

EUROPEAN UNION

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(OR. en)

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

— ERAC —
Secretariat

ERAC 1205/14

NOTE

To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft final report on tracking the impact of ERAC's opinions and reports, based on inputs from Member States and Associated Countries

1. Introduction

The European Research Area and Innovation Committee's (ERAC) principal mission is to provide timely strategic input to the Council, the Commission and Member States on research and innovation issues that are relevant to the development of the ERA.

The Committee's Report on the review of the ERAC mandate¹ recommended that the Committee's Steering Board carry out continuous monitoring of the impact of ERAC opinions and put an annual monitoring report to the Committee.

The Council resolution on the advisory work for the European Research Area² invited the Committee to implement the recommendations included in its Report of 18 April 2013 without delay.

¹ Doc. ERAC 1201/13 of 18 April 2013

² Doc. 10331/13 of 31 May 2013

An overview of ERAC opinions issued since June 2010 and their uptake in Commission communications or other documents and in Council conclusions, resolutions or debates was prepared and ERAC members and observers were asked to assess the potential impact of ERAC opinions as well as their uptake by the Commission and the Council in Member States and Associated Countries.

2. Key messages

- Most opinions given by Member States and Associated States showed medium or low impact of ERAC works.
- Many responses referred to difficulties in measuring effects of ERAC work. Those difficulties arise from tangible nature of effects, but also from complexity of the processes they influence. ERAC's mandate is to give advice at an early stage. It influences an opinion-forming process between Member States and Commission and affects in many feedback loops more or less the different opinion-forming processes in the Commission and the Member States again.
- Due to their specificity ERAC documents which do not have direct impact on national level (e.g. ERAC advice on the review of ERA-related Groups) had rather low impact assessed.
- Some documents were issued too late (e.g. ERAC opinion on the Relationship between the European Research Area and Horizon 2020) to have a direct, well visible and acknowledged impact.
- Some Member States and Associated Countries clearly stated impact on work on national documents. Indirect impact throughout "background knowledge" was also mentioned in many assessments. ERAC debates held with the view to prepare the Committee's opinions and reports provided access to tacit knowledge and they were assessed as valuable and inspiring.

- Most respondents stated that it is too early to judge on newly published documents (e.g. “ERAC Opinion on the European Research Area Progress Report 2013”.)
- High quality of ERAC work was acknowledged by many respondents, including Associated Countries. It was recognised as one of the factors increasing the potential of high impact and uptake.

3. Methodology

In the first step an overview of ERAC opinions issued since June 2010 and their uptake in Commission communications or other documents and in Council conclusions, resolutions or debates was prepared by the Commission and ERAC Secretariat (doc. ERAC 1213/13).

The overview was presented at the 17th meeting of ERAC on 12 December 2013 for a discussion on the methodology of it.

In the second step ERAC delegations were asked to give their assessment of the potential impact of both ERAC opinions and their uptake by the Commission and the Council in Member States and Associated Countries.

They were asked to send their input in time for the February meeting of the Committee (i.e. by 7 January 2014 at the latest).

On the basis of the discussion as well as of an input by Member States and Associated Countries, the Vice-Chair, on behalf of the Steering Board, was expected to present a monitoring report to the Committee at the 18th meeting in February 2014.

However, due to the limited number of responses (11) from the delegations, the deadline was extended till 14 February 2014 with a view to present the monitoring report to ERAC at its 19th meeting in March 2014. Additional 6 responses were given by the extended deadline.

4. Quantitative and qualitative findings

Up till the extended deadline 17 delegations (out of the total number of 41 ERAC delegations) responded. 12 responses came from Member States (BE, DK, EE, IE, MT, SE, UK, AT, CZ, DE, IT, NL) and 5 from Associated Countries (CH, IS, ME, NO, BA).

The numbers of responses is not satisfactory (slightly over 40% of responses, including almost 43% of Member States and over 38% of Associated Countries). It has to be underlined that ERAC members and observers had been asked to assess the potential impact of the work they do, so it should be of their interest to provide input to the survey, especially in case of ERAC members who have direct influence on EU policy and on whom the EU policy has direct impact as well.

Most answers showed medium or low impact of ERAC works. However, the most highly scored were “ERAC opinion on the "Common Strategic Framework" for Research, Technological Development and Innovation” and “ERAC opinion on the development of an ERA Framework”.

Most respondents assessed ERAC’s regular opinions on **Annual Growth Survey** as having medium impact. However, ERAC opinion on Annual Growth Survey 2013 was assessed as of high impact by 25% of respondents. So it could indicate the tendency of increasing impact of ERAC opinion on AGS over the years, if at the same time the equal fraction of responses did not indicate it as having low impact, which was the case.

ERAC advice on the review of ERA-related Groups³ (based on Council resolution of 3 December 2009 on the Enhanced Governance of the European Research Area⁴, which invited Member States and Commission to initiate a review of groups) did not have follow-up or reference in any Commission communication or any other document. It had impact on Council Conclusions on the development of the European Research Area (ERA) through ERA-related Groups⁵. The general assessment given in responses was that it had rather low impact (most of the answers) which is not a surprise as it does not have direct impact on national ground.

