

## Book Reviews

### The European Research Council

By Thomas König. Cambridge: Polity, 2017, 192 pages, £25. ISBN 9780745691244

This book tells the fascinating story of how the European Research Council (ERC) came about and how it established its practices in its early years. The ERC is in many ways an odd construction in the landscape of European Union (EU) research funding. Whereas the dominant principle in almost all other programs is to link funding explicitly to specific political goals and priorities, the ERC distributes its grants solely on the principle of scientific excellence. The ERC has furthermore succeeded in establishing itself as a European benchmark for scientific prestige and as a model for organizing research funding. For these reasons alone, a book that tells the ERC's story is more than welcome. Thomas König is particularly well placed to tell this story, having worked as scientific advisor to the former chair of the ERC, Helga Nowotny. For three years, he was in close daily contact with the EU and ERC bureaucracies, and participated in preparing Scientific Council meetings. As he notes, this insider insight into the workings and everyday life of the ERC and the EU bureaucracy in which it is embedded, is crucial to understanding the early years of the ERC as it was becoming established. This privileged position also gave König access to important actors and documents, including a number of personal archives, which constitute the empirical material for the book. The book has nine chapters, starting with an Introduction, followed by chronological accounts of the history of the ERC in Chapters two to seven, and ending with a summary and postscript. The six chapters address three questions or processes pertaining to the formation of the ERC. The first two address the organization's prehistory, exploring how it advocated for a ERC, and built up alliances; the second two address struggles over the ERC's institutional arrangements; and the last two look at how institutional procedures for the assignment of large sums of public funding to research were established and legitimized. In the first chapter, König recounts the ERC's backstory from the late 1950s onward. He shows how the position of science and research in the EU's budget and

politics changed, especially after the Lisbon treaty, and how these changes enabled well-connected actors that spanned the boundaries of science and politics to build alliances and promote the idea of an ERC. Chapter 3 analyzes how this idea was brought into political circles in the EU, and how a mix of national actors, EU bureaucrats and scientists mobilized and built up momentum through a series of meetings and conferences that tied ministers and EU institutions to the proposal. Here, König also discusses resistance on the part of certain countries to committing EU money to 'basic' research, notably how powerful concerns within the natural sciences regarding scientific autonomy and credibility had to be addressed before the proposal was adopted by the EU in the Seventh Framework Program. Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to analyzing discussions and struggles over the ERC's institutional arrangements. A major question addressed here is how the ERC could simultaneously ensure institutional independence from the European Commission while still securing the commitment of the EU's institutions to the ERC in the long run. Here, König analyzes struggles between the members and chair of the ERC's first scientific council, and the EU bureaucracy, about how to set up an independent research funding agency that still conformed to explicit and implicit EU rules and norms. The two last chapters are devoted to the workings of the ERC in its early years, specifically to how particular institutional mechanisms, such as three-stage funding schemes and peer review systems, emerged as a means to uphold scientific credibility vis-à-vis the EU institutions. König furthermore accounts for the interdisciplinary organization of the council, and explains how an organizational model drawn from the biosciences became the model for the ERC. In the last chapter, König charts the impact of approximately the first ten years of the ERC, arguing that it has become an important mark of distinction in European science and a 'model' that other forms of research funding follow. The concluding chapter, entitled Summary, is more than just a

summary—it draws out the main themes that run through the book, showing how excellence became the symbolic hallmark for the ERC in its struggle for autonomy from the EU commission, and for scientific credibility. The book is a detailed account of the establishment and institutionalization of the ERC, and as such it is an important resource for researchers interested in understanding and explaining the struggles, dynamics and structures involved in European research funding, and the organization of scientific knowledge production. The author explicitly draws on his insight gained from working within the ERC, which naturally raises the question of whether it would be possible for someone without his insider knowledge to write such a detailed account. However, his closeness to the institutions and processes discussed may also hinder a more critical and distanced analysis in which the ERC is placed in the wider context of EU research policies and viewed in the light of the past decade's changes in higher education and research in Europe. The book is structured as

a chronological narrative, and offers only a scanty conceptual framework to account for the processes and institutions involved. It certainly provides the reader with a thick empirical account, but I wondered whether a more elaborate theoretical conceptualization would have made it easier to engage more explicitly with parallel debates in fields like EU studies, research policy, and the sociology of science, thus highlighting the implications of the creation of the ERC and clarifying the book's theoretical contribution.

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doi:10.1093/scipoll/scz015

Advance Access Publication Date: 23 April 2019

## Drone: Remote control warfare

By Hugh Gusterson. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., Hardcover, \$21.95, 216 pp., ISBN:9780262034678

According to some estimates, former President Barack Obama signed off on 473 separate drone strikes between January 2009 and December 2015, with a death toll of approximately 2,500 'combatants' and more than 100 civilians. Under Donald Trump, strikes have continued unabated, and will likely increase as his administration seeks to remove restrictions on the program's reach.

With an ever-changing scope and often secretive operations, writing a timely book that adequately captures the impact, meaning, and policy implications of weaponized drones, and in particular the consequences of their lethal strikes, is a daunting task. Hugh Gusterson's *Drone: Remote Control Warfare* makes a modest, though surprisingly comprehensive stab at the problem at hand. Primarily based on the accounts culled from investigative journalism, memoir, and popular culture, the work lays out key terms of debate, offers some useful conceptual framings to assess the newness and significance of the technology in the context of modern warfare, and explores the perspectives of differently positioned actors associated with drones, including weapons operators, victims, and anti-drone activists.

In absence of ethnographic research (for which Gusterson is known, including his powerful early work,

*Nuclear Rites*), *Drone* takes up the weaponized drone as a 'sociotechnical ensemble' (p. 92), not just a piece of new military hardware. By this he means, in part, a technology whose meaning changes from context to context, and is informed by the co-production of security influences (i.e. the 'War on Terrorism') and technological development. From this perspective, Gusterson's work expands the ethical implications of lethal drone technology away from standard perspectives that remain hemmed in by what calls 'drone essentialism' (p. 92). The novelty of this approach extends from its successful efforts to peel away the layers of already cemented meaning—both cautionary and celebratory—to understand how social and cultural imperatives, in conjunction with technological design, bring us to our current thinking about drones. Gusterson's conclusions are still largely critical of military drone strikes, yet the reasoning that leads to these conclusions is far from straightforward.

The most straightforward portion of the book is the introductory chapter on the history of the weaponry – 'Drones 101'. The chapter weaves together a description of the technology's rise with a political chronology that details the expansion and ethical 'slippage' that moved the idea of drone strikes from 'assassinations' to justified