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Delegations will find annexed to this Note the ERAC Opinion on the 2018 review of the ERA advisory structure, as adopted at the ERAC plenary on 17-18 September 2018.



REVIEW OF THE ERA ADVISORY STRUCTURE 2018

Final Report

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1. Review: Recommendations	1
1.1 <u>Cross-cutting Issues and Future Developments of the ERA</u>	1
1.1.1 <u>ERA Priorities</u>	1
1.1.2 <u>ERA Advisory Structure</u>	1
1.1.3 <u>Relations with the European Commission, Council and Council Presidencies</u>	2
1.1.4 <u>ERA Monitoring and Reporting System</u>	2
1.1.5 <u>Links between ERA and Framework Programmes (FPs)</u>	2
1.1.6 <u>Impact and Outreach of the ERA-related Groups</u>	3
1.1.7 <u>Procedures and Working Conditions</u>	3
1.2 <u>European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)</u>	3
1.3 <u>High Level Group for Joint Programming (GPC)</u>	3
1.4 <u>European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)</u>	3
1.5 <u>SWG on Human Resources and Mobility (HRM)</u>	4
1.6 <u>SWG on Gender in Research and Innovation (GRI)</u>	4
1.7 <u>SWG on Open Science and Innovation (OSI)</u>	4
1.8 <u>Strategic Forum for international S&T Cooperation (SFIC)</u>	4
2. Annex: Main Results (Conclusions and Recommendations by the Rapporteur Team)	5
2.1 <u>Cross-cutting Issues and Future Developments of the ERA</u>	5
2.1.1 <u>ERA Priorities</u>	5
2.1.2 <u>ERA Advisory Structure</u>	7
2.1.3 <u>Relations with the European Commission, Council and Council Presidencies</u>	8
2.1.4 <u>ERA Monitoring and Reporting System</u>	9
2.1.5 <u>Links between ERA and Framework Programmes (FPs)</u>	10
2.1.6 <u>Impact and Outreach of the ERA-related Groups</u>	11
2.1.7 <u>Procedures and Working Conditions</u>	12
2.2 <u>European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)</u>	12
2.3 <u>High Level Group for Joint Programming (GPC)</u>	14
2.4 <u>European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)</u>	16
2.5 <u>SWG on Human Resources and Mobility (HRM)</u>	17
2.6 <u>SWG on Gender in Research and Innovation (GRI)</u>	19
2.7 <u>SWG on Open Science and Innovation (OSI)</u>	21
2.8 <u>Strategic Forum for international S&T Cooperation (SFIC)</u>	22



1. REVIEW: RECOMMENDATIONS

This review examines the advisory structure of the European Research and Innovation Area (ERA) based on (i) the Terms of Reference for the 2018 Review of the ERA advisory structure (WK 992/2018 IN-IT), (ii) the Council Conclusions of 1 December 2015 on the Review of the ERA advisory structure (doc. 14875/15) and (iii) the ERAC Opinion on the review of the European Research Area advisory structure (ERAC 1212/15 Annex D). The Swiss ERAC delegation (Philipp Langer, rapporteur, and Lisa Müller) and Kari Balke Øiseth (former ERAC delegate for Norway) were mandated by ERAC to conduct the review of the ERA advisory structure.

The present review is based on three different sources of evidence. First, the mandated delegations conducted a documentary analysis for the period covered by the review (2016-2018), assessing the output and the performance of the ERA-related groups measured against the mandates, as well as the work programmes of the groups and the objectives of the ERA Priorities. Second, the Chairs of all ERA-related groups were given the opportunity to provide a short self-assessment report. Third, the rapporteur team developed and deployed an online survey, inviting all ERAC delegations including the Co-Chairs and the European Commission (EC), as well as the Chairs of all other ERA-related groups, the Council Presidencies of the examined period (2016-2018), the Council Secretariat and the organisations of the ERA Stakeholder Platform to participate. The rapporteur team would like to thank all involved persons for their time devoted to this exercise and for the very valuable and detailed input.

In addition, the rapporteur team conducted interviews with key players, notably the Co-Chairs of ERAC (Jean-Eric Paquet and Christian Naczinsky), Carsten Pillath (Director-General of the Council General Secretariat), several Chairs of the other ERA-related groups as well as representatives from the ERA Stakeholder Platform organisations.

The review consists of several parts, starting with an overview of the recommendations. They are derived from the main results (conclusions and recommendations made by the rapporteur team) which can be found in the annex of this review (see chapter 2). Finally, a separate Technical Annex describes the summarised findings of the documentary analysis, the self-assessment reports by the Chairs of each ERA-related group as well as the aggregated numerical results of the online survey in graphical form. Furthermore, the Technical Annex also presents detailed information on the methodology used.

