information on a secure website for EFOs has greatly contributed to the professionalisation of scheme operations. There is no feedback

	ECRP competition year								
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Ø (01-07)	2008
Proposals received	37	24	23	60	50	27	23	35	31
Eligible proposals	-	-	-	-	49	26	21	-	27
Funded proposals	6	5	4	8	8	5	2	5	?
Success rate (in %)	16	21	17	13	16	19	10	14	?

Table 1: Applications to ECRP from 2001-2007 (receipt, award, success rate)

4. Stage One: Operation of ECRP since the 2004 evaluation

recorded from EFOs that applications have been mislaid as occasionally happened in the 2001-2003 period.

However, ESF frequently receives ECRP applicant feedback criticising the doubling of efforts when applying to ECRP e.g. through checking national requirements or even providing a second, more detailed application to the national council. Although applicants are accurately informed through concerted efforts of EFOs and ESF in a timely manner, there seems to be room for improvement. Of course, this reduction of effort for applicants, i.e. the even greater centralisation of ECRP management and peer review at ESF, can only be achieved by adopting the highest level of peer review accepted by all participating organisations (cp. 4.2.2 and 4.2.3).

The processing of ECRP applications is generally helped by a comprehensive and detailed ECRP timeframe (cp. References 6.1.3) which has been made available since 2006 for EFO science managers at the beginning of each competition. In addition, a complete manual has been created for the use by EFO representatives to also provide background information on procedures and development of the scheme so far. This was felt to be important to counteract changes in EFO as well as ESF staff and ensure the potential of consistent future scheme development. The table below shows the evolution of the number of applications to ECRP from 2001 to 2007²:

A peak in applications received can be noted in 2004 and 2005; however, looking at the complete time line this seems to be exceptional. The realistic range of applications to be expected in ECRP lies more in the area of 25-35. In 2007, the number of applications decreased to the low level of 23 proposals received (as in 2003) and the number of funded proposals decreased to an all-time low of two. This was of major concern to several EFOs. The low funding rate was influenced by several factors, one of them being the quality of the joint peer review and its translation into the national decision-making systems of EFOs (cp. 4.2.2 for further discussion of this aspect). Obviously it was also influenced by the number of applications received. This in turn was affected by external factors such as marketing of the ECRP scheme (cp. 4.2.6), the bad experiences of leading researchers with the operation of the scheme in early years, and the existing funding opportunities for researchers at the international (cp. 5.1 for fuller discussion) as well as on the national level. With regard to the publicity of the scheme, a decision on renewed efforts by EFOs and ESF to publicise the scheme during the December 2007 meeting of the ECRP Review Committee seemed to have a positive effect on the number of proposals received in 2008 (31).

² The number of applications received in 2008 is for information only and was not used when calculating averages. Due to its different role in the scheme, the ESF Office does not have available eligibility data between 2001-2004.

In summary, it can be said that the procedural recommendations made during the 2004 review with respect to the improved handling of applications have been implemented and additional information material on procedures has been produced to allow new science managers at EFOs to take over the operation with relatively little effort. Submission data suggests that a realistic number of proposals submitted to ECRP would lie at around 30 proposals. Coherent advertising efforts by all parties involved are needed to achieve this number on a regular basis.

4.2.2 Peer reviewing

Review quantity

As described under 4.1.2 a common assessment form which corresponds to the common application form was introduced to ECRP in 2005. The recommendations of the 2004 review have therefore been implemented. In addition referees are provided with instructions on what is expected of their review. It has been noted by the ESF Office that, in comparison to the procedures at certain EFOs, the input asked from reviewers is considered too little (e.g. ESRC, Dr. Craig Bardsley, via e-mail, cp. 6.1.4). It was felt that the thinness of much of the peer review made it impossible in several cases to genuinely assess the quality of the proposed research in national funding boards. This was felt to have had a negative impact, particularly on the 2007 competition where only two proposals were funded, bringing the success rate down to 10%. In order to enable the proper assessment of proposals according to the highest standards, it is therefore proposed to ask external reviewers to provide a written comment of at least 400 words for each of the first two items on the assessment form (i.e. "Originality and Contribution to Knowledge", "Research Design and Methods").

Another aspect of review quantity is the target number of reviews which is currently four in ECRP, although the ECRP Management Committee agreed that three complete and substantiated reviews would be sufficient. For each proposal, ESF initially invites four referees and give them three weeks to respond. After three weeks a reminder is sent giving them another week to provide their assessment. If ESF has not received their assessment after four weeks, another reviewer is contacted. This procedure is handled by the Office with the help of database tracking which was introduced in 2007. In cases where ESF has used up all referee suggestions from EFOs, the ECRP coordinator uses the ESF Pool of Referees. The ESF Pool of Referees is a database containing the names of several thousand scientists across all disciplines who have committed to provide ESF with

up to 5 scientific evaluations per year. The combination of database tracking, the request to EFOs to renew their efforts to provide top-quality referee suggestions (cp. ECRP MC minutes, December 2006) as well as the use of the ESF Pool of Referees led to an 85% achievement of the target number of referees in ECRP in 2007 (as compared to 65% in 2005 and 69% in 2006).

Still, there is further room for improvement. To address this issue, ESRC proposes to other EFOs to provide ideally four referee names for proposals where their national researchers are involved. This would leave ESF with a minimum of twelve referees to choose from, given the eligibility criterion of a minimum of three researchers from three participating countries. Although this will put an additional burden on national science officers, it is felt that this effort is needed to make a decisive improvement in review quantity and quality.

Review quality

Since 2005 the ESF Office has performed regular quality checks of referee reports submitted. This marks an improvement in comparison to the first ECRP cycle (2001-2003) where no centralised quality control was carried out. A more systematic, database-supported quality assurance system has been in place since 2007 when this was introduced for all ESF peer review processes. Five criteria are checked: timeliness, language, completeness, substantiation and usefulness as perceived by the Review Panel *rapporteur* (cp. 4.1.2). Experience from the 2007 competition complements general ESF peer review experience in other instruments and shows that there are rarely problems with timeliness, language and completeness. Substantiation and usefulness, however, pose a problem. The current strategy in ECRP is to ask referees to revisit their assessment, using a standardised e-mail template (cp. 6.1.3). However, this procedure does not seem to be very effective because only a few referees follow this request (cp. discussions in ECRP MC minutes, December 2007). An alternative strategy has been proposed by ESRC. Unsubstantiated assessments should be kept but a new review should be requested from a different referee. To save time and achieve the target number of reviews, one review more than needed should always be invited. This should be applied to insufficient reviews (x+1) but also to the first batch of review invitations (4+1).

4.2.3 Review Panel

The ECRP Review Panel was introduced in 2006 as the second stage of peer review and has the mandate of recommending high-quality ECRP proposals to EFOs for funding. Its membership currently consists of SCSS

members as well as additional experts. As any topic in the social sciences can be submitted to ECRP, usually a great variety of subjects is received. In the past it was not always possible to have experts for every subject on the panel. The negative impact of this on the peer review quality was pointed out, for example by FWF. In addition, the heavy bias towards European Review Panel Members as well as referees was felt to be detrimental. More generally, it is perceived by several EFOs that the revision of the ECRP Review Panel operation will be a key element for the successful continuation of ECRP.

At the current stage, some national organisations still seek additional national assessments and/or appoint specific *rapporteurs* to evaluate proposals and advise the funding organisations' respective decision-making boards. Therefore review efforts are still being duplicated and applicants face "double jeopardy", which of course does not encourage them to participate. According to e-mail feedback received by the ESF Office, the rationale for applying to ESF when the relevant funding decision and additional peer review is made at the national level is not clear to applicants (cp. 6.1.4). Two further suggestions have been made by ECRP Funding Organisations in this respect:

1. During the SCSS Core Group meeting on 7 February 2008 in Oslo, ESRC (represented by Glyn Davies) suggested including a certain number of national board members in the ECRP Review Panel to ensure transparency and foster trust in the ESF review process and to increase acceptance of the Panel decision in a national context (cp. respective Core Group minutes reference, cp. 6.1.2).
2. FWF (represented by Falk Reckling) proposed broadening the scientific expertise by taking on more external experts, ideally from outside Europe, (cp. 6.1.4) in order to arrive at more high-quality assessments and avoid potential conflicts of interest at the same time.

Taking on these recommendations by ECRP Funding Organisations, the following changes to the ECRP Review Panel and to the ECRP funding mechanism are proposed:

1. ECRP Funding Organisations have the right to suggest two ECRP Review Panel members to the ESF Office which then chooses the Panel members to ensure appropriate scientific and geographical balance.
2. ECRP Review Panel members should be well-recognised scholars in core social science disciplines with long-standing experience in international peer review. They could also be associated with national decision-making boards, to ensure the acceptance of the ECRP Review Panel's decision in the national context. Due to the topical variety of proposals received in ECRP, additional experts with the appropriate expertise may be recruited to serve on the Panel.

