

EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

– ERAC –
Secretariat

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ERAC 1214/14

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: Delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the extraordinary meeting of ERAC, held in
Brussels (BE) on 7 November 2014

Delegations will find attached to this Note the summary conclusions of the extraordinary meeting of ERAC, held in Brussels (BE) on 7 November 2014.

Chair: Robert-Jan Smits, Director-General DG RTD

Secretariat: General Secretariat of the Council

Present: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom (27).

Absent: Croatia, Slovenia (2).

1. Review of the ERA-related groups and the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the ERA advisory structure

Discussions were based on the Note from the ERAC Steering Board to ERAC Members (high level) of 27 October 2014 ("Options for the review of the ERA-related groups and the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the ERA advisory structure"). This Note includes an Introduction and three Questions. Questions 2 and 3 were taken in reverse order at the meeting.

Question 1: The structure of the ERA-related groups

Option 1: Permanent groups covering all six ERA Priorities

In this Option, the existing seven ERA advisory groups (hereafter: Groups) will be realigned to the six ERA Priorities in the following manner:

Priority 1: More effective national research systems (**ERAC**)

Priority 2: Optimal transnational cooperation and competition, subdivided into a) jointly addressing grand challenges (**GPC**), and b) research infrastructures (**ESFRI**)

Priority 3: Open labour market for researchers (**SGHRM**)

Priority 4: Gender equality and mainstreaming in research (**Helsinki Group**)

Priority 5: Optimal circulation, access to and transfer of scientific knowledge, including via digital ERA (**KT**, although its mandate will need to be adjusted)

Priority 6: International dimension (**SFIC**).

The following Member States expressed themselves in favour of Option 1: AT, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, IE, IT, NL, FR, PL, PT, RO, SE, UK, and the Commission delegate.

Option 2: Permanent groups (until 2020) covering only those ERA Priorities that are thought by Member States to require the greatest effort to achieve ERA (in the context of the ERA Roadmap)

The following Member States expressed themselves in favour of Option 2: BE, CY, EL, HU, LT, MT.

Member States made the following comments.

There was an urgent need to address the governance issue and link up the work of the Groups better with all stakeholders, especially the Council Presidency programmes, including Council meetings (AT, RO).

The importance of building on the experience and work that has been done was noted (PT, EL, DK, EE). Groups should not be permanent; fixed term mandates would give flexibility to adjust to evolving advisory needs and establish new groups (ES, FI, IE), noting the need for a regular assessment of their performance (BE). Groups should have forward-looking, time-limited mandates (SE, UK), whilst avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach (CZ, DK). There was a need to develop joint / aligned work programmes (NL) and ERAC should have a strategic coordinating role (NL). The ERA-related groups should report to ERAC, which should in its turn report to Council, Commission and/or Member States (BE, EL, ES, LT, MT, NL, PT).

FR stressed the importance to discuss first the role, mission and strategic objectives of ERAC before addressing the structure of the existing Groups or proposing to create any new one such as the European Network for Anticipatory Governance in Research and Innovation which aims, among others, at supporting the functioning of the ERA. HU supported this view. Whatever the structural changes, FR added that there should be no "subordination" of any ERA-related group to ERAC and Groups should keep their present statutory position.

Other MS supported these views (CZ, IE, IT, SE). DE concurred decisions on the structure of the groups should not be discussed first as they would be meaningless without discussion and clarification of the role and function of ERAC itself, also in view of overlaps with the High Level Group on Competitiveness and Growth, on which ERAC had not been able to discuss. SE stated that the detailed structures should not be discussed too early in the process.

Further consideration should be given to the level and type (expert vs. political) of representation in the advisory groups as Groups should not duplicate the work of Council preparatory bodies *stricto sensu* (CZ, LT). Some specific remarks were made relating to the following Groups: ESFRI is a Member State responsibility and any revision of its mandate should therefore come from the Council (FR); GPC's mandate should be extended beyond joint programming to include other kinds of partnership (HU); A new Group should be created for ERA Priority 1 (NL); Priority 1 ought to be dealt with by ERAC itself (ES).

The Chair concluded as follows:

1. Option 1 will be retained, with stronger coordination among the Groups, while it should be recognised that there is no one size that fits all.
2. The mandates would need to be redefined to be forward looking and have a limited time duration. There is also a need for joint work programmes for the Groups, to maximise the impact of activities.

Question 2: the ERAC Steering Board

The Options Paper (p. 8) suggests to put the Steering Board (SB) in the lead in developing the strategy, the mechanisms and the procedures for coordinating the work of all advisory groups, as well as proposing and assigning the R&I policy tasks and negotiating the work programmes and the meeting frequency of the advisory groups.

