

EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

– ERAC –
Secretariat

Brussels, 7 February 2017
(OR. en)

ERAC 1201/17

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 32nd ERAC plenary meeting of 2 December 2016

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the summary conclusions of the 32nd ERAC plenary meeting of 2 December 2016, as adopted by written procedure.

Summary conclusions

32nd ERAC plenary meeting, 2 December 2016 in Brussels

Co-Chairs: Wolfgang Burtscher and David Wilson

Secretariat: General Secretariat of the Council

Present¹: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (36)

Absent: Albania, Faroe Islands, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine (6)

The Member State (MS) co-Chair started the meeting by expressing his satisfaction at being able to attend the plenary again after a long absence.

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The agenda was adopted with four additional AOBs: 1-2) two requested by the Commission on the ERA Progress Report and an update on the European Innovation Council, 3) one requested by the CZ delegation relating to a debrief of the RPG meeting in Prague on 3-4 November 2016 and 4) one requested by the AT delegation relating to the triennial review of the mandates of the ERA-related groups.

The co-Chairs welcomed the new ERAC delegates.

¹ The list of delegations present or absent at the meeting is based on the List of Participants that was circulated during the meeting for completion by delegates.

2. The draft summary conclusions of the 31st meeting of ERAC, held in Bratislava on 15-16 September 2016

The MS co-Chair informed delegations that the draft summary conclusions of the 31st meeting of ERAC had been approved by written procedure.

3. Information from the co-Chairs and Presidency

The Commission (COM) co-Chair informed ERAC about Armenia and Georgia being the most recent countries associated to H2020.

Relating to the latest ERAC Steering Board meeting organised on 18 October 2016, the COM co-Chair indicated that the agenda of the plenary reflected well the items discussed at the Steering Board.

Following this, the rapporteur for the ERAC opinion on the Streamlining of the R&I monitoring and reporting landscape, Ms Karina Angelieva (BG), presented the results of the online survey and the workshop held on 15 November in Brussels. The purpose of both had been to reflect on the identified challenges and to discuss the reporting requests coming from the Commission. On the basis of the results, a first preliminary draft of the ERAC opinion had been prepared and circulated a day before the plenary and therefore substantial discussion would be taken through a written procedure following the meeting.

Streamlining of the R&I monitoring and reporting landscape is one of priorities of the incoming Maltese Presidency, and the MT delegation had assisted the rapporteur in the preparations of the ERAC opinion. The rapporteur first thanked all ERAC delegations who had participated in the online survey and in the workshop. She also thanked the MT delegation for the assistance and the Commission services for their support. She indicated that there was overall agreement among the delegations of the importance of the practical relevance of the reports. Relevant issues to be considered in the streamlining context were underlined such as: the need for greater coherence and adequate time alignment between the ERA Progress Report and the RIO Country Reports;

the necessity to increase awareness around and dissemination of the streamlined reports and to clarify their different purposes; that duplication in information requests to Member States should be reduced while the usefulness of reports for MS policy use should be enhanced; and that there should be more active interaction between the Commission and the MS throughout the reporting process.

The Commission (Román Arjona) thanked the rapporteur for her work so far and efforts to engage all parties, and welcomed that the prominence of the topic in the MT Presidency agenda. He underlined that the reduction in information requests to MS as part of the streamlining process should be balanced (and not excessive) in order to avoid a detrimental effect on the Commission's capacity to respond to the increasing number of requests for information by MS about national R&I performance and policy development. He also emphasised the Commission's intention to make further efforts to channel all of its information requests through the Joint EC(RTD)-OECD STI policy survey in order to contribute to the simplification agenda; and also that the Commission, as highlighted, had already put in place several steps to reduce MS reporting burdens, such as replacing the former "R&I country profiles" with dedicated infographics, and shortening and focusing the RIO Country Reports. He reminded ERAC that the Commission had presented its ongoing work at the ERAC workshop on 15 November, and that a grouping of the reports in three blocks (policy, analysis or ranking) should be considered. The Commission would continue to support the rapporteur and the upcoming Maltese Presidency in the exercise.

