My experience as an ERC applicant/grantee

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ERC Starting Grantee, 2020 Call
EUDAIMONIA (2021-2026)
About me

• Law studies at KU Leuven, research master (2004-2009)
  – + postgraduate degree (LL.M.) as BAEF and Fulbright Fellow, Harvard University (2010)
• Aspirant FWO-Vlaanderen (2010-2013), KU Leuven
  – PhD in law defended on 3 September 2013
• 1 September 2013: appointment as full-time assistant professor (universitair docent), Leiden University, NL
  – Grant submission culture
  – First time I started thinking about applying for an ERC grant, but...
• 1 January 2016: appointment as full-time ‘chargé de cours’ (Fl. equivalent: ZAP-hoofddocent), Université de Liège (probationary period)
  – New responsibilities etc. (ERC “mis au frigo”)
  – However, ERC funding always in the back of my mind...
  – Funding “practice”: FNRS-PDR, ARC...
• 1 October 2018: tenured chargé de cours
  – Why still want an ERC?
Towards an ERC project

• Why an ERC?
  – Scientific curiosity
    • Feeling that some questions had been ignored or downplayed in the field
    • Wanting to broaden existing debates in my field
  – Establish a research team that works on path-breaking issues
    • Go beyond the usual type of research in legal studies
Towards an ERC project

• Finding your idea:
  – Wanted to apply to 2019 call, but did not feel ready
  – Last StG shot: 2020 call (first try, why not, always possibility to move on to CoG)
    • Importance of self-reflection – which project would make me the perfect PI to do this?
    • Follow your passion, but do anticipate what may ‘stick’
      – New topic on which I had not published anything but had been interested in for a long time
      – Follow-up of my doctoral research: comparison between EU rules and interdisciplinary take
    • Get to know your panel! SH2: more than just lawyers
The ERC project

• Deciding on the idea:
  – Peace of mind necessary: visiting fellowship, University of Bournemouth (June 2019)
    • Second option chosen
    • First draft B1 and B2 written in one month, building upon PhD research and publications
    • Comments, self-criticism
  – Summer 2019
    • Redrafting, over and over – fine-tuning – comments
    • B1: really selling yourself and the project
    • Remaining doubts
      – WP1 relatively low risk; comparing rules in different sectors, but to an extent never done before
      – High risk related to use of new methodology, new research method
  – Fall 2019
    • submission in between teaching 2 courses and managing other projects
    • 15 October 2019: submission (finally – and with no expectations?)
The ERC project

• April 2020: First round passed => happiness, maybe I have a shot, preparation interview?
  – Covid-19: no interview organised for ERC StG call…

• 22 July 2020 – mail – good news, but also important formalities to accomplish
  – What to do now + need to reorganise time and professional future: starting date postponed until 1 September 2021
Aftermath

• Importance of international mobility and publications
  – not to be overstated though if project is groundbreaking

• Network – most of the reviewers knew me

• A dose of luck
Good luck!

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