

EU anti-fraud office accused  
of data manipulation – p5

Poland Big ambition, big problems – p8

Earma University voices in Brussels and  
promoting responsible research – p6, 7

# Widening participation 'needs a bigger budget'

## Funding too limited to have desired effect, says Polish minister

**THE THREE FUNDING SCHEMES** aimed at increasing the participation of the newest EU member states in Horizon 2020 are not making a difference in the largest of those countries, a senior Polish official has said.

According to Włodzisław Duch, Poland's undersecretary of state for science and higher education, the resources allocated to the Spreading Excellence and Widening Participation part of Horizon 2020 are too limited to have any impact on a country with a population of 38 million. The European Commission, he says, should have paid more attention to his country's size and characteristics when designing the programme.

"We are quite happy with the introduction of this 'widening' agenda, but one has to realise that getting one Teaming project will not change the overall situation here, as it might in a country such as Estonia," he says (*see Interview, page 8*).

The schemes were introduced to boost research quality in poorly performing countries, including 13 eastern European states and Cyprus, Malta, Portugal and Luxembourg. According to the Commission, the first calls under the three schemes have already proved that there is strong interest from these countries.

The Teaming initiative—which supports the creation and upgrade of centres of excellence in participating countries by creating partnerships with top-quality institutions—has been the most competitive. The Commission received 169 proposals during its first call and funded 31, giving a success rate of 18 per cent.

The European Research Area Chairs scheme, which funds professorships for top researchers at institutes in participating countries, received 88 proposals, of which 30 were selected for funding. A further 553 proposals are now being assessed for the third scheme, the Twinning initiative, which aims to strengthen excellence in particular departments by creating links with at least two external partners and supporting training activities for researchers.

According to Duch, Poland has been granted three ERA Chairs and three Teaming projects—but these will have a limited impact in a country that, by his estimate, has about 100,000 full-time researchers. Negotiations

by **Cristina Gallardo**

[cgnews@ResearchResearch.com](mailto:cgnews@ResearchResearch.com)

for the next Framework programme, to run from 2021, have yet to begin, but Duch is already calling for an increase in the combined budget of these three schemes from their Horizon 2020 level of €722 million—or 1 per cent of the programme—over seven years.

Representatives of several participating countries declined to comment until the impact of the schemes becomes clearer, but the head of Romania's Office for Science and Technology in Brussels backed Duch's stance. "Romania definitely supports Poland," Iulia Mihail says. "The Commission should be much more committed to a 'Europe for all' and not predominantly for the oldest members."

But Daniel Straka, the director of the Slovak Liaison Office for R&D in Brussels, says he'll be satisfied if the Commission continues to provide the same level of funding for the schemes. "We felt great relief that there was not going to be any cut to this pillar due to the European Fund for Strategic Investments," he says.

Duch's call for the schemes to be expanded is likely to be resisted by older member states, who will argue that it would take too much Horizon 2020 money away from projects selected solely on the basis of excellence or relevance to societal goals.

Dimitri Corpakis, the Commission official in charge of widening participation, says that its budget will probably remain stable. "It is unlikely that the programme will receive a higher budget, because capacity building is not a priority in the Framework programme," he says. Corpakis suggests that eastern European governments combine the schemes with EU structural funds to strengthen their research systems.

"It is unacceptable that 90 per cent of the Horizon 2020 budget is going to old member states, while 80 per cent of the regional funds go to the new ones," says the Dutch MEP Lambert van Nistelrooij of the European People's Party. "We need to come to a better balance."

Every new opportunity  
for research funding  
from every sponsor in  
the EU, US & beyond

Independent news,  
comment and analysis

## interview włodzisław duch

# A long way to go

Poland's science and higher education minister tells **Cristina Gallardo** of the country's recurrent research woes.

Poland is the largest of the 13 newest EU member states, and also the largest single recipient of EU structural funds for 2014-20. Some €77.6 billion has been allocated to the country—and the pressure is on to show that the money is spent wisely.