One delegation also mentioned the proposed single entry point and Community of best practices as interesting ideas in the first draft of the opinion.

A timetable was proposed for the follow-up of the work on the preparations of the ERAC opinion, ending with the approval by ERAC of the third and final draft of the opinion by written procedure by the end of January 2017 at the latest.

4. ERA and Innovation Policy

4.1 Interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and preparations for the next Framework Programme for research and innovation

Before the discussion on this item, the CZ delegation gave a short debrief of the RPG meeting organised in Prague on 3-4 November 2016. 4 sessions had been organised, each discussing a single theme: 1) Support of cooperation of academia and business sphere and of technology transfer, 2) European projects or programmes oriented on science, research and innovation after 2019 – important areas, priorities, 3) Human Resources for Research and 4) Regional specialization for smart development. The discussion theme for the second session had triggered a fruitful discussion relating to the interim evaluation of H2020 and the preparations of the next Framework Programme for R&I.

To begin the discussions on the item in question, the Commission (Kurt Vandenberghe) first gave a comprehensive overview of the main elements of the interim evaluation of H2020 which consist of a Staff Working Document, a Foresight Study and a Study making the Economic case for R&I investment. The interim evaluation will set the scene for the remaining years of H2020 (for which there is still more than 30 billion € available) but will also look beyond Horizon 2020. The Commission is in the process of collecting evidence in order to issue its Staff Working document on the interim evaluation of H2020 by May 2017. A public consultation is on-going until mid-January 2017 and so far already 2000 replies have been received. The high-level group chaired by Mr Lamy has been launched and will prepare its report by 30 June 2017. A stakeholder conference will be organised on that same date. The Commission is also working on a foresight exercise ("the Bohemia Study"), for which a report is expected to be ready in January 2017, as well as on the economic case for R&I.

The European Parliament is also planning to publish a report on the interim evaluation of H2020 by July 2017. According to Mr Vandenberghe, it would be ideal if the ERAC opinion would also be ready around the same time period. He also considered that one single ERAC opinion with the inputs from the ERA-related groups incorporated in it would have more impact than several "partial" opinions.

The delegations who took the floor asked the Commission about details of the economic case, the consultation of Member States in the process of the H2020 interim evaluation, the consultation process on the foresight exercise and the role of ERAC in the preparations of the next FP. Mr Vandenberghe explained that the economic case should take the form of an authoritative paper for finance ministers and other decision-makers which will contain economic arguments, based on the latest evidence, that spending on R&I is not a cost but an investment. On the consultation of Member States in the process of the H2020 interim evaluation, he said that the Commission had already received many national positions and considered them very valuable for the process. They would be analysed together with the results of the public consultation. As regards the foresight exercise, Mr Vandenberghe explained that the Bohemia study is looking into possible R&I scenarios in the global geopolitical context. The scenarios will be made public in early 2017 and will be compared with the views of other experts. As to the role of ERAC in the preparations of the next FP, Mr Vandenberghe considered that all stakeholders, including ERAC, were invited by the Commission to co-design the next FP. He also mentioned that representatives of the Commission were currently being invited to speak at numerous national events, and he would very much welcome information from ERAC delegations about which events were the most important ones for the Commission to take part in.

One delegation considered that national positions should be ready by March 2017 in order for ERAC to have a substantial discussion at its plenary, while another delegation pointed out that the national positions might not always be in line with the ERAC Opinion and considered that it should therefore be quite broad in scope. Mr Vandenberghe expressed his opinion that the ERAC opinion should be strategic and not go into concrete proposals at this stage.

One delegation made a plea for policy cross-border issues and referred to the close links between the support from framework programmes and structural funds. It underlined that the next FP has to remain attractive for researchers and that policy advice was needed for creating proper framework conditions for them.

ERAC agreed that for the planned workshop and plenary discussions in March to be useful and fruitful, ERAC would need input from the Commission on the foresight exercise and the economic case prior to the meetings. Mr Vandenberghe indicated that the Commission will do its utmost to provide documents prior to the meetings. It was also agreed that guidelines should be provided for the input by the ERA-related groups.