The Options Paper also suggests a new composition of the future Steering Board, which is to be made up of: Vice-Chair of ERAC (chairing the Board); the ERAC Chair; the Chairs of the Groups; two elected ERAC delegates; two Presidency representatives: one of the incumbent Presidency and one of incoming Presidency. — The Chair clarified that the Steering Board should coordinate the setting of common agendas of the Groups and the drawing up of common work programmes and new mandates of all Groups. The current Steering Board could be renamed to reflect its new remit.

Most Member States agreed to the proposed new composition of the Steering Board.

Comments included: Clarity that SB should be *steering* and *coordinating* the work of the Groups rather than controlling it or assuming a top-down approach (CZ, DE, FR, IE, IT, PT). IT proposed that, according to its new function(s) the SB could be re-named as ERA Steering Board. Groups should be free to plan their own work programmes (CZ, FR) and calendar (FR). Some delegations were opposed to this new structure, as it is unclear how responsibilities will be split up. The statutory independence of some Groups is not compatible with SB coordination arrangements as discussed (ES); a "light" SB would not work, as what was needed primarily were better reporting lines and adjusted mandates (AT).

The Chair concluded as follows:

1. There was broad support from Member States that the composition of the future Steering Board will be as set out in the Options Paper, it being understood that the *Chairs* of the Groups will be members of the Board with the aim of working together in "partnership".
2. It is understood that the Board will focus on *coordinating* the advisory work of the Groups. There will be *no controlling or top down role* for the new Board. The Steering Board should ensure overall coherence of the work programmes of the Groups and their timetables for delivery. It should also prepare the meetings of ERAC.

Question 3: Options for the ERAC Chair

Option 1: The Commission keeps the chairmanship of ERAC and the Vice-Chair is elected from the Member States' delegates

The following Member States expressed themselves in favour of Option 1: BE, BG, CY, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, IE, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PT, RO.

Option 2: A Member State representative chairs ERAC and the Commission takes on the vice-chairmanship

The following Member States expressed themselves in favour of Option 2: AT, CZ, DE, FR, IT, PL. (Chair to be elected from among Trio Presidency representatives, IT).

HU, SE and UK emphasised the partnership approach, which according to the UK could point to *joint chairmanship* by the Commission and a MS representative (an option that would also be acceptable to BG). HU and SE were flexible on the issue of who will chair ERAC in the future.

Other Member States made the following comments: Chairmanship issue is less sensitive if there is agreement on restructuring the Groups (IE). Small MS do not have the resources to chair ERAC (IE, FI, PT, UK, EE, MT). The Commission was recognised for its technical input (DK, MT, EL), its impartial role (DK) and its expertise and resources to chair (EL). It should be a partnership (NL, UK, BE, SE, BG) and the strengthened role of the Steering Board enhanced the role of the Vice-Chair / MS (PT, FI).

DE stated that the chairmanship issue is decisive for the future existence of all Groups as it could not be separated from the question which role ERAC should have and how its impact could be strengthened in a joint effort; that dissolving all groups should be considered if this issue is not solved in a satisfactory manner; that ERA is principally a MS responsibility; given the fact that decisions on 80% of expenditure on R&I in ERA are under the responsibility of MS, therefore MS should chair ERAC; the expectations concerning greater prominence of ERAC are very high if Commission retains the chairmanship; continuation of the status quo was not an option; and no option for the future of either ERAC or all of the Groups together should be excluded if ERAC fails to live up to these expectations.

The Chair recalled that the "ERA project" is a common project between MS, COM and Stakeholders and the Treaty refers to shared responsibility between the Union and MS to coordinate research activities.

The Chair concluded as follows:

1. A majority of MS are in favour of Option 1, emphasising the need for a Partnership approach.
2. Given the wishes expressed by several MS to reform ERAC and to increase the level of representation, the Director-General of DG RTD will chair the ERAC meetings *in persona* from January 2015 onwards.

Other, related issues

1. BE, DE, FR, HU, IE and SE asked for an in-depth discussion *at high representation level* on the strategic role, the mandate and ways to increase the impact of ERAC itself, also arguing that high-ranking officials would not come to ERAC meetings if ERAC were not changed. IE thought such a discussion should not put into question the outcome of the present discussions on the three Questions raised in the Options Paper and as reflected in these Summary Conclusions.

The Chair concluded as follows:

1. A *high-level* ERAC meeting will be organised at the beginning of 2015 as a follow-up to the present meeting and in order to discuss the role, the mandate, and ways to increase the impact of ERAC's work, as ERAC lacks sufficient impact and visibility at the moment. ERAC members ought to be senior officials in order to achieve these desiderata.
2. The Chair invited FR to prepare a discussion paper for this strategic debate, all MS being welcome to contribute to this.

DE and FR expressed their misgivings about the setting up of the 'European Network for Anticipatory Governance in Research and Innovation' arguing no new group aimed at supporting the functioning of the ERA should be created before debate on ERA governance is concluded; besides, forward-looking activities could very well be taken up by ERAC if there is an agreement to make ERAC more strategic.

The Chair promised to look into the matter.