4. Stage One: Operation of ECRP since the 2004 evaluation

3. The ECRP Review Panel should consist of 10-15 members and it is proposed to maintain a core set of members on the Panel to allow for consistent decision-making.
4. Ideally, two or three ECRP Review Panel members should come from outside Europe and also an appropriate gender balance should be observed.

These new ideas, and generally all the proposals brought forward during this report, should be discussed by the ECRP Management Committee and further developed by the ECRP Working Group with the aim of ECRP funding agencies adopting a revised ECRP Protocol in autumn 2008. This would leave the ESF Office enough time to arrange documentation and procedures for a potential new competition cycle 2009-2011.

4.2.4 Informing applicants of decisions

ECRP applicants are informed of the competition outcome by e-mail and by post immediately after the result is known (usually in February). More precisely, it is the Project Leader (PL) who is informed about the result and who then has the duty of notifying all Principal Investigators (PI) involved in the Collaborative Research Project (CRP). Applicants are informed via a complete competition schedule on the ECRP website as to when they can expect feedback from ESF. It seems that the problems regarding applicant information rightly addressed in the 2004 review of the scheme have now been solved.

4.2.5 Monitoring of awards

Another recommendation of the 2004 review was for ESF to post details of awards on the ECRP website as well as to collect progress reports from Project Leaders (PL) of successful applications and make them available on the secure website. In this case too, the ESF Office has applied standard EUROCORES procedures and is currently asking for an annual report as well as a final report from Project Leaders. In doing so ECRP has become very effective in report collection. However, the posting of these reports on a secure website has not yet been implemented and is a further recommendation of this report. More generally, procedures have not been put in place for the analysis of these reports and this needs to be addressed by the ECRP Management Committee and the ECRP Working Group. As to the publication of award details, all information is available on the ECRP website and the brochure can also be downloaded in PDF format.

4.2.6 Publicity and information

All the changes in public relations (PR) use put forward by the 2004 review have been implemented and even expanded (cp. 4.1.6). However, the PR work for ECRP needs to be established and intensified, especially in light of the new funding schemes which have emerged in recent years. New ideas should be discussed by the ECRP Management Committee and the ECRP Working Group, as improved PR seems to have at least some impact on the number of proposals received (cp. 4.2.1).

4.3 Summary of ECRP operation since the 2004 evaluation

The assessment of the operation of the ECRP scheme between 2005 and 2007 was based on the recommendations put forward during the substantial ECRP review by Professor Linda Hantrais in 2004. It can be concluded that the great majority of suggestions taken on in the 2005 ECRP Protocol have been implemented in the collaboration of EFOs and ESF. The availability of scheme coordination capacity (50% coordination + 50% administration) under the EUROCORES contract, which was not available before 2005, greatly helped the implementation of improvements in this competition cycle. Aspects like application handling, informing of applicants, monitoring of awards and scheme publicity seemed to be running smoothly in early 2008. The requested steps have also been taken regarding the joint peer review process and considerable progress has been made with respect to referee selection and quality assurance. Still, in comparison to some national standards, the volume of external written reviews does not seem to be satisfactory. The requirements for written peer review therefore have to be elevated to the highest national standards, in order to allow these organisations to fully accept the recommendations of ECRP peer review. For the same reason, the operation of the ECRP Review Panel needs to be revised. Specifically, the composition mechanisms, the assurance of relevant high-level expertise and the geographical balance need to be addressed. It is now for the ECRP Management Committee and the appointed ECRP Working Group to discuss the revisions proposed in this report, suggest further improvements and develop a new ECRP Protocol which can then be presented to ECRP Funding Organisations for them to consider further participation in the potential new competition cycle of 2009-2011.

5. Stage Two: Science policy assessment of the ECRP scheme

It is important to note that in 2001 no international collaborative funding scheme existed in the social sciences which could be compared to ECRP. Thus a lot of pioneering work was undertaken by participating councils and ESF through the launching of ECRP at that time. The European Research Area (ERA) proposed by the European Commission in 2000 has since dramatically changed. Hence the main question for the first part of the science policy assessment of the ECRP scheme (cp. 5.1) is whether ECRP is still a unique funding instrument and thus serves its purpose.

In 2004, the ERA-NET NORFACE was launched as the result of a successful bid for funding to the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme under the ERA-NET scheme.³ NORFACE is "designed to deliver new levels of cooperative research policy and practice" in the social sciences and is currently supported by fourteen European research councils, many of which are ESF members.

In the same year, the EUROCORES Scheme was introduced by the ESF Member Organisations and ESF. The EUROCORES Scheme provides a framework to bring together national research funding organisations and to support interdisciplinary research in non-traditional areas across all scientific disciplines.⁴ It is supported by a contract with the European Commission which covers additional networking and also coordination costs. As mentioned above, ECRP was included in the EUROCORES framework at the end of 2004, despite its different operational design, and has therefore been able to benefit from coordination and scheme development capacity available through the EC contract.

In 2006, the long-anticipated European Research Council (ERC) was established in Brussels, setting out to fund investigator-driven research without the limitation of any priorities in order to bring out the best science.⁵ It is currently operating two major funding schemes: the ERC Starting Independent Researcher Grant scheme (ERC Starting Grants) and the ERC Advanced Investigator Grant scheme (ERC Advanced Grants) which are also offered for the social sciences. The ERC is a major component of the Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7) for the period 2007 to 2013. In view of these funding alternatives to ECRP, it is useful to compare the distinctive features of available funding mechanisms in the social sciences.⁶

3. cp. www.norface.org for information on NORFACE and ERA-NET; ERA-NETs are designed to increase the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at a national or regional level in the European Union.

4. cp. www.esf.org/eurocores

5. cp. <http://erc.europa.eu/>

6. Funding instruments being offered through the Framework Programme are not considered in the comparison because they already existed when ECRP was developed. As a matter of fact, ECRP was

Moreover, many European research councils have set up various bilateral funding agreements in recent years (e.g. DFG and ANR, to name just one collaboration). It is obvious that all existing funding schemes at the international but also at the national level in the social sciences are competing for the attention of excellent scientists. However, to attempt to compare all of them would go beyond the scope of this report. Thus a most-similar-case design will be used to highlight important differences of available schemes for international collaborative research in the social sciences. Subsequently, the reasoning behind the case selection will be explained in more detail.

5.1 Comparison of currently-available funding schemes for collaborative research programmes in the social sciences

5.1.1 Selection

Following the design of the analysis, only funding schemes which are similar to ECRP have been selected for closer examination of their respective features. Therefore both ERC grants are excluded as they are predominantly designed to support individual researchers (although not specifically excluding collaboration). Nor are the various bilateral agreements analysed, as it has always been a condition in ECRP to fund broader collaborations (a minimum of three countries). The ERA-NET NORFACE (i.e. its Transnational Research Programme) and the thematic EUROCORES Scheme seem to have most in common with ECRP, and European researchers might consider any of the three when looking for collaborative funding mechanisms in the social sciences.

5.1.2 Comparison

The most notable difference between ECRP and the other two schemes is that ECRP does not operate with a thematic orientation or limitation. All topics which lie in the remit of the social sciences can be submitted to the annual ECRP call.⁷ This distinction leads to operational differences such as the absence of a thematic call, simply because it is not needed. NORFACE does not operate with a thematic call either, but this is due to the fact that NORFACE call topics are identified by the participating funding agencies and not through a

developed by national funding agencies as a response to a perceived lack of bottom-up opportunities in the international context.

7. Please cp. table 2 for aspects discussed in this chapter.

5. Stage Two: Science policy assessment of the ECRP scheme

call procedure. This top-down approach of NORFACE has a lot of similarities with the European Commission Framework Programme where there is consultation with the scientific community on topics but the topics do not come directly from the scientists.

ECRP does not use an outline stage, unlike the other two schemes. This leads to a rather short project-selection period of ten months. The short project-selection duration in NORFACE can be attributed to the existence of a common pot of funding, reducing decision-making to one entity (NORFACE Review Panel), whereas in ECRP and EUROCORES a lot of time is spent on national funding decisions.

Differences can also be noted in the call frequency: whereas ECRP and the thematic EUROCORES operate with an annual call, NORFACE had a unique call for its Transnational Research Programme. This is due to the different structure of the NORFACE ERA-NET which also focused strongly on exchange of best practices between funding agencies. Hence the setting-up of funding schemes (also note the NORFACE Seminar Scheme as well as the NORFACE Pilot Research Programme) was only part of the project.

Still, there are quite a number of similarities between the three schemes, such as duration of the funded projects, roughly also the funding volume available for a competition, and the fact that there is scheme coordination available.

A specific element of the thematic EUROCORES is the availability of funds dedicated to support networking

across Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs) within a thematic programme. This is designed to bring added value to a given EUROCORES Programme to enable researchers to work together who would otherwise not have done so. As ECRP has been operating within the EUROCORES framework networking funds have also been available. However, as topics of CRPs usually vary greatly and are in very different areas of the social sciences, these funds have only been used in one instance (2005 competition) when four out of eight funded CRPs happened to focus on migration and integration. Still, in comparison to thematic EUROCORES where networking activities constitute an integral part of the programme, the networking use in ECRP is marginal. In the NORFACE Transnational Research Programme on Migration, there is a Scientific Programme Director coordinating networking activities.