Włodzisław Duch, a 51-year-old physicist who arrived at the Polish science ministry in April 2014 after two years as vice-rector at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, admits that several issues still cast shadows over the country's research system.

Despite heavy EU spending in the past decade, and some positive developments such as the launch of a Polish Space Agency last month, the country is still facing brain drain, a lack of innovation and collaboration between universities and industry, and low academic salaries. "We are not satisfied with the state of research at the moment," Duch says.

The aim is to use the structural funds to employ the right people in teaching and research, he says, in contrast with the past emphasis on buildings and equipment.

But other sources for research funding in Poland remain scarce, with both public and private spending falling well below the thresholds desired by the

European Commission. The Polish government—a coalition between the Civic Platform and the Polish People's Party—is theoretically committed to doubling spending on R&D from 0.9 to 1.7 per cent of GDP by 2020. Duch says this remarkable target has now been increased further, to 2 per cent.

An increase is needed to satisfy the myriad research facilities that were built using structural funds from Framework 7, many of which are already struggling to fund their operations. "We have received dozens of requests from laboratories asking for additional money to complete some parts of the work they are undertaking," Duch says. "The number of requests is growing and that shows that researchers are ambitious—but also that we don't have enough funding."

The Commission has praised Poland's efforts to increase competitive funding, which accounts for 52 per cent of publicly funded R&D. The rest is allocated to national research institutes on the basis of evaluations carried out by the ministry every four years, the latest of which is now under way. The previous evaluation, in 2011, led to a series of closures and mergers that, according to Duch, have helped to ensure that the surviving institutes are financially sound.

The work of researchers in Poland is also made more difficult, Duch says, by a heavy teaching load at universities, scant experience of knowledge transfer, and too few international partners.

Several EU and Polish initiatives are aiming to attract Polish emigrants back to the country. Duch acknowledges, however, that most returnees are near the end of their careers: younger talent is still leaving in search of better working conditions and higher pay.

One reason for emigration is the salary gap between Horizon 2020 grantees working in western and eastern Europe—an unresolved issue, Duch says, despite the Commission's decision in 2012 to introduce a bonus of up to €8,000 a year on top of basic salaries. The consequences of the gap are still "rather severe" in Poland, he adds, which is leading a group of nine countries pressing the Commission for more solutions.

"In Poland, the basic wage is always low, but researchers receive lots of different motivational bonuses, for activities such as publishing or writing reviews," he says. "Polish researchers are starting to say that they are not willing to apply for Horizon 2020 calls because they can receive a bigger amount from national grants."

The official goal is for Poland to win €1.5bn from Horizon 2020: a highly ambitious target, given that it only won €430 million under Framework 7 and only 2 per cent of Horizon 2020 proposal submissions in 2014 involved Polish researchers.

Poland will hold a parliamentary election in October, at which the Eurosceptics of the Law and Justice Party, which won the presidential election in May, could well enter government. But Duch rejects the possibility that Poland's commitment to European research programmes could waver. "If we leave well-thought-out plans, worked out with the scientific institutions, whoever comes after us is likely to keep to that path. Even the Eurosceptics will need to show progress in research."

*More to say? Email comment@ResearchResearch.com*

## Włodzisław Duch

- \* **2012-present** Undersecretary of state for science and higher education, Poland
- \* **2012-2014** Vice-rector, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland
- \* **2010-2012** Visiting professor, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
- \* **2000-present** Professor, Nicolaus Copernicus University
- \* **1998-2008** President, DuchSoft R&D company
- \* **1996-2001** Visiting scientist, Max Planck Institutes for Astrophysics and Psychological Research, Germany
- \* **1990-1999** Associate professor, Nicolaus Copernicus University
- \* **1980-1982** Postdoctoral fellow, University of Southern California
- \* **1980** PhD in quantum physics, Nicolaus Copernicus University