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EUROTECH UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCE INITIATES DEBATE ON TENURE TRACK SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 10th June 2013. Presidents from EuroTech Universities, along with the Director-General of the European Commission's DG for Research and Innovation, highlighted the acute need for a clearer career path for academic scientists in Europe. The message from both EPFL and TU München's presidents was clear: if Europe wants to recruit and retain the best research minds, its universities need more attractive and globally competitive systems such as Tenure Track.

It's a well-trodden path. Young scientist gets PhD and heads west to the Eldorado of research: the United States. Increased European funding for scientists, such as ERC grants (€7.5 billion to 3,400 projects from 2007 to 2013), has done much to attract talent back to Europe. Yet, the lack of a defined and stable career path means that some choose not to return or leave research altogether.

Well-established in the US and increasingly in the UK, Tenure Track provides a clear, merit-based system that takes the best researchers from postdoc to professor. Typically, evaluations made on a biennial basis may lead to fixed tenure positions as Associate Professor at the end of five or six years. During this time, Tenure Track professors are free to follow their chosen research topic independently of established professors. In mainland Europe, getting a foot on the first rung of the professorship ladder can be fraught with uncertainty. Positions are often short-term, leaving researchers in a precarious situation with reduced research productivity while they move, often with their lab to a new institution. The average age for tenure in the US is under thirty, yet in some European countries researchers can be well into their forties before they have the prospect of a stable position. In addition, an unstable career path, relatively incompatible with family life, may be one of the factors leading to the 'leaky pipeline' that drains women scientists after PhD and postdoctoral positions.

Many European universities are now looking to Tenure Track to address this challenge. Switzerland's EPFL was one of mainland Europe's first institutions to bring in the system ten years ago and is now seeing the benefits. "Around half of our Tenure Track professors have an ERC Starting Grant, making EPFL the 4th highest recipient after Cambridge, Oxford and ETHZ," states EPFL President Aebischer. "By providing initial funding, lab space and job security, we can attract the best researchers, help them maximize their productivity and get the ball rolling to bring in additional funding of their own." In 2012, TU München was the first German university to introduce the system. "We expect Tenure Track to really boost TUM's leadership in research and education," stresses TUM President Herrmann. "Up until now, international top researchers in have generally avoided German universities as there is often little prospect for promotion or for a permanent position." The new system has undoubtedly contributed to TUM's success in the German Excellence Initiative, a national competition to promote top-level research and to improve the quality of German universities. Other EuroTech



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Universities Alliance partners, TU Eindhoven and Denmark's DTU, are also developing new ideas for attractive career systems, especially relevant to technical universities.

Across Europe, there is presently a lack of common understanding and cooperation concerning Tenure Track systems. The European Commission is also aware of the need for action: "If we are to safeguard Europe's position among the leaders in research and innovation, we also need to innovate within our higher education systems. Innovation in the way universities develop talent and manage their human resources is part of Europe's modernization agenda for education, research and innovation" sums up Robert-Jan Smits, Director-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission. "If we want to complete the European Research Area, European universities need open, transparent and merit-based recruitment systems that provide stable careers for talented scientists. Tenure track systems are interesting in this regard".

ABOUT THE EUROTECH UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCE

The EuroTech Universities Alliance is a strategic partnership of four leading universities of science & technology in Europe: TUM (Technische Universität München), EPFL (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne), DTU (Danmarks Tekniske Universitet) and TU/e (Technische Universiteit Eindhoven). The Alliance builds upon and combines the excellence, expertise and capabilities of its partner universities to develop technical solutions which address grand societal challenges. It is also a forum for cooperation and exchange on a range of issues in research, education and innovation, including the recruitment and career development of researchers.

www.eurotech-universities.org

[More information on EPFL Tenure Track Policy](#)

[More information on TUM Faculty Tenure Track](#)

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