5.1.3 Conclusion

Summarising the comparative exercise above, one can conclude that since the first launch of ECRP in 2001 the opportunities for social scientists to obtain research funding have diversified considerably. Even if this means increased complexity, an increased supply of funding opportunities should be welcomed in the spirit of the European Research Area. Although there are many similarities between ECRP, EUROCORES and the NORFACE Transnational Research Programme, ECRP still seems to address an important gap in social sciences funding which is currently not addressed by any other inter-

Scheme feature	EUROCORES	ECRP	NORFACE (Transnational Research Programme)
Thematic orientation/ limitation	Yes	No	Yes
Funding volume per project/ programme	350 000-1.5 M€	350 000-1.5 M€	500 000-4 Mi€
Project selection duration	24 months	10 months	9 months
Project duration	3-4 years	3-4 years	max. 4 years
Availability	across all scientific domains	social sciences only	social sciences only
Call type	theme + outline + full	general	thematic outline + full
Call frequency	annually (theme)	annually	unique
Networking within a programme/competition year	Yes (thematic orientation ensures networking potential)	If applicable (CRPs with similar topics and hence networking potential may occur by chance)	Yes; Scientific Programme Director in charge of networking coordination
Scheme coordination	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scheme duration	2004-2008	2001-2008	2004-2009

Table 2: Funding scheme comparison in the social sciences

national collaborative funding scheme. The decisive element is the strictly bottom-up approach for collaborative projects. The fact that the call is offered on a regular, annual basis should also be helpful, as this constitutes a reliable element for scientists. A useful exercise at a later stage may be to take stock of the existing bilateral or multilateral (e.g. D-A-CH) funding mechanisms as they might emerge as a main “competitor” to ECRP in the future. This aspect may also be addressed when improving the scheme for the new competition cycle 2009-2011. In order to elaborate the science policy assessment of ECRP further, a SWOT analysis questionnaire was sent out to ECRP Funding Organisation representatives and external experts in the area of science funding.

5.2 ECRP SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a strategic assessment and planning tool used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats involved in a project or a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the project (or scheme in this case) and identifying the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieving that objective. There are different usages of this method. For the analysis of ECRP, a mixture between strategic and creative use of the SWOT analysis was proposed to respondents.

The continuation of ECRP with improved peer review and an advanced funding model for the period 2009-2011 was defined as the objective for this SWOT analysis (although this does not exclude a different outcome). The respondents (Members of the ECRP Management Committee and the ECRP Working Group; cp. 7.3) were asked to use existing funding schemes for international collaborative research in the social sciences as a frame of reference (e.g. ESF thematic EUROCORES, NORFACE Transnational Research Programme, ERC Grants). There are currently 18 countries participating in the ECRP Scheme and every funding agency has a representative on the ECRP Management Committee. The most experienced members of the ECRP Management Committee were invited to join the ECRP Working Group along with outside experts on international social science funding. In total, 21 individuals have been approached and nine responses have been received. This input has been compiled into one document and also quantified where applicable. This document can be found under 7.4 for reference. The responses are summarised below, always starting with the most important aspects in a given area.

5.2.1 Strengths

Very much in line with the analysis under 5.1, respondents perceived the bottom-up approach as the strongest feature of ECRP. Eight out of nine questionnaires mentioned this element as a strength. Given that a majority of respondents belong to the ECRP Management Committee, it is not surprising that the collaboration between funding agencies in ECRP is also appreciated for providing an international forum for best practices in this sector (mentioned three times). Two respondents also perceived ECRP as unique in the European funding landscape. Further strong points which were mentioned once are: the European dimension and the opportunity to cooperate with Associate Partners, the regularity and flexibility of the scheme, the capacity to stimulate new collaboration, the responsibility of national groups in the overall design of the projects. There was also a perception that ECRP is now fairly well known in the scientific community after years of operation.

A second question was how the strengths of ECRP could best be used in its continuation. Three respondents felt that ECRP Funding Organisations (EFOs) and ESF should emphasise ECRP’s unique role in the funding environment when engaging in publicity. Two individuals felt that the inclusion of important European players such as France and Italy, as well as further Associate Partners (potentially also outside Europe) would be vital to strengthen the scheme. Again there were several aspects which were mentioned only once, such as ongoing quality assurance and improvement, the focus on young researchers, the stressing of the high level and the European added value of the scheme, the enlarging of the networking between projects. It was also proposed to shorten the timeline for project selection to eight months. One individual thought that there should be a mechanism for avoiding very large consortiums of national groups, although it is not argued why this should be done. A very interesting suggestion from the science policy perspective was that the model scheme could potentially be extended beyond the social sciences which would, in the medium term, increase the profile of the scheme as a whole.⁸

5.2.2 Weaknesses

Of concern to four respondents was the consistency of the peer review quality and three individuals were wor-

8. Indeed, the ECRP mechanism was presented to EUROCORES workshop participants on 9 September 2008 in Brussels. ESF Member Organisation representatives from all scientific areas were present at this meeting and declared an interest in principle. The ESF will now put forward the proposal of an ECRP-like mechanism for the consideration of the other ESF Standing Committees. Should the outcome be positive, further steps, such as the approval of the Governing Council, will follow.

5. Stage Two: Science policy assessment of the ECRP scheme

ried about decreasing interest of applicants (especially in 2007, cp. table 1) and the resulting low success rates. Four respondents wanted to see more funding agencies involved, which is mentioned in the last section. Another three questionnaires mentioned the time-consuming selection procedures as an issue, although it remained unclear whether they referred to the 10-month project selection procedures or the time it takes to select referees (please note: experts for written reviews are suggested by EFOs where national researchers are involved in a proposal). In this context, another respondent mentioned the long coordination process after the decision is made by the ECRP Review Panel. Also connected to this issue is the problem of the “double jeopardy” (mentioned by two respondents) resulting from EFOs running their own peer review (to varying degrees) after the ESF has done the common peer review. The question is quite evident: why should ECRP have several levels of peer review when all the partners could work together to have one single peer review of the highest standard? This would allow for a shorter timeline of potentially only seven months and make ECRP probably the fastest regular funding scheme in the social sciences remit, therefore further elevating its attractiveness. This seems to be one of the crucial questions which need to be answered by the ECRP Working Group in order to advance ECRP to the next level.

The issues above were perceived as prominent weaknesses whereas the following aspects were each mentioned only once and are subsequently presented largely unmentioned: ECRP should focus more on training capacity; the ECRP scheme should focus on well-integrated collaborative projects, rather than allowing individual researchers to pursue separate agendas; a non-thematic call can grow into a parallel system that is too large to manage; the existence of two different EUROCORES schemes (ECRP and thematic EUROCORES) running in parallel is perceived as misleading for applicants as well as institutions. One respondent stated that the absence of networking activities in ECRP would constitute a lack of added value which would be significant for other EUROCORES Programmes. This is of course ignoring the strategic aims of both schemes. Moreover, a lack of attractiveness for European top researchers was felt, in particular in recent years. In addition, the different and additional application efforts required by some EFOs were seen as a problem, as was the lack of coherent standards for reviewer nominations by EFOs.

Respondents were then asked to suggest ways to reduce weaknesses or do away with them entirely. Due to the substantial input received in response to this open question, it has been summarised by topic.

Peer review quality

Two respondents saw the work on the ECRP Review Panel as a crucial element to overcoming weaknesses: “The ECRP should develop a strong dedicated Review Panel, with detailed collective knowledge of a number of MO research funding traditions, and adopting a quality standard which is comparable to the most competitive of member organisations. Member organisations should be willing to accept the decision without further review.” Also the ESF Office is asked to implement procedures to ensure that every proposal submitted under ECRP receives high-quality peer review. MOs would have a role to play in this, but if MOs do not fulfil their obligation to provide reviewer nominations, the ESF should take an active role in identifying the problems and developing solutions. This may lead to the need for additional capacity. It was also felt that setting clear standards for reviewer profiles would be crucial, for example (a) the majority of reviewers should come from other countries than the applicants’, (b) MOs and ESF should check the reviewers’ potential conflict of interests. Another respondent feels that the Review Panel should not act as reviewers but interpret the reviews available, and should finally make a ranking of the proposals. Many comments were also made on procedural efficiency.

Procedural efficiency

The demand to shorten and streamline the selection procedures was repeated, in connection with the implementation of a dedicated Review Panel. Another suggestion was to reduce weaknesses by requiring all EFOs to sign a protocol whereby they agree to follow the recommendation of the ECRP Review Panel. The parties who do not follow the agreed procedures should not be allowed to participate in the ECRP Scheme. Another respondent proposed a different approach, asking for more efficient decision-making from EFOs and suggesting that they be required to make final decisions at most three months after Review Panel recommendations are provided to them. This is essentially the status quo. At the same time, additional application efforts should be reduced.

