DNA methylation plays an essential role in regulating plant development: recent research has demonstrated that this epigenetic phenomenon plays an integral role in processes such as vernalisation, flowering and endosperm development. Even though the exploration of epigenetic phenomena has been intensively developed for the study of cancer and many human disease syndromes, only a few groups are studying these phenomena in plants, where they have major economic relevance, such as somaclonal variation or transcriptional gene silencing. Epigenetic regulation of gene expression is mediated by two processes: methylation of cytosine residues in DNA and chromatin structure.

Dr Finnegan’s group in CSIRO Australia is undoubtedly a world leader in this area, as it has a high international profile earned through many key contributions to plant epigenetic research over the last 10 years.

Dr Rival is the leader of a research group working on the molecular determinism of somaclonal variation in tropical plants of economic importance, such as oil palm.

The aim of the present OIF is to consolidate Dr Rival’s expertise in the understanding and study of epigenetic mechanisms in plants.
Dr Rival’s group has shown that the occurrence of floral variants in tissue-culture derived oil palm is associated with DNA hypomethylation. The time is ripe to integrate the various strategies developed by Dr Finnegan’s group to the study of epigenetic regulation of somaclonal variation in oil palm.

The VARIOMETH fellowship will focus on the role of DNA methyltransferases on the determinism of somaclonal variation and on the exploration of the relationship between DNA methylation and chromatin remodelling. Indeed, methylated DNA has been found to adopt a distinctive chromatin structure in the genome. Both approaches will be developed in parallel with the aim of describing specific molecular events which could be used for the development of markers of epigenetic instability in plants. These markers will be integrated in a strategy aimed at the identification of in vitro treatments which are prone to generate epigenetic variability in somatic embryogenesis-based micropropagation processes.

The outputs of the Fellowship will be shared between Europeans research groups dedicated to epigenetics in plants through a EC 6FP RTN (Research and Training Network) project named EPIDEV, which has been presented in November 2003 under reference number FP6-512523.
### 2. Quality of the research training activities (Weight 0.15 / Threshold 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark (out of 6)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>The proposal has good expertise in plant development and biotechnology. The host institution is expected to provide training in the newest technologies to study the regulation of somatic embryo formation. Research training activities are clear and of high quality. The complementary training and skills offered would include the organization of workshops and colloquia events by the researcher. The proposed training will be highly beneficial to the researcher and will greatly increase his knowledge in molecular genetics and genomics.</td>
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### 3. Quality of the host (Weight 0.15 / No threshold)

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<th>Mark (out of 5)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Both hosts have a very good scientific expertise in this field and the quality of the supervisors are very high. Both supervisors are highly qualified and expert in training PhD students and research scholars as evidenced by good publication record. International collaborations are evident. Both host institutes have a very good infrastructure to support the proposed research.</td>
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### 4. Quality of the researcher (Weight 0.15 / Threshold 4)

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<th>Mark (out of 5)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>4.4</td>
<td>The candidate is a highly qualified and experienced senior research scientist. He has an excellent CV and an impressive publication record. His academic and leadership qualities are evident from the number of PhD students he supervised, projects he executed and his international recognition as a research leader. He has untapped skills to execute the proposed project effectively. This fellowship will increase his knowledge, capability, competitiveness within and outside EU.</td>
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### 5. Management and feasibility (Weight 0.05 / No threshold)

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<td>4.9</td>
<td>The workplan is very well organized however, considering the position of the proposal as an established scientist and group leader, the proposed duration of the project in the ongoing phase appears to be long. Practical arrangements have been detailed through the supporting letter, but the management of the following is not clear. The proposed project is feasible within the framework of downturn. The methodological approach and work plan are clearly mentioned. In the WP, each phase and the time scale with the planned research activity is clearly addressed.</td>
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### 6. Relevance to the objectives of the scheme (Weight 0.15 / No threshold)

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<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The researcher and his group will highly benefit from this mobility grant. Also mobility will help to improve his current experience and make him more competitive inside and outside Europe. There is a strong match between the proposed project and the researcher’s profile. The researcher is currently heading the group working in the similar area and hence it is quite likely that the researcher will continue this area of research after this fellowship. The fellowship has the potential to enhance the EU scientific level in plant epigenetics and it will increase the collaboration within EU and with Australia bringing to an increase of knowledge and researchers mobility.</td>
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### 7. Added value to the Community (Weight 0.20 / No threshold)

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<td>4.3</td>
<td>The study of somatic embryo formation is a high priority and contribute to the objectives of the ERA. This is in respect of obtaining technologies that are important instances outside Europe and establishment of collaborative links is likely to contribute to the European excellence. Also, the out come of this research will contribute immensely to the research excellence and European competitiveness. The benefits to the researcher, the groups involved and to the area of plant research as a whole will be very good. This collaboration will become a platform for long-term collaboration. Also, the potential for improving long-term collaboration within and outside EU is high. In addition, the gender balance is adequately addressed.</td>
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**Marie-Curie International Fellowships**

**Call:** FP6-2002-Mobility-6A

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**3**
NETWORK OF MOBILE RESEARCHERS

- International (42 countries) and highly multidisciplinary (all major disciplines)
- Founded to promote the Marie Curie Actions programme and geographic mobility
- 3195 registered fellows (1,028 female, 2,167 male); with ca. 100 new fellows a year
ASSISTANCE WITH ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

• MCFA manages 20 mailing lists, more than 3,000 subscribers and ca. 350 postings per months
  – Hot topics “taxation of allowances”, “health insurance”, “auditing”, “annual reports”, and events
• Networking in national and regional groups
CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

• 70 conferences and workshops organized by the Association, ca. 100 at which the Association was represented
  – Hot topics: Early Career Researchers; Researcher Mobility; Research and Innovation; Science and Policy; Science and Society; Europe's Human Research Potential; Challenges and Opportunities for Young Scientists in Europe
• More than **22,000** unique visitors a month (average duration of visit **3 min**)

• **Online member database** to search for members in neighborhood

• Discussion forum, online blackboard, feedback form, electronic business cards, e-mail alias …
SCIENCE POLICY

IS THERE A NEED FOR A EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL?

Jonathan Duley, Head, Analysis, Scientific Policy, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

The role of an overarching and strengthening Europe, and Europe's Research Council

Recent years have witnessed a number of European, European and European-level initiatives in the field of research and innovation. These initiatives have been aimed at strengthening the European Research Area, increasing its attractiveness and competitiveness, and promoting European research.

The need for a European Research Council (ERC) is often discussed, but there are also concerns and arguments against its establishment.

The ERC could play a key role in coordinating and setting priorities for research in Europe, and in ensuring that European research is competitive and attractive to researchers from around the world.

The ERC could help to ensure that European research is aligned with the priorities and challenges of the 21st century, and that it is able to contribute to addressing these challenges.

The ERC could also help to ensure that European research is conducted in a way that is sustainable and efficient, and that it is able to make the best use of available resources.

The establishment of an ERC would require a significant investment of resources, and it would need to be closely linked with other initiatives in the field of research and innovation.

The decision to establish an ERC would need to be taken in a careful and considered manner, taking into account the views and concerns of all stakeholders.

The decision to establish an ERC would need to be based on a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the current state of European research, and of the potential benefits and challenges that an ERC could bring.

It is clear that the establishment of an ERC would be a major step forward in the development of European research, and it would be a significant achievement for European cooperation in science and innovation.
We look forward to welcome you as a member
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