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Subject: Council conclusions on European Research Area Progress Report 2014

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on European Research Area Progress Report 2014 as adopted by the Council ("Competitiveness") at its meeting on 5 December 2014.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA PROGRESS
REPORT 2014

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

- Its Conclusions of 29 May 2008 on the "Ljubljana Process - Towards realisation of ERA"¹ in which it sets out general orientations on ERA and of 2 December 2008 on the definition of a 2020 vision for ERA²;
- Its Conclusions of 26 November 2010 on the "Europe 2020 flagship initiative Innovation Union: Accelerating the transformation of Europe through innovation in a fast changing world"³ confirming that a well-functioning and coherent ERA is an integral part of the Innovation Union to strengthen the knowledge base in Europe;
- The Conclusions of the European Council of 3-4 February 2011⁴ which confirmed that Europe needs a unified research area to attract talent and investment and called for the completion of the ERA by 2014, including by addressing any remaining gaps in order to create a genuine single market for knowledge, research and innovation, as confirmed by the European Council of 2 March 2012⁵, and recalled in its Conclusions of 29 June 2012⁶ and of 18-19 October 2012⁷;

¹ Doc. 10231/08
² Official Journal C 25, 31.1.2009, p.1-4
³ Doc. 17165/10
⁴ Doc. EUCO 2/11
⁵ Doc. EUCO 4/3/12 REV 3
⁶ Doc. EUCO 76/12
⁷ Doc. EUCO 156/12

- Its Conclusions of 11 December 2012⁸, endorsing the Commission Communication on 'A reinforced European research area partnership for excellence and growth'⁹, including the setting-up by the Commission of a robust ERA Monitoring Mechanism, followed by a first Commission ERA Progress Report 2013¹⁰, acknowledging the state-of-play of ERA implementation at both national and European level;
 - The Conclusions of the European Council of 24-25 October 2013¹¹ which note the need to accelerate structural reforms of national systems and to strengthen progress monitoring based on robust data provided by Member States in view of obtaining a full European Research Area by the end of 2014;
 - Its Conclusions of 21 February 2014 on the progress report from the Commission on European Research Area (ERA) 2013 which noted the progress in delivering the ERA and called for the development of an ERA roadmap by mid-2015.
 - The need for close cooperation with Associated Countries in the development of ERA, and NOTING their contributions to the ERA Progress Report 2014;
 - The ERAC opinion on the 2014 ERA Progress Report
1. EMPHASIZES that the ERA remains a major EU policy objective and the cornerstone of the Innovation Union flagship initiative of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the full integration of the ERA principles in this flagship initiative boosts jobs, growth and competitiveness.
 2. REAFFIRMS therefore the need for Member States to improve the conditions for research, development and innovation, in particular with the aim of raising public and private investment levels in this sector, in the view of reaching the EU target of investing 3% of EU GDP in research and development by 2020.

⁸ Doc. 17649/12

⁹ Doc. 12848/12

¹⁰ Doc. 13812/13

¹¹ Doc. EUCO 169/13

3. ACKNOWLEDGES that the ERA partnership has made good progress in delivering ERA and that the conditions for implementing a well-functioning ERA, set out in the Communication on a reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth, are now in place. Although much has already been achieved, further efforts of the Commission, Member States and research stakeholders are needed to make the ERA fully operational, whilst recognising that the full completion of the ERA is a long term process and the paths, depending on the national contexts, can differ among Member States.
4. ACKNOWLEDGES that the second ERA Progress Report 2014 provides a view of the progress towards the achievement of ERA and AGREES with the findings of the Report that the completion of ERA remains a gradual process and that more efforts are needed. It is now mainly up to the Member States and research stakeholders to implement the necessary ERA related reforms and, with the support of the Commission, to make the ERA fully operational and fully functioning.
5. REAFFIRMS its support to develop by mid-2015 an ERA roadmap at the European level, which will provide a shared understanding of the ERA principles and concrete measures to implement them, together with a set of tools and best practices to support Member States in closing the research and innovation divide, developing and implementing their policies according to their respective specificities and priorities. The ERA roadmap will serve the purpose of guiding Member States and the Commission, in its support to the Member States, in implementing the ERA in their respective areas of responsibility. And therefore the Member States are called upon to take into account the ERA implementation when developing voluntary action plans and/or strategies.