Funding

With regard to funding, MOs should define a more flexible financial commitment so that all recommended projects can be funded. Because ECRP member countries adopt different frameworks for funding based on national rules (some of which are not particularly designed to support collaboration), it is not entirely clear whether ECRP projects are fully supported to conduct within-collaboration networking and dissemination to ensure they maximise both academic and (where appropriate)



broader social impact. This issue needs to be explored by the ECRP Working Group and proposals should be made on how to arrive at flexible national financial frameworks.

Since ECRP member countries employ different frameworks for funding based on national rules (some of which are not particularly designed to support collaboration), it is not entirely clear whether ECRP projects always receive the fullest support for intra-CRP networking and dissemination. As these dimensions of collaborative research are essential to maximise both scientific and broader social impact, this issue should be explored by the ECRP Working Group and proposals made on how to arrive at flexible national financial frameworks.

Publicity

In terms of publicity, the creation of a common dissemination strategy for ECRP was proposed. EFOs should use their contacts in bilateral programmes to encourage new countries to join. It was also suggested that the European added value and the required high standard should be stressed in the call and in general publicity in order to maintain a manageable number of applications; this is of course in contradiction of the idea of too little

interest in ECRP. However, it is a very good example of the diverse views about the operation of international funding schemes.

5.2.3 Opportunities

Again the input on opportunities is structured according to topics to better summarise the variety of inputs. Opportunities are often seen in the demand for the scheme.

Demand

There seems to be a strong feeling among respondents that there is still a demand for an investigator-driven, multilateral research programme with very low bureaucratic application barriers, since most funding instruments in social sciences are applied and strategic, thus making ECRP very attractive. Also, an increased understanding among policy makers of the importance of the internationalisation of research, and acknowledgement of the virtues of the model of bottom-up, peer-reviewed proposals as the best way to spend science budgets is perceived.

5. Stage Two: Science policy assessment of the ECRP scheme

Expansion

Respondents also feel that there is now the opportunity to establish research links with non-European countries. The USA and Canada are mentioned but others might be included as well. One respondent adds that it is likely that the European Commission's Eighth Framework Programme will have a stronger emphasis and increased funding for Joint Programming by programme owners in the member states, and increased funding for the European Research Council (ERC). At the same time, project funding will be reduced. This is perceived as both an opportunity and a threat. From a strategic point of view this may be seen as an opportunity, if the EFOs see the ECRP scheme as more important when project funding on the European level is reduced. According to the respondents, integrating members of research councils of external countries into the scheme would be an obvious way to seize this important opportunity. Observers from external countries might also be invited to ECRP Management Committee meetings.

5.2.4 Threats

The three main threats that respondents mention lie in the areas of complexity, competition and publicity. Complexity is perceived on different levels: there is a perceived confusion about the differences between funding schemes in general ("panoply of instruments") and also on the ESF level regarding the differences between the thematic EUROCORES and ECRP. Then, there is a fear of having too many members in ECRP, which again goes against the expansion being asked for by some respondents. Despite the impression of ECRP's uniqueness, there is also a perception of increased competition. ECRP could therefore be marginalised because (a) ECRP has different rules to other EUROCORES Programmes and (b) ECRP is competing with similar programmes in the social sciences like the Framework Programme, other EUROCORES (e.g. HUMVIB, HESC), bilateral or multilateral agreements (e.g. D-A-CH) or ERANETs (e.g. NORFACE). In particular the bilateral and multilateral agreements between funding agencies are seen as a threat to ECRP. Developments such as the International Common Application Process are making it possible for funding agencies to support multilateral responsive-mode proposals without the mediation of the ESF. Depending on how it evolves, the ERC might also develop into an agency that directly competes with ECRP in terms of types of funding it may support. The development of the Framework Programme towards Joint Programming on the European level may cut short the national funding available for ECRP.

The strategies proposed for overcoming these threats were somewhat repetitive of aspects mentioned before and are therefore summarised briefly. Again, greater efficiency is being advised in order for ECRP to move quickly towards a single decision point for funding. It should quickly establish an unquestionably high quality standard, and use this standard as the basis for expanding its base of participation into other countries (i.e. Central and Eastern Europe). Again, the simplification of procedures is requested. The ECRP Scheme should also be extended to other disciplinary fields. In terms of dissemination EFOs and ESF should define a clear role for ECRP and EUROCORES in general. This could include two or three different schemes: a) bottom-up EUROCORES (ECRP model), b) thematic EUROCORES ("normal" EUROCORES), c) and TOPCORES.

5.2.5 Conclusion

The SWOT analysis conducted has produced rich feedback which will now be summarised. The aspects mentioned will serve as a point of departure for the ECRP Working Group in revising the ECRP Protocol, i.e. the new Terms of Participation in the scheme.

1. The ECRP is still perceived as a unique scheme in the social sciences funding landscape, which serves to address an important funding gap. The main reason for this is its strictly bottom-up approach. The regularity and flexibility of the scheme contribute to this positive impression.
2. The main opportunities lie in the perceived demand (despite fluctuating numbers of applications). This opportunity should now be used by including additional funding agencies from Europe (e.g. France, Italy and Eastern European countries) as well as participants from overseas (e.g. USA and Canada).
3. Central perceived weaknesses and threats are the consistency of the peer review quality and the procedural efficiency. Concrete proposals to overcome these are the improvement of the written peer reviews and the establishment of a dedicated ECRP Review Panel (as already suggested under 4.2). As a consequence EFOs should accept the decision of the ECRP Review Panel and dispose of the "double jeopardy", thereby reducing the project selection duration. In order to accommodate this, EFOs should look into ways of having more flexible financial and procedural arrangements to support ECRP.
4. Along with the double jeopardy, the duplication of application efforts (individual national requirements) is lowering the attractiveness of the scheme by complicating the application process. Instead,

the Common Application Form should be brought to a standard that is acceptable to all participating agencies.

5. These important improvements should then be actively communicated on a broad scale to increase the application quantity and hopefully also the quality of applying researchers. Up until now, the lack of targeted publicity is connected to a lack of clear profile for ECRP in funding agencies as well as ESF. For the moment, ECRP is only available in the social sciences, which is not helping its impact. EFOs and ESF should work together to develop this profile.
6. Respondents also feel that the bilateral and multi-lateral schemes developed by EFOs pose a threat to ECRP. Here the ECRP Working Group is asked to examine the rationale for the development of these schemes and suggest ways for ECRP to accommodate these needs within the scheme.
7. Summarising the aspects above, the participating agencies will need to make a fuller commitment to ECRP in terms of procedural and financial support, in order to have it realise its full potential and therefore achieve significant impact.

6. References

6.1 Documentary Sources

A variety of documentary sources was used in order to substantiate the evaluation outcome. The different types of documents have been listed below. In order to keep the review at a manageable size the documents are not fully included in this report but can be made available upon request.

6.1.1 Websites

- ECRP: www.esf.org/ecrp
- ESF: www.esf.org
- ESF secure website (only available during certain phases in competition):
Login: <http://www2.esf.org/asp/form/scss/ecrp/login.asp>
Password: c91g92cj

6.1.2 ESF documents

6.1.2.1 General

- Terms of Reference: ECRP Working Group 2004
- Terms of Reference: ECRP evaluation 2007

6.1.2.2 Meeting minutes

- ECRP Management Committee minutes, December 2007
- Core Group minutes, Oslo, 7 February 2008

6.1.3 ESF documents provided in response to revised ECRP Protocol

- Manual for science managers at ECRP funding agencies
- ECRP annual timeline
- Revised ECRP Protocol for the competitions 2005-2007
- Template e-mail request for substantiation of reviews to referees
- Template letter to ECRP Project Leaders informing them of funding decision (positive/negative)
- ECRP awarded projects information document
- ECRP yearly report form for awarded Project Leaders
- ECRP final report form for awarded Project Leaders

6.1.4 Other documents

- 2004 ECRP evaluation final report by Professor Linda Hantrais
- E-mail exchange: Falk Reckling, FWF, 30 November 2007
- E-mail exchange: Phil Ward, University of Kent, 11 February 2008
- E-mail exchange: Craig Bardsley, ESRC, 14 May 2008

6.2 Abbreviation register

- DFG: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft; German Research Foundation; www.dfg.de
- ECRP: European Collaborative Research Projects (in the Social Sciences); www.esf.org/ecrp
- EFO: EUROCORES Funding Organisation (formerly EFA, EUROCORES Funding Agency)
- ERA: European Research Area
- ERA-NET: Networking of national or regional programmes under the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission; <http://cordis.europa.eu/coordination/era-net.htm>
- ERC: European Research Council; <http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm>
- ESF: European Science Foundation; www.esf.org
- ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council; www.esrc.ac.uk
- EUROCORES: European Collaborative Research; www.esf.org/activities/eurocores.html
- FWF: Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung in Österreich; Austrian Science Research Fund; www.fwf.ac.at
- NORFACE: New Opportunities for Research Funding Cooperation in Europe; www.norface.org
- SCSS: Standing Committee for the Social Sciences; www.esf.org/social
- SNF: Schweizerischer Nationalfonds; Swiss National Science Foundation; www.snf.ch
- ToR: Terms of Reference

6.3 Glossary of ESF terms

Collaborative Research Project (CRP):

The Collaborative Research Projects (CRPs) are the international research activities which make up a EUROCORES Programme. A CRP consists of a number of Individual Projects (IPs), each led by normally one Principal Investigator (PI). Associated Projects may also be part of a CRP. Each CRP is represented by a Project Leader (PL). Each CRP should demonstrate a minimum level of trans-national collaboration as defined in the relevant Call for Proposals of the EUROCORES Programme. Associated Partners do not count towards the trans-national eligibility criteria.