1.1 Cross-cutting Issues and Future Developments of the ERA

1.1.1 ERA Priorities

1. Keep the current ERA Priorities at this time. However, expand the scope of ERA Priority 2a (jointly addressing grand challenges) to include the new approach on partnerships, which should also take into account the missions of Horizon Europe. For the time being, embed emerging needs for new activities into existing ERA Priorities.
2. ERAC advises the European Commission to publish in due time a new ERA communication for the period beyond 2020, which should revise the priorities and their actions included in the 2012 ERA Communication and examine possible new priorities, against the background of the changes in the R&I landscape since 2012. Such a new Communication could be complemented by a Ministerial ERA Conference in 2020 as an opportunity for priority-setting.

1.1.2 ERA Advisory Structure

3. Keep and strengthen ERAC's superordinate role in the ERA advisory structure.
4. Explore options to relaunch the existing GPC to prepare Member States' and Associated Countries' participation in the strategic coordinating process for partnerships, once its design and the design of missions is decided in the appropriate forum.

5. Consider back-to-back or even joint meetings of ERA-related groups where many synergies with regard to content and target groups exist (such as SWG HRM and SWG GRI, or GPC and SFIC). In the medium term, examine options to reduce the number of groups while ensuring adequate coverage of all aspects of ERA Priorities.
6. Consider the possibility of organising future work within the ERA Advisory Structure to be carried out more often in ad-hoc Working Groups of ERAC rather than in permanent ERA-related groups. This applies notably for newly emerging topics, whose longer-lasting relevance needs to be clarified, addressing the fact that certain ERA Priorities arise but then lose focus.
7. Keep the Research Policy Group (RPG) separate from the ERA advisory structure, as an informal and independent brainstorming platform with ad-hoc topics of particular interest to participants.

1.1.3 Relations with the European Commission, Council and Council Presidencies

8. Clarify the role of the European Commission in each ERA-related group to ensure efficient, constructive and consistent participation in all groups. Examine also whether a stronger involvement of the Joint Research Centre JRC (e.g. preparing background material) might be interesting and useful for the activities of the ERA-related groups.
9. Make sure that all ERA-related groups have optimal conditions in their efforts to realise the goals set in the ERA roadmap. This includes resources to strengthen their activities, increased visibility (including web visibility), resources for secretariat and expert assistance. In particular, find a long-term solution regarding meeting venues for SWG HRM, SWG GRI and SWG OSI.
10. Increase coordination between Council Presidency priorities and the agendas of the ERA-related groups, by earlier involvement of future Council Presidencies in the ERAC Steering Board.

1.1.4 ERA Monitoring and Reporting System

11. With a view to the next programming period starting in 2021, the indicators of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism (EMM) should be reviewed and improved. To do so, an ERA-wide study on the current relevance and future potential of the existing ERA indicators could be launched, ensuring alignment with other relevant processes such as in the OECD or work of the Joint Research Centre (JRC). This process could be steered by a reinstated ad-hoc ERAC Working Group on Monitoring. As a result, the EMM (with the current eight headline indicators) will be based on more adequate data than is the case now.
12. Set up a coherent and yet lean monitoring tool on national progress towards all ERA Priorities to be used across all ERA-related groups. The system should be very simple, to accommodate the different national systems and situations with minimal administrative burden. Given that national progress towards ERA Priorities is a national responsibility, individual countries are allowed to opt out from using the tool without hindering others to benefit from it. The tool developed by GPC to follow up the implementation of the countries' individual priorities could be investigated and possibly adapted for use by other ERA-related groups.
13. Explore options to better articulate the 'ERA National Action Plans' (NAPs) with the European Semester. Consider carefully if and how NAPs should continue to be a tool of ERA policy-making in the future.
14. Strengthen the exploitation of results of Policy Support Facility (PSF) related activities and of other ERA-related evidence.

1.1.5 Links between ERA and Framework Programmes (FPs)

15. Encourage the European Commission, Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC) to look at ERA and the Framework Programme from a systemic point of view.
16. Make more explicit the inter-linkages between the Horizon Europe pillars and activities on the one hand, and the ERA Priorities on the other hand. Outline this possibly as an ERAC Opinion before the start of the new Framework Programme. This could also allow better alignment between Horizon Europe and national R&I investments, as recommended in the Lamy report.
17. Examine how specific support measures on ERA Priorities in the FP could be increased, in addition to the funding measures. This would further increase synergies between ERA Priorities and the FP.