The COM co-Chair referred to the roadmap which had been proposed to ERAC by the Steering Board according to which a rapporteur was to be nominated at the plenary. The MS co-Chair proposed that Katrine Nissen (DK) could take on the job. She indicated that she was not against the proposal as such but had to consult her authorities and would send her answer shortly. The MS co-Chair therefore invited all delegates who wished to consider being the rapporteur to contact him during the week following the plenary. The COM co-Chair reminded that the plan was for the Chairs of the ERA-related groups to discuss the inputs from their groups together with ERAC at the workshop that had been planned back-to-back to the ERAC plenary in March. This discussion should serve as input to the rapporteur. At the plenary, the Commission would present the foresight and the economic case, possibly together with the preliminary findings from the interim evaluation. The ERAC opinion should be adopted at the June plenary and submitted to the Estonian Presidency in view of the informal Competitiveness Council in 24-25 July 2017.

Under this item, the Mr Rein Kaarli/EE also took the floor to briefly inform ERAC on the priorities of the upcoming Estonian Presidency in the field of R&I. The main topic during the Estonian Presidency will be the interim evaluation of H2020, including EIT and Euratom. After all, the wider context of the Presidency coincides with the preparation of the proposals for the next MFF and the next FP. Estonia has two main priorities:

- advancing excellent RDI as the basis for Europe's competitiveness; and
- increasing the openness, transparency and coherence of EU joint initiatives.

Regarding the first priority, Estonia would like to profit from H2020 interim evaluation results to emphasise positive impact of investments in excellent R&I to EU's competitiveness and addressing societal challenges, as well as to broaden the understanding of impact of excellent research that goes beyond short-term economic stimulus to provide rationale for investing in research. As far as the second priority is concerned, Estonia would like to develop principles for creating thematic partnerships, closing ineffective ones and increasing openness of joint initiatives that would support widening participation and thereby to reduce the "innovation divide". The informal Competitiveness Council in July 2017 should discuss the first outcomes of the H2020 interim evaluation, including the report by the Lamy Group. A conference "Excellent Research to the Benefit of Society" has been planned for 12 October 2017. The main outcome of the Estonian Presidency will be the Council Conclusions on interim evaluation of H2020 and the next FP which are planned to be adopted at the December 2017 Competitiveness Council.

4.2 ERA national action plans and strategies

To start the discussions on the item, the COM co-Chair referred to the note from the Steering Board (SB) to ERAC which had been circulated prior to the meeting. This note set out a recommendation on how to follow-up on the ERA National Action Plans (NAPs) and was drafted on the basis of the agreement at the ERA-workshop organised back-to-back to the Bratislava ERAC plenary in September that the follow-up on the implementation and monitoring of the national action plans should be done as a learning exercise for the ERA countries where they can learn from each other and share best practices. The aim of such an exercise would be to increase the efficiency of the research policies and actions in all ERA Countries. In its note, the SB recommended that the proposed learning exercise/sharing of best practices should be organised on a regular basis and take place in workshops that would be organised back-to-back with the ERAC meetings, ideally in connection with the ERAC meetings in the countries of the Presidency. Malta had already confirmed that the first workshop could take place back-to-back with the ERAC plenary on 15 March 2017. The workshops could cover an exchange on topics that are already dealt with by ERA-related groups and subsequently look at other topics such as Priority 1 with monitoring of the roadmap as the core of this priority. The exact procedure including the methodology for the exchange and the choice of topics could be proposed by the Presidency and the Commission in cooperation, in particular for the first workshop. The procedure could later be adapted to the experience made at the first workshop. The COM co-Chair asked ERAC to also reflect on possible topics for the workshops.

The Commission (Anette Bjornsson) then gave a short presentation of the latest developments. She explained that the Commission was in the process of analysing the NAPs in order to follow the impact of the actions proposed and to measure if the set objectives are achieved. The overall impression so far was that there was a clear commitment to ERA in line with the Council Conclusions on the ERA Roadmap and the Roadmap itself.

