

Report from a ERC grant applicant

So, that was it. I'm in the train from Brussels after an exciting experience at the ERC. You need to check into the building using your passport. Next you are taken a room for travel reimbursement. Subsequently you can wait in a room, which has WIFI for your laptop. There also is plenty of coffee, tea, orange juice and water available.

The schedule for the day is put up on the wall. I was up for 14.30, of which I was glad, as it reduced the waiting time and the nervousness-build-up-time as well. One of the ERC people took me to the 24th floor, where I was asked to wait outside the room to be picked up. Coming to the room, I handed over my handouts to the one of the committee members, who passed around the handouts (18 committee members). The chairman apologized for not having time to introduce the committee members and invited me to launch my talk (5 min + 20 min Q&A). The 18 members were sitting on both sides of a long table with loads of paperwork on their desk and a whole lot of laptops. The handout partly had the effect I feared beforehand: the people were staring at the handout, rather than listening to me. After a short while this got better. When I mentioned halfway my talk the words "so to summarize...", they also paid attention (again).

After my talk there were three people doing the opposition (one after the other). The questions were asked in a nice manner. In my talk I mentioned my recent promotion to Associate Professor, which was clearly appreciated by the committee. They all were paying a lot of attention all of a sudden. One professor asked questions if some specifics from my research would be an issue. The next opponent was a lady who asked a number of questions at the same time. She also asked whether I would search collaboration with other experts. Finally, one professor started giving me compliments about the proposal, but he also said that he was surprised that I was not promoted to associate professor any earlier. He said that apparently they must have had their reasons for that. I did not want to highlight this statement, so I did not respond to it. He mentioned that he would think that after my work the chapter on my subject could be closed. I responded that I did not agree, since there are still numerous open questions. Then the chairman had to stop the discussion and suggested that the last opponent could continue the discussion with me over dinner, which he responded to that he did not feel much for.

All in all, the atmosphere was nice; the committee was friendly, though quite critical. I have the feeling that I could reply all of their questions and, most importantly, that I made a good, self-confident impression. I think I could not have done much better than this.