

Ing. Robert Plaga, Ph.D.
Minister of Education, Youth and Sports
Karmelitská 529/5
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Brno, 29.3.2021

Open letter to the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports:

A kind request for support of EMBO grants for the Czech Republic in the form of increasing the number of awarded EMBO installation grants to two to three newly supported grants per year and securing funds for their implementation from the state budget

Dear Minister,

We are contacting you regarding the provision of sufficient support for EMBO installation grants (hereinafter: EMBO IGs) and the matter of increasing the number of grants awarded to scientists, including securing the necessary funding for their co-financing from the state budget.

EMBO IGs are of great importance in determining a positive systemic change in the Czech research environment. Scientists who have previously benefitted from this support are today at the forefront of Czech research and command a strong international reputation. With their international experience, progressive thinking and shared values of the EMBO program, they represent a great hope for the systematic change necessary for Czech science to reach European standards.

Insufficient support for EMBO IGs is in conflict with the long-term strategic interests of the Czech Republic and makes it more difficult to achieve the goals of the Innovation Strategy 2019 – 2030 of the Czech Republic. Experience to date with EMBO IGs shows tangible intellectual, material and financial benefits for the Czech Republic and Czech society. To maintain the international scientific competitiveness of the Czech Republic and to build the brand of a European innovation leader, it is necessary to use all available means to attract minds and to increase the representation of excellent researchers from Czech institutions in the international scientific community.

Experience to date with the Czech Republic's participation in the EMBO program clearly shows a positive impact on the quality of science produced in the Czech Republic, the cultivation of the research environment and a greater integration of the Czech Republic into the European Research Area (ERA). Holders of EMBO IGs with their innovative research projects are subsequently also achieving success in top international grant competitions, and are therefore attracting to the Czech Republic not only prestigious international grants (ERC, MSCA, Wellcome Trust, etc.), but also private resources at the national and international level. **With a relatively small amount of national funding needed to support the program, this is truly an effective and strategic investment, which has a far-reaching impact on the competitiveness of Czech science internationally.**

Applications for EMBO IGs are evaluated by an EMBO member who is a specialist in the applicant's field, and a ten-member international EMBO Young Investigator Committee. The final

selection is guaranteed by the Strategic Development Installation Grants (SDIG) Board. All applications for EMBO IGs undergo several demanding international evaluations, including an interview and presentation of the project plan to the evaluator's foreign research institutions. EMBO IGs are awarded only to scientists who meet the highest standards of EMBO, and who have worked for high-quality research institutions abroad for at least two years. The selection is therefore of extremely high quality and thus guarantees the international competitiveness of all selected candidates.

The Czech Republic needs to award at least two to three EMBO IGs in the field of life sciences each year to keep up with the rest of the world. If this does not happen, we risk a further widening of the innovation gap. In the future, the Czech Republic could drop behind other widening countries that would use these grants to reduce their innovation gap.

A comprehensive report and evaluation of the positive impacts of the Czech Republic's membership in EMBO is presented in the attached document: **“EMBO Installation Grants: Excellent research in life sciences. Vision for the Czech Republic 2021 – 2030”**.

The current global coronavirus pandemic has shown how important the development of life sciences is for the entire society. We are therefore concerned by the observation that the Czech Republic is reducing its share of financed EMBO IGs compared to other countries, and the year 2020 was the first year in which no grant at all was awarded. This trend is in conflict with the strategic interests of the Czech Republic, such as the goal of becoming one of the European innovation leaders and with the aim of becoming competitive within the European Research Area (ERA). We are afraid that the current trend will have a very negative long-term impact on the international competitiveness of Czech science.

On the basis of the above-stated facts and the attached comprehensive document, **we propose the Czech government to increase the number of EMBO IGs awarded annually for the Czech Republic to at least two to three grants, depending on the number of excellent applicants selected and recommended by EMBO and to secure funding for those grants.** By awarding two to three EMBO IGs for three years with the possibility of extension to five years, the prestige of the EMBO competition and high selectivity will be maintained, while at the same time the number of excellent scientists coming to the Czech Republic will increase. The annual costs until 2026 for the Czech Republic will be approximately CZK 14 million and this strategy will be able to support 15 top scientists in each of those years.

Sincerely,

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