Furthermore, good systemic coverage of priorities and policy actions as well as efforts to integrate ERA into diverse national R&I policies and ecosystems was clearly visible in the NAPs. The Commission had however also taken note of only a moderate inclusion of baselines, targets and timelines, as well as a variety of scopes on priorities and different degrees of detail in the policy descriptions. Ms Bjornsson presented tables relating to each ERA Priority which showed the inclusion of a baseline, targets, actions and timelines in those NAPs which had so far been received by the Commission. She explained that on the basis of the analysis, there were hardly any quantitative targets set in the NAPs. There were baselines in some NAPs but only part of them were quantitative, most were descriptions of the current situation without reference to the framework. Almost all countries did define actions for each priority, however a more specific approach defining the instruments, the framework conditions and the reforms required was needed. Timelines were also often missing or described in a tentative way. It would thus be necessary to discuss the following issues in the proposed workshops: analytical framework, quantitative description of baselines, targets and timelines, improving the structure of NAPs and the need for long-term oriented policies.

16 delegations took the floor. There was a general concern that the NAPs were being compared against each other. Several delegations underlined that it was the remit of the ERA-countries to define and structure their NAPs and that the NAPs were just snapshots of already established national strategies on R&I. The nature of variable geometry had been acknowledged from the beginning and imposing an "EU programme" with baselines etc. would not work. The Member States/Associated Countries could improve their NAPs if they considered it necessary but strategic issues were in any case the key. Some delegations asked what would now happen with the results of the analysis and whether the results meant that the NAPs should be re-done. Furthermore, as not all countries are ready with their NAPs, delegations wanted to know whether the comparison would be re-done once all NAPs were ready. There was a lot of support for a proposal by one delegation for a conference at a political level on the present status of the development of the ERA strategy and structure and on its future. Several delegations also proposed that a broader reflection on ERA should take place.

Regarding the proposal on the workshops, delegations considered it a good idea and underlined that the discussions should concentrate on qualitative issues. Furthermore, ERA-related groups could help in the sharing of best practices. It would also be important to cover Priority 1 at these workshops.

In reply to delegations, Ms Bjornsson underlined that the purpose was not to compare the NAPs but that the Commission was analysing the implementation of the ERA with the help of the NAPs. The current analysis will be followed by a more thorough analysis in the ERA Progress Report 2018.

The COM Co-Chair stressed that this analysis was important in order to ensure progress ahead of the next biannual ERA Progress Reports. He noted, for example, that for the gender priority only three Member States had introduced timelines. Having a proper overview provided helpful indications on what was missing, rather than being an intrusion into MS policies. Whilst most NAPs had a good showing of actions, they had to be accompanied by timelines, else there was a risk that they would never be achieved. The workshops are an opportunity to assess whether a more substantial debate on ERA is needed.

The COM co-Chair concluded by proposing that at the workshop in March a qualitative analysis would be done of the parts in the NAPs concerning Priority 1. The links between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the NAPs should also be covered. The Commission would prepare a discussion paper for this purpose. The ERA Progress Report which should by then already be available would serve as a basis for the discussions on how to proceed at political level.

4.3 EUROSTAT

EUROSTAT (Mr Carsten Olsson) gave a presentation on the use of reliable and relevant statistical data for R&I performance measurement and evidence-based policy making. Mr Olsson indicated that Member States (Ministries in charge of the R&I portfolio or national statistical institutes) were both producers and end-users of the statistical data provided by EUROSTAT and that EUROSTAT needs their support to produce reliable and useful statistics. As regards the question of administrative vs. survey data, he underlined that EUROSTAT uses existing data whenever possible but that such data could only be used if it was reliable, relevant for the purpose and comparable.

The need for reinforced collaboration between government bodies, including National Statistical Institutes, was highlighted so that statisticians could get better access to administrative data, such as information on funding for R&D purposes. On the monitoring of the progress of the ERA Roadmap, Mr Olsson referred to the set of core high level indicators for monitoring and performance that ERAC approved in December 2015. He pointed out that this was a limited set of politically relevant indicators the use of which should not require large amounts of additional interpretative material.