EUROCORES:

EUROCORES Programme stands for EUROpean COLlaborative RESearch Programme. EUROCORES Programmes operate in specific scientific research areas. A EUROCORES Programme is “launched” as soon as the Call for Proposals of that specific EUROCORES Programme has been published. The EUROCORES Programmes involve an international peer review process and the subsequent networking of the funded Collaborative Research Projects.

ECRP:

The EUROCORES Programme for *European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP)* is a response to the continuing demand from the scientific community in the countries of the SCSS’s Member Organisations for funding to support responsive-mode, investigator-driven Collaborative Research Projects within all fields of social science in Europe. The ECRP Programme is designed to promote research of the highest quality, offering opportunities to test innovative ideas, pool expertise and strengthen research capacity in line with the objectives of the European Research Area.

Individual Projects (IPs):

A research activity/project within a Collaborative Research Project which is led by a Principal Investigator (PI) and supported by a national EUROCORES Funding Organisation (EFO) is an Individual Project. The PI applies for national funding in the context of a CRP’s research objectives. A minimum number of three Individual Projects make up a Collaborative Research Project. The IP budget request should include funds for networking within the Collaborative Research Project.

Principal Investigators (PIs):

A scientist who leads an Individual Project (IP) is a Principal Investigator (PI). He/she applies via the EUROCORES CRP for funding from a national funding organisation which is participating in a EUROCORES Programme (EUROCORES Funding Organisation – EFO). He/she must be based in a country or associated with an organisation participating in the EUROCORES Programme and be eligible to apply to that organisation. There can be a maximum of two PIs per IP (One PI and one Co-PI).

Project Leader (PL):

The Project Leader (PL) of a CRP is the main representative of the CRP. He/she is a Principal Investigator of an Individual Project in the CRP he/she represents. He/she is normally the representative of the CRP to the ESF and in the Scientific Committee of the EUROCORES Programme. The PL is responsible for communication with the other Principal Investigators of his/her CRP. An Associated Partner cannot act as a PL.

ESF Pool of Referees (POR):

The ESF Pool of Referees is a database containing the names of several thousand scientists across all disciplines who have committed to provide ESF with up to five scientific evaluations per year.

7. Annexes

7.1 Forms

- Common Application form
- Common Assessment form

7.2 Other documents

- ECRP timeline for science managers
- ECRP funding statistics 2001-2007

7.3 Individuals consulted for the SWOT analysis

- ECRP Management Committee
- ECRP Working Group

7.4 Compiled SWOT questionnaires

7.1 Forms

 EUROCORES Programme <small>European Collaborative Research</small>	European Collaborative Research Projects in the Social Sciences 2008
SECTION ONE: THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT	
1.1 Main aims of the Collaborative Research Project <i>(Max 5 aims/150 words)</i>	
1.2 Potential impacts of the Collaborative Research Project <i>(Max 200 words)</i>	
1.3 Added value of the collaboration <i>(Max 200 words)</i>	
1.4 Data handling aspects (if relevant): quality assurance, storage, access <i>(Max 200 words)</i>	

1.5 Description of the Collaborative Research Project *(Max 2500 words. Description of a Collaborative Research Project exceeding 2500 words will not be accepted)*

The Project Leader should describe the overall collaboration (each Individual Project should be described in Section Two in a maximum of 1500 words; description of Individual Projects exceeding 1500 words will not be accepted), using the following structure:

- 1.5.1 Originality of the Collaborative Project and potential contribution to knowledge
- 1.5.2 Research design and methods
- 1.5.3 Competence and expertise of the Individual Project partners
- 1.5.4 Contribution of Individual Projects to the collaboration and arrangements for co-ordinating the collaboration
- 1.5.5 Justification for the level of funding requested
- 1.5.6 Planned outputs (publications and dissemination activities)
- 1.5.7 Annexes (including no more than 1 side of A4 for references and no more than 2 sides of A4 for technical details, if appropriate)

SECTION TWO: INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS		
INDIVIDUAL PROJECT 1	Country: EUROCORES Funding Organisation	
2.1 Financial summary for Individual Project 1		
The Principal Investigator should provide below a summary of the financial support sought from his/her national EUROCORES Funding Organisation.		
Full financial details and any other supplementary information required by your national EUROCORES Funding Organisation should be supplied to them as instructed on the web.		
		TOTAL
2.1.1 Staff		
2.1.2 Travel and subsistence		
2.1.3 Consumables		
2.1.4 Other items		
2.1.5 Overheads and other allowable costs		
2.1.6 GRAND TOTAL FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECT 1		

2.2 Description of Individual Project 1 (*Max 1500 words*)

- 2.2.1 Originality; potential contribution to knowledge
- 2.2.2 Research design and methods
- 2.2.3 Competence and expertise
- 2.2.4 Contribution to the collaboration
- 2.2.5 Justification for funding requested (explain why items requested are necessary for the research)
- 2.2.6 Planned outputs (publications and other dissemination activities)
- 2.2.7 Annexes (including no more than 1 side of A4 for references and 2 sides of A4 for technical details, if appropriate)

Insert brief CVs (no more than 1 side of A4) for each of the researchers listed. CVs should include a list of no more than 10 relevant publications for each researcher.

7.1 Forms

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT 2	Country: EUROCORES Funding Organisation	
2.1 Financial summary for Individual Project 2		
The Principal Investigator should provide below a summary of the financial support sought from his/her national EUROCORES Funding Organisation.		
Full financial details and any other supplementary information required by your national EUROCORES Funding Organisation should be supplied to them as instructed on the web.		
		TOTAL
2.1.1 Staff		
2.1.2 Travel and subsistence		
2.1.3 Consumables		
2.1.4 Other items		
2.1.5 Overheads and other allowable costs		
2.1.6 GRAND TOTAL FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECT 2		

2.2 Description of Individual Project 2 *(Max 1500 words)*

- 2.2.1 Originality; potential contribution to knowledge
- 2.2.2 Research design and methods
- 2.2.3 Competence and expertise
- 2.2.4 Contribution to the collaboration
- 2.2.5 Justification for funding requested (explain why items requested are necessary for the research)
- 2.2.6 Planned outputs (publications and other dissemination activities)
- 2.2.7 Annexes (including no more than 1 side of A4 for references and 2 sides of A4 for technical details, if appropriate)

Insert brief CVs (no more than 1 side of A4) for each of the researchers listed. CVs should include a list of no more than 10 relevant publications for each researcher.

7.1 Forms

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT 3	Country: EUROCORES Funding Organisation	
2.1 Financial summary for Individual Project 3		
The Principal Investigator should provide below a summary of the financial support sought from his/her national EUROCORES Funding Organisation.		
Full financial details and any other supplementary information required by your national EUROCORES Funding Organisation should be supplied to them as instructed on the web.		
		TOTAL
2.1.1	Staff	
2.1.2	Travel and subsistence	
2.1.3	Consumables	
2.1.4	Other items	
2.1.5	Overheads and other allowable costs	
2.1.6	GRAND TOTAL FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECT 3	

2.2 Description of Individual Project 3 *(Max 1500 words)*

- 2.2.1 Originality; potential contribution to knowledge
- 2.2.2 Research design and methods
- 2.2.3 Competence and expertise
- 2.2.4 Contribution to the collaboration
- 2.2.5 Justification for funding requested (explain why items requested are necessary for the research)
- 2.2.6 Planned outputs (publications and other dissemination activities)
- 2.2.7 Annexes (including no more than 1 side of A4 for references and 2 sides of A4 for technical details, if appropriate)

Insert brief CVs (no more than 1 side of A4) for each of the researchers listed. CVs should include a list of no more than 10 relevant publications for each researcher.