³ Doc. ERAC 1206/11 of 6 May 2011.

⁴ Official Journal C 323, 31.12.2009, p. 1-4.

⁵ Doc. 11032/11 of 1 June 2011.

Very diverse views were on ERAC opinion on the Relationship between the European Research Area and Horizon 2020 - from low to high. The ERAC opinion did not have direct follow-up nor was referred to in any Commission communication. It was neither referred to in any Council conclusions/resolution or debate either. This fact may lead to the conclusion that it was issued too late (in August/September 2012 the on-going negotiations were already concentrated on details of Horizon 2020 rather than on general issues related to it).

Most respondents stated that it is too early to judge on “ERAC Opinion on the European Research Area Progress Report 2013”. Indirect impact throughout “background know-ledge” was mentioned in many statements. A very interesting, although not unexpected, observation is that an explicit reference in national documents was very rare. Only few Member States and Associated Countries clearly stated impact on work on national documents.

At the same time - despite a moderate number of responses - the general positive feedback has to be noted. Many responses referred to difficulties in measuring effects of ERAC work. Those difficulties arise from tangible nature of effects, but also from complexity of the processes they influence. ERAC’s mandate is to give advice at an early stage. It influences an opinion-forming process between Member States and Commission and affects in many feedback loops more or less the different opinion-forming processes in the Commission and the Member States again.

High quality of ERAC work was acknowledged by many respondents, including Associated Countries. It was recognised as one of the factors increasing the potential of high impact and uptake. Also the adequate time and resources dedicated to developing ERAC opinions were appreciated in this context.

The debates at ERAC meetings held with the view to prepare the Committee’s opinions and reports were highly appreciated. It was underlined that they provide access to tacit knowledge and they were assessed as valuable and inspiring.

As far as procedure of ERAC impact assessment is concerned, it has to be underlined that a light monitoring procedure is expected in the future.

⁶ Doc. ERAC 1207/12 of 30 August 2012.

5. Conclusions

a) General

- (i) A limited number of responses given leads to the general conclusion that a culture of evaluating national systems on the national level exists, however there is no or there is **limited culture of assessing impact of EU decisions and opinions on the national ground**. Such culture should be promoted. It should be recommended to incorporate evaluation of impact of EU decisions and opinions in the national assessment systems.
- (ii) Despite a limited number of responses **the exercise proved to be useful** as it leads to some interesting conclusions and recommendations. Thus there is a need to continue the assessment in the future.

b) Methodology

The current assessment of the potential impact of both ERAC opinions and their uptake by the Commission and the Council in Member States and Associated Countries seemed to be **too complex** to produce tangible results.

Its complexity may be also the reason for so moderate response.

c) Substantial outcome

This first exercise, though with yet limited feedback, showed a **clear impact of ERAC works on the Commission and Council activities** but only a **certain impact on both Member States and Associated Countries policies**. In some cases ERAC opinions played important role in shaping national policy documents or inspiring a policy debate on national level, while in others they had limited or no impact.

6. Recommendations for further work

a) Methodology

Before the next stage of monitoring is launched there is a need for further discussion related to demonstrability of both direct and indirect impact. In that context it is important to re-discuss methodology and timing of the exercise.

It is recommended that next stages are very well focused on clearly defined objectives.

In the next stages a distinction should be made between impact on (i) preparation of documents, (ii) discussion and decision and (iii) implementation stages.

b) Scope

It is recommended to focus future exercises on an assessment of the potential impact of ERAC opinions in Member States and Associated States only (an assessment of uptake of ERAC works on national level). If the expected impact is low – the remit of the opinion should be changed or no opinion should be developed.

Regarding **Commission and Council documents ERAC should continue to track impact of them.** However, such process should be conducted in a lighter manner than it has been done now – without putting additional assessment or reporting burden on Member States and Associated Countries.

c) Reduce administrative burden on Member States and Associated Countries

It is recommended to streamline ERAC impact assessment process with other reporting activities.

As ERA Progress Report seems to be a major reporting tool to measure progress of the development of ERA, it is recommended to prepare next ERAC impact assessment as an important input to the next ERA Progress Report to be prepared in 2016 and continue the ERAC impact assessment on biennial basis in line with ERA Progress Report cycle.

d) Improve impact

To maximise impact of ERAC work it is recommended to carry out an ex-ante assessment of possible impact for each initiative of the Committee (a report, opinion etc.).

Such an ex-ante assessment should be based on critical review of possible consequences of ERAC work seen through different dimensions like timing, relevance and policy interest.

Deeper involvement of Member States and Associated Countries in assessing impact of ERAC opinions will help

- ERAC to fully utilize its potential and influence on the EU policy and better structure its future activity orientations and strategies,
- ERAC members and observers to better align their national strategies with the European one, by that facilitating to achieve a true ERA.

It should be a continuous learning process with benefits for all its participants.