Mr Olsson also gave an overview of EUROSTAT's cooperation with DG RTD, including the joint work with DG GROW to improve the measurement framework of the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS).

Delegations that took the floor underlined the need for a dialogue between data collectors and policy makers. One delegation indicated that the macroeconomic/socioeconomic impact of the framework programmes for R&I was difficult to measure with the existing indicators. Some delegations also called for more information on the proposed changes in methodology for the EIS, indicating that the changes introduced for the 2015-2016 exercise were already non-negligible, while other delegations supported these proposed changes.

Mr Olsson agreed that the macroeconomic impact was indeed not easy to measure and that help was needed from researchers, statisticians and policy makers. As regards the question concerning the proposed changes in methodology for the EIS, the Commission (Mr Román Arjona) explained that the proposed modification of the measurement framework had been developed to improve the timeliness of the product and to better account for the way that EIS captures relevant phenomena such as digitisation and entrepreneurship that have gained increasing weight for innovation. As a follow up, a meeting with MS under the aegis of ERAC to explain the changes in the EIS measurement framework was scheduled by the Commission for 16 December 2016.

5. Standing Information Point

Two SIP notes were circulated to ERAC prior to the meeting on the following issues:

- Update on the PSF activities: overview of the lessons learnt from 2016 country-specific activities, including the numerous MLEs, the MD, HU and UA peer reviews, and the specific supports to MT and SK. The outcome of the 3rd expression of interest for the H2020 PSF services launched before the summer will serve to plan the activities of the PSF throughout 2017.
- Update on the 2017 approach to the European Semester to inform delegations on the methodology and key focus areas for the 2017 exercise.

The HR delegation took the floor and asked for confirmation that they are counted in the MLE on performance-based funding and supported (together with NL and SI) an activity on synergies between H2020 and ESIF. The Commission (Mr Román Arjona) reassured HR about their status in the MLE and undertook to explore how to best follow up on the request on "synergies", possibly in the context of the MLE on measures to support wider participation in Horizon 2020.

6. ERA Governance

6.1 ERAC Annual Report 2016

ERAC discussed the preparation of the ERAC Annual Report 2016 on the basis of the 2015 Annual report. It had become clear during that exercise that it was necessary to provide the ERA-related groups with a template and clear instructions concerning the contributions required from them in order to make a coordinated effort to present a uniform and coherent annual report for 2016. ERAC was informed that such template and instructions would be circulated by the ERAC Secretariat to the Chairs of the ERA-related groups before the end of 2016.

The ERAC Steering Board had agreed at its meeting on 18 October 2016 that the ERA-related groups would be asked to submit their contributions by the end of February 2017. ERAC would be informed about the state of play at the plenary on 16-17 March 2017, and the adoption of the 2016 ERAC Annual report should take place at the 16 June 2017 plenary.

6.2 Updated version of the ERAC Work Programme 2016-17

The MS co-Chair informed ERAC that the updated version of the ERAC Work Programme 2016-17 was approved by written procedure on 25 November 2016.

6.3 Draft ERAC Opinion on the streamlining of the expert groups set up by the Commission

The MS co-Chair informed ERAC that the draft ERAC Opinion on the streamlining of the expert groups set up by the Commission was approved by written procedure on 7 November 2016.

6.4 Updates from the ERAC Working Groups

6.4.a Ad-hoc Working Group on Measuring the Impact of EU Framework Programmes for R&I at National Level

The Chair of the Ad-hoc Working Group, Mr Tiago Santos Pereira, gave a brief update on the group's activities. The group was established to develop a harmonised impact evaluation template based on (i) a core set of evaluation questions, (ii) common evaluation methodologies, (iii) common indicators and (iv) available common datasets and available EU and national databases to assess the socio-economic impacts of EU Framework Programmes at national level. It had a mandate until December 2016. The group was expected to go beyond basic templates which most countries have been already applying and to address wider impact of participation in FPs.

