



New Proof of Concept

ERC Funding to develop Heterogeneous Integrated Short-wave Infrared Colloidal Quantum Dot Lasers

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The European Research Council, in its efforts to help ERC grant-holders to bridge the gap between their research and the earliest stage of a marketable innovation, created the Proof of Concept (PoC) funding scheme for researchers who have already been awarded an ERC grant. Not only does this program help ERC grantees to explore the innovation potential of their research and/or commercialize the results of their ERC-funded research, the program complements the efforts of ICFO's Knowledge and Technology Transfer Unit (KTT), which proactively searches for ways to translate newly generated knowledge into new technologies.

In a press release from the ERC announcing the award of 100 new Proof of Concept Grants, Iliana Ivanova, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, put into context the importance of these grants, stating: "Since 2011 when the scheme started, ERC grantees have received over €300 million in Proof of Concept grants. Thanks to Horizon Europe funding, they could advance on the path from ground-breaking

research to innovation. These researchers are a great example of how to translate and commercialise the strong research output funded by the EU.

ICREA professor at ICFO Gerasimos Konstantatos is one of the recipients of the Proof of Concept grant in this, the first round of the 2024 competition. His new project, entitled **IRQUAL**, is his fourth PoC to date, the sixteenth award of this kind for ICFO since the launch of the PoC grant scheme. **The main goal of this project is to explore and develop a new generation of solution-processed, versatile infrared laser technology that can be produced at scale and be compatible with CMOS electronics.**

IRQUAL addresses the critical need for compact, low-cost and integrated lasers operating in the short-wave infrared (SWIR) spectrum (1.3 - 2.5 μm) for diverse applications such as consumer electronics, automotive, IoT, and AR/VR. Specifically, lasers in the eye-safe window (around 1.4 μm and $> 2 \mu\text{m}$) are crucial for LIDAR systems, 3D face recognition, and environmental monitoring. Current technologies, including solid-state lasers and III-V semiconductor laser diodes face limitations in size, cost, and scalability, therefore IRQUAL aims to develop a versatile heterogeneous-integrated laser platform that will exploit Silicon Quantum Dot (Si QD) laser technology pumped by established GaAs-based high-power laser diodes to develop a device that covers the range 1.5 to 2.5 μm . The realization of low-cost CMOS compatible lasers at eye-safe and telecom wavelengths has the potential to disrupt in any possible ways. To begin, the introduction of this technology in the automotive industry will render LIDAR technologies a commodity and the use of longer wavelengths ($>2 \mu\text{m}$) currently limited by available laser sources can drastically increase the detection range and improve the operability of LIDAR technology in all weather conditions with huge benefits to driver safety. Moreover, the use of low-cost infrared lasers manufacturable at scale in the mobile industry and consumer electronics at large will introduce new functionalities for IoT and mobile applications for increased security and data protection. Access to longer wavelengths (above 2 μm) with low cost laser sources will unleash the potential of photonics for environmental monitoring and remote chemical detection that is of paramount importance for natural gas leak detection, pollution monitoring, hazardous gas inspection etc. Last but not least the possibility of an electrically driven laser integrated on silicon CMOS is the Holy Grail in the field of silicon photonics as it fulfils the last missing component for the realization of all-optical information transfer and processing on silicon with huge implications towards secure, low power consumption and high data rate of transfer and processing. IRQUAL will further focus on the potential commercialization and exploitation of this technology by developing a strong intellectual property portfolio as well as engaging with leading industrial figures that could assist in the development and validation of the technology. **In summary, this project pioneers a new era in SWIR laser technology, featuring compactness, cost-effectiveness, and scalability for a multitude of high-impact applications.**