1.1.6 Impact and Outreach of the ERA-related Groups

18. Consider ways to improve the dissemination and valorisation of all ERA-related groups' outputs and to increase their impact and relevance for ERA Stakeholders, EU Presidencies and Member States / Associated Countries, e.g. through regular ERA-related events, as well as through enhanced visibility. In particular, consider updated websites for ERAC and the other ERA-related groups containing mandates, lists of delegates, reports etc. in a way compatible with Council regulations, or link the group's work to platforms such as OECD/EC's 'STIP Compass'. The Austrian ERA website can serve as a good-practice example. All groups should develop an output, communication and impact strategy, in order to improve visibility and uptake of recommendations by different target groups.
19. Increase the use of the expertise present within ERA stakeholder organisations in the ERA-related groups. Explore options to increase direct exchanges between concerned ERA-related groups and e.g. the ERA Stakeholder Platform, such as inviting members of the ERA Stakeholder Platform to selected meetings of concerned ERA-related groups.
20. To foster exchanges and discussions about common policy interests between ERA and the EHEA, examine the possibility of an annual back-to-back meeting between ERAC and the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and/or DG Higher Education.

1.1.7 Procedures and Working Conditions

21. Member States and Associated Countries need to make sure to be represented in the ERA-related groups (including their working groups) by competent representatives from national authorities and, if appropriate, additional national experts.
22. Ensure that the mandates of all ERA-related groups give each group a clear mission with concrete and tangible tasks, while allowing it to respond to newly emerging topics.
23. The work programmes of each ERA-related group need to be more concise, concrete and targeted. The competences expected from delegates should be clarified and properly communicated. Furthermore, meeting documents should be substantial and sent in due time. Drop the possibility of interpretation services given that also ERAC does not use interpretation any longer.

1.2 European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)

24. Introduce an explicit reference to ERA Priority 1 into the ERAC mandate.
25. Increase the focus on substantial discussions around ERA Priority 1. The ERAC Steering Board should make sure to draft balanced plenary agendas in terms of strategic discussions and information items. In this sense, also make the interactions with the other ERA-related groups more strategic.
26. Where appropriate, adapt the organisation and working conditions of ERAC: In particular, explore new ways to stimulate debates during plenary meetings, such as e.g. the use of break-out sessions, or circulation beforehand of background papers that highlight central questions for debate.

1.3 High Level Group for Joint Programming (GPC)

27. Explore options to relaunch the existing GPC to prepare Member States' and Associated Countries' participation in the strategic coordinating process for partnerships, once its design and the design of missions is decided in the appropriate forum (see recommendation 4).
28. Seek the best organisational form for this new 'GPC 2.0', either as a configuration of ERAC or in closer cooperation and co-ownership with the Commission.

1.4 European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)

29. ESFRI functions in a very effective and efficient way, therefore no substantial changes in its organisation or procedures are needed.

30. Explore ways to further increase the transparency of the evaluation process of research infrastructures for the ESFRI roadmap, e.g. by enhancing the role of external experts in the evaluation and monitoring of projects.
31. Explore ways to simplify processes and reduce the workload, e.g. by prolonging the roadmap update cycle.

1.5 SWG on Human Resources and Mobility (HRM)

32. Make the responsibility for ERA Priority 3 more explicit in the mandate of SWG HRM. On the one hand, a direct reference to ERA Priority 3 needs to be included under the objectives. On the other hand, the top action priority according to the ERA Roadmap should be integrated.
33. Consider back-to-back or even joint meetings between SWG HRM and SWG GRI, given the many synergies between the two groups with regard to their content and target groups (also see recommendation 5).

1.6 SWG on Gender in Research and Innovation (GRI)

34. The interactions with other ERA-related groups should be intensified, given that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue.
35. Consider back-to-back or even joint meetings between SWG GRI and SWG HRM, given the many synergies between the two groups with regard to their content and target groups (also see recommendation 5).

1.7 SWG on Open Science and Innovation (OSI)

36. Revisit the mandate of SWG OSI, in order to give the group a clear mission with concrete and tangible tasks, while allowing it to respond to newly emerging topics in a fast developing field. In its current version, the mandate appears too fragmented and too diffuse in certain areas.
37. Make more efforts to pay equal attention to Open Science and Open Innovation topics. One approach could be to work more often in focused sub-groups or meet in different configurations, to deal with the increasingly complex fields of Open Science and Open Innovation.
38. Clarify the position of SWG OSI with regard to other working and expert groups active in Open Science.
39. Improve the organisation of the group (more time for feedback and to prepare meetings, structure of meetings).

1.8 Strategic Forum for international S&T Cooperation (SFIC)

40. The SFIC mandate should specify more clearly whom the group is supposed to advise. In relation to this, clarification of the group's main purpose is needed: dealing with the international cooperation dimension within the FPs or fostering exchanges between MS/AC about their international S&T cooperation policies. Such a clarification may also help defining more strategic and targeted activities and, in consequence, contribute to increase SFIC's impact.
41. SFIC should improve its working dynamic. This includes more substantial meeting documents and a timely distribution thereof.
42. SFIC needs to consider ways to increase the quality and impact of its opinions and reports.
43. Keep SFIC as a configuration of ERAC (including travel reimbursement and access to Council premises for plenary meetings).