It was now however struggling with the identification of impacts (long term and structural effects, tracing impacts, identifying counterfactuals) and the specification of a template which would embrace standardization and comparability with flexibility and national needs. There was also the issue of differences between instruments and areas.

Mr Santos Pereira therefore proposed to ERAC to extend the mandate of the group for 6 more months. This would give it time to balance existing data and indicators with dedicated objectives and needs, to reflect on current discussions on the "impact policy agenda" and to benefit of the on-going parallel work made by the Commission. The group was aware that in certain Member States/Associated Countries, the national timelines had counted on the group to present its final report already by the end of 2016. It would thus at any rate aim to present a draft report as soon as possible.

According to the MS co-Chair, it was not astonishing that the work of the group had taken more time than foreseen, taken the very structural approach the group was taking. The AT delegation intervened noting that this delay had implications for its scheduled impact assessment study, which was being prepared to be initiated in early 2017, and the DK delegation noted potential implications in terms of internal resource allocation. DK was also wondering whether the members of the group had been informed of the proposal to extend the mandate. The co-Chair of the Helsinki Group (HG) asked about the consideration of the gender dimension and research careers.

According to Mr Santos Pereira, the group was aware of AT's timetable and would aim to produce results as soon as possible to counter AT's and other delegations' possible similar needs. He understood that also other delegations than DK could have problems to allow their representatives to continue as members of the group and regretted this very much, said however that it had been impossible for the group to produce results on the difficult subject in 9 months. To answer the question by the HG co-Chair, he confirmed that the group was discussing the scientific and structural impacts of gender and research careers.

ERAC agreed to extend the mandate under the condition that the extension cannot be renewed but that the group would have to present its final report within the extended mandate. The ERAC Secretariat circulated a draft revised mandate reflecting this agreement. With the consent from ERAC, it was agreed that the final revised mandate would be circulated to ERAC after the meeting.

6.4.b Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation

The Vice-Chair of the Standing Working Group (SWG), Marc Vanholsbeeck, gave a brief update of the work of the SWG. The group had had its second meeting on 6 October 2016. According to the Work Programme that the SWG had adopted in October, it will work on five thematic priorities:

- 1) open research data and infrastructures
- 2) open access to publications
- 3) innovation
- 4) research and researchers, incentives, evaluation and impact assessment
- 5) training and skills

Two of the thematic priorities, innovation and training and skills, were identified as having relevant implications on the other three and would consequently be worked on as cross-cutting issues.

There had been general agreement in the group to avoid duplication of work in relation to what other groups and organisations are doing in the field of open science and innovation, for example the SGHRM and the Open Science Policy Platform of the Commission. It had been agreed that the SWG Chair would coordinate the work with other groups. The group had also discussed the issues and deliverables identified in the Work Programme as well as the need to define some of the concepts such as 'open innovation'. The issue of how to organise the work of the group and whether there was a need to set up sub-groups had also been discussed but it had been considered premature to establish sub-groups. This issue would be discussed again at the SWG's next meeting on 14 February 2017.

Two preparatory tasks for the work of the SWG had been agreed on: 1) the assessment of the actions of the Amsterdam Call for Action as a basis for the work of the SWG focusing on the actions related to the two main thematic priorities identified by the group i.e. open research data and infrastructures and open access to publications; and 2) taking stock of existing and ongoing recommendations, suggested actions and other relevant information with particular emphasis on the two main thematic priorities identified. As only 2 replies had been received so far from the members of the SWG, Mr Vanholsbeeck asked ERAC delegates to liaise with their colleagues in the SWG to ensure that more replies would be sent.

6.5 Updates from the ERA-related groups

Under this item, ERAC discussed the issue of the status of the Helsinki and SGHRM groups in view of the triennial review of ERA-related groups. The October 2015 ERAC Opinion on the review of the ERA advisory structure and the December 2015 Council Conclusions on the same issue formed the background for the discussions (notably the invitation from the Council to the Commission to consider the mandates of HG and SGHRM with a view to converting these groups into standing working groups of ERAC no later than the first triennial review by 2018).

