

Media release

Duebendorf, St. Gallen, Thun, 3rd September 2012

European elite support for Empa researcher

Young scientist brings in EU millions

The European Research Council (ERC) recently awarded its ERC Starting Grants for the fifth time. One of the recipients is a young Empa scientist, Maksym Kovalenko, who also holds a professorship at the ETH Zürich. He has been awarded around CHF 1.8 million to continue his research on nanocrystals in solids. This makes him a member of the elite group of eight very gifted young scientists and researchers at the ETH Zürich who will receive ERC funding this year, thereby enabling them to establish their own scientific teams.

Roland Siegwart, ETH Vice President for Research and Economic Relations, has every reason to be happy. This year as many as eight ETH professors have been awarded a much sought-after ERC Starting Grant – never before have so many applicants been successful. "It is unbelievable how productive our young researchers are. This sustains our belief that we have been successful in attracting the really talented people to the ETH." Four those receiving ERC funding were only appointed to their professorships in 2011 and yet they are already bringing in financial support for research to Zürich.

The youngest awardee is an Empa researcher

At just 30 years old Maksym Kovalenko, a professor at the ETH Zürich's inorganic chemistry laboratory and head of a research group at Empa, is the youngest of the ERC prizewinners. Born in the Ukraine, he specialized in nanotechnology during his studies, completing his doctoral work in Linz, Austria, and working as a postdoc at the University of Chicago before taking up an assistant professorship at Empa and the ETH Zurich in July 2011. Kovalenko's research work involves investigating so-called nanocrystals, materials which possess unique properties. However, before it is possible to exploit these properties through new technologies scientists must first succeed in integrating the nanocrystals into other nanocrystalline solids. Kovalenko intends to use the ERC funding to help better understand and control the surface chemistry of nanocrystals.

ERC Starting Grant

This is the fifth time that the European Research Council has disbursed its coveted Starting Independent Researcher Grants. These provide funding to support projects led by promising young scientists with the aim of enabling them to build up their own research groups. The awards are based on a single selection criterion – the scientific excellence of the researcher and the proposals submitted. Projects selected to receive ERC starting grants are awarded up to CHF1.8 million over a duration of five years.

Further information

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Maksym Kovalenko brings one of the much sought-after ERC grants to Empa.

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