SECTION THREE: ASSOCIATE PROJECTS			
ASSOCIATE PROJECT 1 Please number the project according to the number of associate partner		Country: EUROCORES	
3.1 Associate partner	<i>Title</i>	<i>FAMILY NAME</i>	<i>First Name(s)</i>
Gender:	<i>M F</i>	Date of Birth:	<i>dd/mm/yyyy</i>
3.1.1 Position held:			
3.1.2 Institution:			
3.1.3 Dept/ Faculty:			
3.1.4 Postal address:	<i>Building/PO Box; Street; Town; Postcode; Country</i>		
3.1.5 Email address:	(1)	(2)	
3.1.6 Telephone:	(1)	(2)	
3.1.7 Fax:	(1)	(2)	

3.2 Associate Project contribution to the CRP (3 pages max.) please explain here how the AP fits within the overall CRP

- 3.2.1 associate project aims and objectives
- 3.2.2 methodologies/experiments
- 3.2.3 work plan
- 3.2.4 planned outputs (publications and other dissemination activities)

3.3 Information on funding

Please give information on the source and status (confirmed, applied for etc.) of the funds you have requested to participate in the CRP)

Check list: Materials supplied

This check list is provided to help Project Leaders double-check their application. This information will be used for administrative purposes to check that the application is complete and meets the eligibility requirements.

SECTION ONE: THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

Items 1.1–1.3: Have you completed these items using the required number of words?

Item 1.4: Have you addressed data handling aspects (if relevant): quality assurance, storage, access?

Item 1.5: Have you provided a description of the Collaborative Research Project in no more than 2500 words and have you supplied the following:

- An annex with References (no more than 1 side of A4)
- An annex with Technical details, if appropriate (no more than 2 sides of A4)

SECTION TWO: INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Please indicate the Funding Organisation from which you are requesting funding.

Individual Project 1

Item 2.1: Have you included a summary of the financial support requested from your national Funding Organisation and have you followed their instructions on the web for supplying full financial details and any other information required?

Item 2.2 Have you provided a description of your Individual Project 1 (Max 1500 words) and have you supplied the following:

- An annex with References (no more than 1 side of A4)
- An annex with Technical details, if appropriate (no more than 2 sides of A4)
- Short CVs (no more than 1 side of A4 and no more than 10 relevant publications for each researcher) for Principal Investigators and all the Project Members listed.

Have you included the details required in Section Two for **at least two other Individual Projects**?

Individual Project 2

Item 2.1 Have you included a summary of the financial support requested from IP2's EUROCORES Funding Organisation and has IP2's Project Leader followed his/her Funding Organisation's instructions on the web for supplying full financial details and any other information required?

Item 2.2 Have you provided a description of Individual Project 2 (Max 1500 words) and have you supplied the following:

- An annex with References (no more than 1 side of A4)
- An annex with Technical details, if appropriate (no more than 2 sides of A4)
- Short CVs (no more than 1 side of A4 and no more than 10 relevant publications for each researcher) for Principal Investigators and all the Project Members listed.

Individual Project 3

- Item 2.1 Have you included a summary of the financial support requested from IP3's EUROCORES Funding Organisation and has IP3's Project Leader followed his/her Funding Organisation's instructions on the web for supplying full financial details and any other information required?
- Item 2.2 Have you provided a description of Individual Project 2 (Max 1500 words) and have you supplied the following
- An annex with References (no more than 1 side of A4)
 - An annex with Technical details, if appropriate (no more than 2 sides of A4)
 - Short CVs (no more than 1 side of A4 and no more than 10 relevant publications for each researcher) for Principal Investigators and all the Project Members listed.

Add further Individual Projects as necessary

SECTION THREE: ASSOCIATE PROJECTS

- Item 3.1 Have you included details about the Associate Partner?
- Item 3.2 Have you provided a description of the Associate Project?
- Item 3.3 Have you included information on the source and status of the funds you have requested to participate in the CRP?



EUROCORES Programme European Collaborative Research

Standing Committee for Social Sciences (SCSS)

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS DOCUMENT IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY – PLEASE USE IT AS A GUIDELINE TO PREPARE YOUR ASSESSMENT, TO BE ENTERED ONLINE AS INSTRUCTED IN THE EMAIL YOU HAVE RECEIVED.

ASSESSMENT FORM

Title:
Project Leader:

Note on protection of personal data

This proposal has been sent to you for assessment.
Please note that in line with French law and with European Union directives on the protection of data the information contained in this proposal, including the personal data of the persons involved, should not be used for any other purpose than the assessment.

We must also inform you that a complete list of the names of all referees involved in the ECRP Programme will be published unattributed on completion of the review process. Furthermore, national Funding Organisations may receive on request a complete list of the referees allocated to the projects they have reviewed.

THE EUROPEAN SCIENCE FOUNDATION THANKS YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Declaration of conflict of interest (confidential)

If you believe you stand to **directly benefit** financially, professionally or personally from the success or failure of this proposal **you should not referee this proposal** and should contact the ESF programme secretariat as soon as possible.

If you currently have or in the past 5 years have had collaborations with any of the scientists involved in this proposal, or if you have any other potential **indirect interest, you should contact the programme secretariat and declare your interest to them.**

The ESF office will carefully consider the level (and perceived level) of your interest and will inform you if you can continue to referee the proposal.

Normal scientific interaction e.g. at conferences, workshops, professional activities etc. **need not be declared.**

Please do not hesitate to contact us:
Frank Kuhn (Science): +33 3 88 76 21 77 – fkuhn@esf.org
Caroline Eckert (Administration): +33 3 88 76 71 42 – ceckert@esf.org

7.1 Forms

Referee's personal data (confidential)

Referee's personal data *(please complete or correct information provided by ESF Secretariat)*

Title: First name: Surname:

Address:

Contact phone no.:

E-mail:

Instructions for referees

Please read carefully the following instructions before completing the assessment.

The ESF is conducting a single European peer review on behalf of the ECRP Funding Organisations. As this procedure has to meet the highest quality standards, we would like to kindly ask you to particularly focus on scientific justification and arguments supporting your grades.

Therefore, we invite you to write at least 400 words on "Originality and potential contribution to knowledge" (question 1.1) and "Research design and methods" (question 1.2), as these are the most essential aspects in evaluating the quality of a research proposal.

For the remaining criteria, we would invite you to provide us with at least five sentences. Please avoid writing empty phrases and concentrate on scientific justification.

The ESF greatly appreciates your support.

7.1 Forms

1. Assessment of the Collaborative Research Project

1.1 Originality and potential contribution to knowledge

Is the proposed research likely to make an original and significant contribution to theory, methods or knowledge? (400 words)

Please indicate your grade, based on your assessment, by ticking the appropriate box:

Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies

1.2 Research design and methods

Does the proposal have clear conceptual and theoretical foundations? Are the research methods and framework for analysis appropriate for the aims and objectives? Are they clearly defined, rigorous and feasible? Is the timescale and scheduling of the work appropriate and realistic? Have potential ethical issues been addressed? (400 words)

Please indicate your grade, based on your assessment, by ticking the appropriate box:

Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies

1.3 Competence and expertise of the applicant(s)

Do the researchers have the necessary expertise and competence to carry out the project? (5-6 sentences)

Please indicate your grade, based on your assessment, by ticking the appropriate box:

Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies

7.1 Forms

1.4 Added value of the collaboration

Does the collaborative dimension add value to the research? In 2.2 below, please give your assessment of the contribution of Individual Projects to the success of the collaboration (*5-6 sentences*).

Please indicate your grade, based on your assessment, by ticking the appropriate box:

Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies

1.5 Value for money

As far as you can judge, are the staffing levels appropriate to carry out the work? Are the equipment, travel and other costs justified? (*5-6 sentences*)

Please indicate your grade, based on your assessment, by ticking the appropriate box:

Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies

1.6 Planned outputs

Are the planned outputs of the research appropriate? Have the applicants made adequate plans to disseminate the results of the research? (*5-6 sentences*)

Please indicate your grade, based on your assessment, by ticking the appropriate box:

Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies

2. Assessment of the contribution of the Individual Projects within the Collaboration

Please assess the significance and contribution of each Individual Project.

7.1 Forms

Please indicate by ticking the relevant box your assessment of the contribution of Individual Projects (IPs) to the success of the collaboration

Individual Project no	Assessment of the Individual Projects within the Collaboration			
	Outstanding	Good/considerable potential	Fair/some weaknesses	Poor/serious deficiencies
IP 1				
IP 2				
IP 3				
IP 4				
IP 5				
IP 6				
IP 7				
IP 8				
IP 9				
IP 10				

3. Overall assessment of the proposal

Please provide your **overall assessment** of the proposal by ticking the appropriate box:

	Overall Assessment
Outstanding scientific quality: project has the potential to make an excellent contribution to knowledge on an international competitive level	4
Good/considerable potential scientific quality: likely to make a significant contribution to knowledge	3
Fair/some weaknesses: not of a consistently high quality and unlikely to make a significant contribution to knowledge	2
Poor scientific quality, not worth pursuing, reject	1

4. Concluding remarks (if applicable):

5. Competence to assess this proposal:

Please comment on your competence to assess the proposal in terms of disciplinary orientations, familiarity with the topic, research design and methods (including collaborative aspects) and planned outputs.

