

**Brussels 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2016**

***EuroScience* launches a new initiative recognising individuals who have made a major impact on European science during their lifetime.**

**European Commission, Director-General for Research & Innovation, Mr. Robert-Jan Smits announced as first recipient.**

*EuroScience*, the European grassroots organisation acting since 1997 as a voice for scientists and other stakeholders in science, technology and innovation, has been a keen participant in the discussions and actions to create a new European landscape for science and innovation, and a better working environment for Europe's scientists. It participates in global conferences and provides awards for science communication and young researchers. Its journal *EuroScientist* and the bi-annual European City of Science event '***EuroScience Open Forum (ESOF)***' are recognised as important, independent platforms for the continuous evolution of such debates.

*EuroScience* has decided to introduce a new accolade in "***Recognition of Lifetime Achievements for European Science and Society***". Whereas landmark scientific discoveries, the launch of major funding programmes or the opening of world-class infrastructure stand out in the minds of most and are rightly recognised, the hard work of inspired individuals contributing over a long period of time to building truly transformative STI landscapes may be less apparent. For this reason, the Governing Board of *EuroScience* has decided that the first person to receive this new recognition should be Mr. Robert-Jan Smits, EC Director-General for Research and Innovation.

Presenting Mr. Robert-Jan Smits with lifetime membership of *EuroScience* and recognising his many contributions to an audience of 600 delegates at the "*Science and Policy Making: Towards a New Dialogue*" conference organised by the EC and the International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA), *EuroScience* President, Lauritz Holm-Nielsen stated that: "***EuroScience is a network organisation, striving to represent the interests and views of our diverse, grass-root research community. The proposal to nominate Robert-Jan Smits for our inaugural recognition of an individual's Lifetime Achievements for Science and Society is an expression of the high-esteem and reputation he has earned through thick and thin, navigating through often challenging circumstances with a level of professionalism and grace that is second to none***".

Thanking *EuroScience*, Robert-Jan Smits said: "***I am very honoured with this recognition. I have been privileged to work on science policy at the European Commission for over 25 years and am fortunate to have worked with some of the best Commissioners who allowed me to deploy my creativity and energy to the benefit of European science***". He added that: "***I have always been a strong believer in European cooperation in the field of science and innovation and have seen what we can achieve if we join forces to extend the frontiers of knowledge and find solutions for the grand societal challenges we are facing. This award is for me, as well, recognition of the trust and partnership that have characterised my collaboration with the science community and of the first class work my colleagues at DG RTD are doing since in the end it's all about team work***".

European Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Carlos Moedas commented: ***“Robert-Jan Smits has been a mainstay of the European research enterprise for nearly three-decades. EuroScience rightly recognises the role he has played at the forefront of our largest European funded programme, so important to the day-to-day lives of our researchers, entrepreneurs, academics and indeed, citizens. I personally, as are, I’m sure, all of Robert-Jan’s colleagues and our many friends in global science and innovation, am delighted to hear of this recognition of his lifetime’s work.”***

### **Why caring about the grass-roots deserves recognition**

Today’s recognition of this stellar career by *EuroScience* underlines, in particular, Robert-Jan’s ability to help create new and more effective EU policies and structures, coordinate EU tools with national policies and align all of these towards the broader needs of society. He is widely known as somebody with a deep understanding of science as the driver of Europe’s innovative capacity, economic and societal development and ultimately, place in the world. He tirelessly champions this crucial role for science.

Robert-Jan’s career-long commitment to creating better conditions for scientists and science in Europe, his openness to welcoming new voices and building stakeholder partnerships within the European Research Area, including industry and citizen groups, makes him stand out. Scientists, their organisations and civil society actors have benefited greatly from his responsible and accountable approach. Those that have the privilege of knowing his work first-hand can testify to his true passion for delivering in performance-based, multicultural environments where political skill and budgetary acumen matter as much as scientific excellence.

A pertinent example of this vision is the landmark engagement of the European Investment Bank or the strengthening of links with Structural Funds to create dynamic Regions of Knowledge. These achievements were not possible without the project management, influencing and implementation skills Robert-Jan has both emphasised and demanded within his own organisation.

Similarly, key pieces of the jigsaw puzzle making up Europe’s scientific establishment that were put in place during recent decades received his never-ending support. A prime example is the European Research Council (ERC) as a key driver for excellence. Furthermore, he has consistently placed high on the budgetary and political agenda the promotion of existing and new Research Infrastructures of pan-European interest (ESFRI & the ERIC legal structure). These correspond to the long-term needs of the European research communities and cover all scientific areas, regardless of location. The roots of these multiple efforts only continue to grow.

*EuroScience* is convinced that a vibrant European scientific endeavour requires the building of connections worldwide with other international organisations interested in the advancement of science and innovation with and for society. We actively liaise with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Japan S&T Agency and grassroots organisation elsewhere. We partner in efforts to establish discussion platforms for e.g. pan-African science. It is remarkable just how well-known Robert-Jan Smits is in these circles. His proven track-record in international communications from the Carnegie Group of Science Advisers to meeting staff researcher unions has raised the institutional reputation of DG Research & Innovation to new heights.

Robert-Jan's almost thirty-year career in key positions promoting the case for Europe's science and innovation is literally a case-study of the "Europe, Open to the World" vision now being put into practice. His masterminding of the world's largest funding programme for research, Horizon 2020, is perhaps his most recognisable achievement. Yet, *EuroScience* would argue that his legacy will prove his undying commitment to supporting researchers on the ground, his loyalty and support to civil-society actors everywhere and his true presence and personality.

### **Note to editors: nearly thirty-years of service**

Robert-Jan Smits is Director-General of DG Research and Innovation (RTD) at the European Commission. In this capacity he is responsible for defining and implementing the EU policy and programmes in the field of research and innovation (average annual budget 8 billion euro).

Mr Smits was one of the main architects and negotiators of Horizon 2020, the new 80 billion EU programme for science and innovation (2014-2020).

Mr Smits has also been instrumental in the development of several other policy initiatives in the field of European science and innovation such as: the European Research Council (ERC), the European Roadmap for large scale facilities, Public-Private Partnerships in research, the Innovation Union and the European Research Area (ERA).

Mr Smits is chairing several high-level committees such as European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC), the Steering Committee of the ERC (ERCEA) and joint S&T committees with Europe's key global partners.

Mr Smits was born in The Netherlands. He has degrees from Utrecht University in The Netherlands, Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales in Switzerland and Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy in the United States of America.

### **About EuroScience**

*EuroScience* is Europe's grassroots organisation for scientists and all those taking an interest in science. It is the voice of European researchers, across disciplines and countries, promoting dialogue with researchers worldwide. The *EuroScience Open Forum* (ESOF), [www.esof.eu](http://www.esof.eu) and our web magazine *EuroScientist*, [www.euroscientist.com](http://www.euroscientist.com) are major platforms for building bridges between science, innovation and society. To become a member or learn more about our free journal or upcoming events, log on to: [www.euroscience.org](http://www.euroscience.org)

**Press or general enquiries:** Dr. Peter Tindemans, Secretary General, *EuroScience*: [peter.tindemans@euroscience.org](mailto:peter.tindemans@euroscience.org) +31 6 2044 1945