6. EMPHASIZES that the Member States are the primary actors in developing the ERA reforms at national level and promote their implementation by research and innovation stakeholders. ENCOURAGES Member States to further identify key actions, through their national and regional research and innovation strategies, and to embed key measures in their National Reform Programmes in the context of the European Semester, including the synergies with the use of the European Structural and Investments Funds.
7. NOTES that fiscal consolidation affects R&D investments which are among the main sources of future growth and job creation. ACKNOWLEDGES that all Member States have adopted their specific R&I strategies; RECOGNISES the need to intensify our efforts to raise the quality and impact of public spending on research and innovation in accordance with these strategies. RECOGNISES the importance of “mutual policy learning” as well as the use of peer reviews and other initiatives to foster a better understanding of the impact of R&I policies.
8. INVITES the Member States to further strengthen their commitment to the Joint Programming Process in order to strategically coordinate and align, where possible, their specific strategies, research programmes and activities with the strategic research agendas developed within the Joint Programming Initiatives, aiming at better jointly tackling grand societal challenges; WELCOMES the use of Horizon 2020 funding instruments to improve supporting Joint Programming and encourage the related process of alignment, where possible and appropriate.

9. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to launch a debate with the Member States, in the framework of Joint Programming, aiming at achieving a better level of coordination and of alignment, where possible and appropriate, of national R&I strategies and investments to increase the impact at the EU level on the societal challenges. INVITES the Commission to prepare and conduct this debate together with Member States.
10. While RECOGNISING the great efforts made by Member States to strategically plan their investments in research infrastructures, NOTES the need for further coordination of country specific and European roadmaps on research infrastructures and of national funding decisions for the development and operation of research infrastructures, including those identified by ESFRI. STRESSES that the appropriate Horizon 2020 funding instrument should seek to be coherent with the ESFRI priorities and financial commitments agreed by Member States.
11. WELCOMES the progress reported by the Commission in its first Report on the implementation of the ERIC Regulation, and INVITES the Commission to present the next ERIC implementation Report by 2017. INVITES the Commission and Member States to take appropriate measures to facilitate the use of the ERIC instrument and to stimulate investments in ERICs and other ESFRI Roadmap Infrastructures, for example as concerns in-kind contributions.
12. UNDERLINES the evidence that open and attractive research systems go hand in hand with strong innovation performance. CALLS on all the ERA actors to work together to ensure that open, transparent and merit based recruitment of researchers becomes and remains a landmark of all national research systems, being also a pre-requisite for fostering all modalities of researchers' mobility, including across different sectors, e.g. between industry and academia.

13. NOTES the persistence of gender bias in careers, of gender imbalance in decision-making roles, as well as the lack of a gender dimension in most of the national research programmes. INVITES therefore Member States to support gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities.
14. CALLS on all the ERA actors to adequately tackle the remaining gaps in the area of open access to scientific publications resulting from publicly funded research and digital infrastructures and to explore the conditions under which open access to publicly funded research data is appropriate taking into account the legitimate interests of the parties involved.
15. CALLS also on all the ERA actors to adequately address the remaining gaps in the exploitation of results and in the area of effective knowledge circulation between public and private sectors, underlining the importance of actions for promoting engagement from actors with the translation of knowledge into value and better quality of life of the citizens.
16. UNDERLINES that the success of ERA will mainly depend on research reflecting society's needs and challenges, and so INVITES the Member States to promote country specific policies and actions to encourage and facilitate the joint involvement of all stakeholders, including citizens and civil society organisations, in research and innovation activities.
17. RECALLING that the international dimension remains an important and integral part of the ERA, INVITES the Commission together with the Member States to better integrate this dimension in the ERA Monitoring Mechanism and in the next ERA Progress Report. UNDERLINES that the importance of the international dimension requires not only its mainstreaming as a fully integrated part in all the ERA priorities but also its strengthening as a specific priority of the ERA.

18. REAFFIRMS the importance of monitoring the ERA progress and CALLS ON the Commission to further improve the ERA Monitoring Mechanism in close cooperation with the Member States, and possibly collaborating with other relevant providers of comprehensive statistical databases, also through ERAC and other ERA-related groups, and in consultation with research stakeholder organisations. INVITES Member States and the Commission to strive to increase the representativeness of the responses to future surveys in order to improve the data collection, the statistical significance and the robustness of the analysis in the next ERA Progress Report.

 19. REAFFIRMS that a fully functioning ERA needs a well-structured and effective governance with a more enhanced role of Member States. INVITES therefore ERAC to discuss and propose a reform of the ERA-related governance by 2015.
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