On behalf of the European Science Foundation, the ESF Office would like to thank you very much for taking the time to assess this proposal.

**To assist the office with its referee database, we would be grateful if you would take a few moments to classify better your areas of expertise.
This information will be used solely for ESF purposes.**

7.2 Other documents



EUROCORES Programme European Collaborative Research

EUROCORES ECRP Timeframe 2008

COMPETITION STAGES	ACTION POINTS	EFOS	ESF	DATE
Prior to the Call	Discus new Call and amend it if necessary.	X		04/12/07
Launching of the Call	Update list of EFOs' financial details and additional requirements (docs/web).		X	01/02/08
Deadline for EUROCORES-ECRP online application			X	28/04/08
Acknowledging receipt of proposals			X	09/05/08
Initial eligibility check	Submission by the deadline, full documentation, minimum number of signatory countries and length criteria. The ESF then informs the EFOs.		X	19/05/08
ESF makes eligible applications available on the secure ECRP website.	ESF sets up dynamic secure page. EFOs are invited to consult applications where they are involved.	X	X	19/05/08
EFO feedback on eligibility	EFOs will make eligibility checks against national criteria (institutional affiliation, funding limits, duration and other national requirements), confirm receipt of additional materials by the deadline and inform ESF of any ineligible Individual Projects.	X		26/05/08
In preparation of Management Committee meeting	EFOs will identify four possible reviewers for each of the proposals with which they are involved and forward their suggestions with full address details (including email, homepage and competences) about the reviewers to ESF.	X		Before MC meeting

7.2 Other documents

COMPETITION STAGES	ACTION POINTS	EFOS	ESF	DATE
Management Committee meeting	EFOs will check the list of suggested reviewers for possible conflicts of interest.	X		29/05/08
After Management Committee meeting	ESF will look at whether national eligibility checks result in any collaborations no longer being viable (fewer than three eligible partners) and inform Management Committee members about eligibility. The ESF will inform the PLs if a project should be deemed ineligible after this second check and cc the relevant EFOs.		X	16/06/08
Preparation of refereeing process	ESF will take into consideration the EFOs' referee suggestions and select additional referees where needed. Besides, the ESF will circulate the list of suggested referees to EFOs to help spot potential conflicts of interest (more obvious at the national level sometimes)		X	23/06/08
Start of review process	ESF invites referees to assess the proposals.		X	End June 08
Selection of Review Panel members	ESF invites EFOs to suggest names and invites the RP members.		X	August 08
End of review process	No more assessments will be taken into account after 12/09. Acknowledge referees' participation		X	12/09/08 October 08
ESF will make the reviews available to the EFOs.	The ESF will collate anonymised reviews and post them on a secure web page and EFOs are invited to consult them.		X	12/09/08
Rebuttal for applicants	The ESF sends assessments to the PLs and gets their input online before 22 September, then post it for EFOs and RP members		X	15/09/08 Posting 22/09/08
The ECRP Review Panel (selected SCSS members) meets before the SCSS Plenary	The RP members are provided with the relevant information (instructions and supporting documents) and draft a document in preparation of the RP meeting. Review Panel meeting		X	22/09/08 15/10/08

7.2 Other documents

COMPETITION STAGES	ACTION POINTS	EFOS	ESF	DATE
	The SCSS endorses the selection during the Plenary meeting.		X	17/10/08
Communication of selection to the Management Committee	The ESF will compile a written justification for each proposal (selected or not) of at least 120 words, consisting of Review panel commentators' comments as well as external reviewers' comments.		X	27/10/08
After review process	a confidential list of referees (with names linked to proposals) is given at the end of the review process to Germany, Switzerland Austria and the UK		X	Late Sept. or early October 08
Awarded CRPs from previous competitions (ECRP I, II and III)	The ESF will contact PLs to ask for a report on the past year (very short form, for ESF internal monitoring only)		X	15/11/08
Management Committee meeting	Update on 2008 funding decisions Scheme improvements Discuss continuation of the scheme	X	X	04/12/08
Boards and councils make their decisions and notify ESF	ESF Office collects the EFOs' feedback.	X		between October 2008 and January 2009
ESF shares boards and councils' decisions with other EFOs.	ESF distributes the final document to the EFOs.	X	X	31/01/09
Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their proposals	ESF will send paper letters including funding decisions and anonymised assessments. Relevant EFOs will receive an electronic copy of the letters.		X	28/02/09

7.2 Other documents

ECRP Funding statistics 2001 to 2007

Country	ECRP competition year															
	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		Average:	
	Volume	IPs	Volume	IPs	Volume	IPs	Volume	IPs	Volume	IPs	Volume	IPs	Volume	IPs	Volume/IP	IPs/year
Austria	327 000 €	3	0 €	0	321 000 €	2	250 000 €	1	192 000 €	1	275 950 €	2	108 000 €	1	1 376 750 €	1.43
Belgium (FNRS)	74 000 €	2	104 000 €	1	0 €	0	80 000 €	4	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	258 000 €	1.00
Belgium (FWO)	0 €	0	63 000 €	1	0 €	0	522 000 €	2	15 000 €	1	238 600 €	1	274 000 €	1	884 267 €	0.86
Cyprus									0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0.00
Czech Republic									47 000 €	1	94 800 €	1	0 €	0	141 800 €	0.29
Denmark	209 000 €	1	89 000 €	1	28 000 €	1	0 €	0	75 000 €	1	55 000 €	1	0 €	0	456 000 €	0.71
Finland	273 000 €	2	106 000 €	1	109 000 €	1	90 000 €	1	250 000 €	1	311 000 €	2	0 €	0	1 139 000 €	1.14
France	12 000 €	1	0 €	0	0 €	0	40 000 €	4	102 000 €	3	80 000 €	1	0 €	0	234 000 €	1.29
Germany	325 000 €	2	357 000 €	3	0 €	0	885 000 €	4	893 000 €	4	403 000 €	2	272 000 €	1	2 880 000 €	2.29
Iceland									0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0.00
Ireland									45 000 €	1	227 000 €	1	0 €	0	346 000 €	0.43
Italy	141 000 €	2	84 000 €	1	64 000 €	1	219 000 €	2	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	508 000 €	0.86
Luxembourg									0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0.00
Netherlands	408 000 €	4	0 €	0	53 000 €	1	1 216 539 €	4	636 000 €	3	398 000 €	2	0 €	0	2 711 539 €	2.00
Norway	384 000 €	1	0 €	0	552 000 €	2	241 000 €	1	0 €	0	641 000 €	2	0 €	0	1 818 000 €	0.86
Poland	0 €	0	46 000 €	1	0 €	0	83 000 €	1	54 000 €	2	96 000 €	1	0 €	0	279 000 €	0.71
Spain	201 000 €	4	90 000 €	1	11 000 €	1	257 000 €	3	152 000 €	4	110 000 €	2	170 000 €	0	832 333 €	2.14
Sweden (FAS)	0 €	0	70 000 €	1	0 €	0	204 000 €	1	578 000 €	2	0 €	0	0 €	0	852 000 €	0.57
Sweden (VR)	66 000 €	1	136 000 €	2	118 000 €	1	374 000 €	1	337 000 €	1	416 000 €	2	0 €	0	1 447 000 €	1.14
Switzerland	155 000 €	2	0 €	0	0 €	0	590 000 €	4	324 000 €	3	316 000 €	2	209 000 €	1	1 402 417 €	1.71
Turkey	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	0 €	0	208 000 €	2	0 €	0	208 000 €	0.29
United Kingdom	102 000 €	2	290 000 €	2	464 000 €	3	772 000 €	3	1 087 000 €	3	871 000 €	2	459 500 €	2	3 613 029 €	2.43
Total	2 677 000 €	27	1 509 000 €	16	1 720 000 €	13	5 823 539 €	36	4 787 000 €	31	4 741 350 €	26	1 492 500 €	6	21 387 135 €	22.14

7.3 Individuals consulted for the SWOT analysis

List of ECRP Management Committee

- AT - Petra Grabner (FWF)
- BE - Benno Hinnekint (FWO)
- CY - Constantina Makri (RPF)
- CZ - Veronika Paleckova (The Czech Science Foundation)
- DK - Lars Christensen (The Danish Social Science Research Council)
- FI - Kustaa Multamäki (AKA)
- DE - Michael Schuster (DFG)
- IS - Elisabet M. Andrésdóttir (RANNIS)
- IE - Dipti Pandya (IRCHSS)
- IE - Sorcha Carthy (IRCHSS)
- LU - Frank Bingen (FNR)
- NL - Berry J. Bonenkamp (NWO)
- NL - Joris S. Voskuilen (NWO)
- NO - Siri Tønseth (RCN)
- PL - Wojciech Dziejcz (Ministry of Science and Higher Education)
- PL - Bogdan Mach (PAN)
- ES - María Soledad García Cabeza (Ministry of Science and Innovation)
- SE - Cecilia Grevby (FAS)
- CH - Rudolf Bolzern (SNF)
- TR - Bülent Olcay (TUBITAK)
- UK - Craig Bardsley (ESRC)