To start the discussions on the item, the COM co-Chair referred to the discussion note from the Steering Board (SB) to ERAC which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The note proposed ERAC two options to consider: 1) establishing HG and SGHRM as ERAC Standing Working Groups as of 1 July 2017, i.e. before the triennial review and with a necessary period of transition; or 2) keeping the "status quo", i.e. that HG and SGHRM remain under the remit of the Commission until they are converted into Standing Working Groups of ERAC no later than the first triennial review in 2018. The SB recommended Option 1.

The representative of the SGHRM group took the floor underlining that both groups deal with their specific ERA Priorities. They have a lot of valuable work on-going, for example the examination of the ERA National Action Plans as regards their respective priorities, and would need security and certainty regarding their status. Furthermore, the groups are not compatible with the new internal procedures of the Commission relating to its expert groups. The co-Chair of the Helsinki group added that she welcomed the SB recommendation which would allow the two groups to step up their work also in the context of the H2020 interim evaluation and the preparation of the next FP. She also mentioned the on-going cooperation with SFIC. She expressed her wish that all concerned parties would cooperate to ensure a smooth transition of the groups.

Two delegations took the floor inquiring whether there would be any financial implications for the group members and how the secretarial support for the groups would work. A representative of the General Secretariat of the Council explained that only delegates who are members of groups mentioned on the list of the preparatory bodies of the Council are reimbursed when they come to meetings. In the case of the ERA-related groups, such bodies were ERAC and its two configurations GPC and SFIC. It was thus not possible for the members of the Helsinki and SGHRM groups to be reimbursed.

She also indicated that the General Secretariat of the Council provided the Secretariat for those ERA-related groups which were under the remit of the Council. It had just recently started to provide secretarial support to the ERAC Standing Working Group (SWG) on Open Science and Innovation, the first ERAC SWG to be established, and that it would do the same for the Helsinki and SGHRM groups once they came under the remit of the Council.

The COM co-Chair confirmed to delegates that a simple letter from the Commission was enough to conclude the groups in their current form ahead of their transfer to the Council.

ERAC agreed to follow the recommendation of the SB and to endorse Option 1.

7. Any other business

Invitation to Armenia, Georgia and Tunisia to participate in ERAC meetings as observers

In accordance with Article 6.3 of ERAC's Rules of Procedure, ERAC decided to initiate the procedure to invite Armenia, Georgia and Tunisia (the latest countries associated to H2020) to its meetings as observers.

33rd ERAC meeting (16-17 March 2017, St. Julian's)

The MS co-Chair indicated that at its next meeting on 31 January 2017, the Steering Board will draw up the provisional annotated agenda of the next meeting on the basis of the updated Work Programme 2016-2017.

ERA Progress Report

The Commission (Ms Anette Bjornsson) informed ERAC that the ERA Progress Report would be published in the beginning of 2017.

European Innovation Council (EIC)

The Commission (Mr Chris North) summarised the state of play with the EIC, notably the references to it in the recently adopted Commission Communication on the Start-up and Scale-up initiative, the discussions held in October with national innovation agencies and Taftie, and the imminent setting up by Commissioner Moedas of a High Level Group of innovators to assist the Commission in taking forward the EIC.

Triennial review of the mandates of the ERA-related groups

The AT delegation referred to the October 2015 ERAC Opinion on the review of the ERA advisory structure in which it is proposed that a year before the triennial review, ERAC should hold a discussion at DG level on the strategic landscape for research and innovation in Europe to identify the key strategic priorities that will require attention by the research and innovation community. At its December 2015 Conclusions, the Council agreed that the first full review should take place no later than in 2018 in line with the procedures outlined in the ERAC Opinion. AT wanted to know whether ERAC would follow the procedure it proposed, especially as AT will have its Presidency in 2018 during triennial review. The MS co-Chair indicated that the ERAC Steering Board would discuss the procedure and modalities at its next meeting on 31 January 2017.