7.3 Individuals consulted for the SWOT analysis

List of ECRP Working Group

- AT - Falk J. Reckling (FWF)
- FI - Eili Ervelä-Myrreen (NORFACE)
- DE - Michael Schuster (DFG)
- NL - Berry J. Bonenkamp (NWO)
- ES - Carlos Juan Closa Montero (University of Zaragoza)
- CH - Rudolf Bolzern (SNF)
- UK - Linda Hantrais
- UK - Frances Burstow (ESRC) replacing Craig Bardsley

7.4 Compiled SWOT questionnaire

Stage Two: Science policy assessment of the ECRP scheme SWOT analysis

Reference group

9 SWOT questionnaires: 4 Management Committee members, 5 ECRP Working Group members

STRENGTHS

1. What are strengths of ECRP, i.e. what are the attributes of ECRP that support its continuation?

- Bottom-up approach/Topical openness: 8
- Forum for national practices: 3
- Uniqueness: 2
- Quality of selection procedures, user-friendliness, one-stage application process, faster than most other schemes: 2
- European dimension and option to cooperate with Associate Partners
- Regularity
- Flexibility
- Stimulation of new collaboration
- Autonomy and high commitment and responsibility of national groups in the overall design of the projects
- Established in the community through years of running

2. How can the strengths of ECRP best be used in its continuation?

- Its unique niche should be emphasised in publicity, both by the ESF and member organisations: 3
- Add new countries (e.g. France and Italy) and attract possible Associate Partners: 2
- Ongoing quality assurance and improvement
- Focus on young researchers
- By stressing a very high level and the European added value
- Enlarge the networking between projects
- The model could potentially be extended beyond the social sciences which would, in the medium term, increase the profile of the scheme as a whole
- Shorten the time for project selection, decision making is feasible within 8 months, now it takes 11 months until the last decisions are taken.
- Perhaps avoiding very large consortiums of national groups.

WEAKNESSES

3. What are the weaknesses, i.e. what are the attributes of ECRP that are harmful to its continuation?

Peer review quality

- Consistent quality of the peer review: 4
- Triple (or more) jeopardy: 2
- No coherent standards for reviewer nominations by the MOs

Procedural efficiency

- Time-consuming selection procedures: 3
- Long coordination process among the MOs after the decision is made by the ESF
- Decisions not to fund certain projects despite positive reviews (in particular because of lack of sufficient number of supporting EFOs): 2

1

7.4 Compiled SWOT questionnaire

- Procedures should ensure having integrated research projects across countries; nowadays it is still possible to push individual agendas
- Variation in MO funding levels, particularly with respect to networking and dissemination
- Different and additional application efforts by some MOs

Demand

- Low success rates (especially in 2007): 3
- Decreasing interest of applicants: 3
- Lack of participating funding agencies: 2
- Lack of applications from the top group of European social scientists, esp. in recent years

Other

- Focus on training capacity is missing
- A non-thematic call can grow into a parallel system that is too large to manage
- Existence of parallel running two different schemes EUROCORES (ECRP scheme and the other EUROCORES scheme) is misleading for applicants as well as institutions
- Absence of some added value that is significant for the other EUROCORES programmes (e.g. networking activities)

4. How can these weaknesses be reduced or done away with?

Peer review quality

- The ECRP should develop a strong dedicated review panel, with detailed collective knowledge of a number of MO research funding traditions, and adopting a quality standard which is comparable to the most competitive of member organisations. Member organisations should be willing to accept the decision without further review: 2
- The ESF Office needs to implement procedures to ensure that every proposal received under ECRP receives high-quality peer review. MOs do have a role to play in this, but if MOs do not fulfil their obligation to provide reviewer nominations, the ESF should take an active role in identifying the problems and developing solutions
- Setting clear standards for reviewer profiles, for example (a) the majority of reviewers should come from other countries than the applicants', (b) MOs and ESF should check the conflict of interest of the reviewers
- The Review Panel should not act as reviewers but interpret the reviews available and should finally make a ranking of the proposals

Peer review efficiency

- Shorten and streamline selection procedures
- A dedicated review panel whose decisions were accepted should make it possible to significantly shorten the review time
- The weakness could be reduced by requiring all EFOs to sign a MoU or Protocol whereby they agree to follow the recommendation of the ECRP panel. Those parties which do not follow agreed procedures should not be allowed to participate in the ECRP scheme. They have to decide whether they want to be in or out. It is impossible for a joint scheme to have two kinds of partners. At the same time it is important to ensure that the evaluation process is robust and transparent so there is no cause for additional national evaluation. - It is also necessary to raise the success rate
- Include EFAs at decision-making and decision-sharing stages
- After the decision is made by the ESF, MOs should make their decisions within three months at the latest
- Reducing additional application efforts by the MOs

7.4 Compiled SWOT questionnaire

Funding

- MOs should define a more flexible financial commitment so that all recommended projects can be funded
- Because ECRP member countries adopt different frameworks for funding, based on national rules (some of which I believe are not particularly designed to support collaboration), it is not entirely clear whether ECRP projects are fully supported to conduct within-collaboration networking and dissemination to ensure they maximise both academic and (where appropriate) broader social impact. This issue needs to be explored by the ECRP review, by consideration of how current ECRP funded projects have been networking and disseminating their findings

Publicity

- Creating a common dissemination strategy for the programme
- To use the bilateral programmes to encourage some countries to join in
- Stress the European added value in the call and the high required standard to maintain a manageable set of applications

OPPORTUNITIES

5. What are the opportunities, i.e. what are *external* conditions that are helpful for the continuation of ECRP?

Demand

- There is a demand: 2
- The need for a (1) curiosity-driven, (2) multilateral research programme (3) with very low bureaucratic application barriers
- Most calls in Social Sciences are applied and are strategic
- The bottom-up logic of ECRP is attractive, EU is still concentrating on targeted research programmes
- There is an increasing understanding among policy makers of the importance of the internationalisation of research, and acknowledgement of the virtues of the model of bottom-up, peer-reviewed proposals as the best way to spend science budgets is spreading

Expansion

- Establish research links with non European countries. The obvious are USA and Canada, but others could be included as well
- It is likely that FP8 will have a stronger emphasis and increased funding for Joint Programming by programme owners in the member states, and increased funding for the European Research Council. At the same time the project funding will be reduced. This can both be an opportunity and a threat

6. How can these external conditions be exploited?

- Integrating members of research councils of external countries into the Management Committee and bringing referees in as evaluators: 2 (e.g. NSF)
- Invite observers from external countries
- By assessing that only fundamental research is meant
- By a better division of labour within ESF, but also with the EU
- Increasing the demand
- It can be seen as an opportunity if the EFOs see the ECRP scheme as more important when project funding on the European level is reduced

7.4 Compiled SWOT questionnaire

THREATS

7. What are the threats, what are the *external* conditions that are harmful to the continuation of ECRP?

Complexity

- Panoply of instruments, too complicated, it is not easy to make a distinction between the different tracks: 2
- Participation in different international cooperation programmes/initiatives (e.g. FP, ERA-NETs, EUROCORES) requires familiarising oneself with different rules and procedures
- Integration of too many members becomes difficult to manage
- The existence of two types of EUROCORES scheme support for the social sciences

- Major European funding agencies (e.g. ESRC, NWO, DFG, ANR) are increasingly working directly together, on a bilateral basis to support international collaborative research projects. Developments such as the International Common Application Process are making it possible for these agencies to support multilateral responsive mode proposals without the mediation of the ESF. Depending on how it evolves, the ERC also may develop into an agency that directly competes with ECRP in terms of the types of funding it may support

Competition

- See answer above – If more of the national funding is used for Joint Programming on the European level, there may not be any interest or national funding available for the ECRP type of schemes
- ECRP could be marginalised because (a) ECRP has different rules than any other EUROCORES Programme and (b) ECRP is competing with similar programmes in the social science like Framework Programmes, other EUROCORES (HUMVIB, HESC, e.g.), bilateral or multilateral agreements (D-A-CH, ESRC, e.g.) or ERA-Net (NORFACE)

Publicity

- The ESF should define a clear EUROCORES profile. That could include for example 2 or 3 different schemes: a) bottom-up EUROCORES (ECRP model), b) thematic EUROCORES (normal EUROCORES), c) and TOPCORES

8. How can these external conditions be overcome?

Efficiency

- ECRP needs to move quickly towards a single decision point for funding. It must quickly establish an unquestionably high quality standard, and use this standard as the basis for expanding its base of participation into other countries (i.e. Central and Eastern Europe)
- Simplifying rules and procedures

Expansion

- The ECRP should also begin to think about serving as a platform not just for collaboration in Europe, but for collaboration by researchers in other parts of the world *with* Europe
- The ECRP scheme should be expanded to other disciplinary fields

Other

- to use the regular EUROCORES schemes for the social sciences
- The ECRP would need to become really attractive for both researchers and the research funders