2. ANNEX: MAIN RESULTS (CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE RAPPORTEUR TEAM)

This Annex contains the conclusions by the rapporteur team that form the basis for the recommendations in chapter 1 of this report. For better visibility, the corresponding recommendations of chapter 1 are repeated after each related topic also in this chapter.

The conclusions in this chapter combine findings from the following sources:

- The *documentary analysis* performed by the review team for each ERA-related group (work programmes and output measured against a group's mandate and the objectives of the corresponding ERA Priority);
- The *self-assessment* report provided by the Chair(s) of each ERA-related group;
- The *online survey* developed by the rapporteur team and deployed to all ERAC delegations including the Co-Chairs and the European Commission (EC), to the Chairs of all other ERA-related groups, to the Council Presidencies of the examined period (2016-2018), to the Council Secretariat and to the organisations of the ERA Stakeholder Platform;
- The *interviews* that the review team conducted with key players, notably the Co-Chairs of ERAC (Jean-Eric Paquet and Christian Naczinsky), the Director-General of the Council General Secretariat (Carsten Pillath), several Chairs of the other ERA-related groups as well as representatives from the ERA Stakeholder Platform organisations.

As requested by ERAC delegations, the rapporteur team has implemented a large number of open-ended questions in the online survey where comments, suggestions and evaluations could be given in *text form*, in addition to the closed, *numeric* questions that assessed opinions on a scale from 0 to 100.

A large part of the conclusions formulated in this Annex consists of concrete suggestions or ideas. These stem directly from the numerous text replies in the questionnaire. They were either formulated exactly the way they are posted here, or are a result of grouping several text replies that go in the same direction. Text replies were more outspoken than the numeric replies. This explains the sometimes apparent contradiction between (i) the text replies to a given question taken up in the conclusions here and (ii) the mean numeric reply to that same question. The aggregated numeric replies are available in the separate Technical Annex to this report; in this chapter, the numeric results are normally only summed up in descriptive terms and used to identify trends.

When compiling together all text replies received during the online consultation, one receives 77 pages (format A4) filled with text. The large volume of text replies includes a wealth of information and suggestions of excellent quality, proving the amount of knowledge available among the consulted stakeholders. To honour this knowledge appropriately, the rapporteur team has taken up as many statements as possible in the present conclusions. They indicate thus deliberately a *variety of opinions* and are not to be confounded with the *recommendations* in chapter 1 of this review, which is the part subject to consensus among ERAC delegations.

2.1 Cross-cutting Issues and Future Developments of the ERA

2.1.1 ERA Priorities

Conclusions

- According to the survey, there is overall good progress in achieving the objectives of the ERA Priorities (mean value of 68 on a scale from 0 to 100).
- On average, there is strong support for all the present ERA Priorities. According to the majority of replies to the survey, ERA Priorities 1 (effective national research systems), 2b (make optimal use of public investments in research infrastructures), 3 (open labour market for researchers), 4 (gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research) and 6 (international cooperation) should be kept. ERA priority 5 (optimal circulation and transfer of scientific knowledge) should be kept according to

half of the replies and modified according to some 40%. In contrast, ERA priority 2a (jointly addressing grand challenges) should be adapted according to the majority of replies.

- Detailed replies concerning optimisations of the ERA Priorities indicate:
 - Priority 1 (effective national research systems): This Priority is up-to-date and valid but actually not mentioned in the mandate of ERAC (see chapter 2.2 on ERAC).
 - Priority 2a (jointly addressing grand challenges): The scope should be enlarged to include the new approach on partnerships, taking into account the missions of Horizon Europe and the need for a more systemic approach, rationalisation, more openness and more impact.
 - Priority 2b (research infrastructures) could be more embedded in regional innovation ecosystems and smart specialisation strategies. Otherwise, this priority is up to date and works well. The ‘sub-priorities’ 2a and 2b could be modified and joined into a single priority.
 - Priority 3 (open labour market for researchers): Researchers’ careers and skills could be horizontal priorities and embedded strongly in every of the other ERA Priorities. Several delegations also suggested combining Priorities 3 and 4 in a new ERA priority for open and equal access to positions and promotion of careers for all, notably of women.
 - Priority 4 (gender equality, gender mainstreaming in research and the gender dimension in R&I content and programmes): Gender issues could be horizontal priorities and embedded strongly in every ERA priority.
 - Priority 5 (optimal circulation and transfer of scientific knowledge) should include Open Science and Open Innovation explicitly and increase attention for the latter. Part (a) of the top action priority in the ERA Roadmap includes “maximise the dissemination, uptake and exploitation of scientific results” and “knowledge transfer”, but more focus should be paid to this aspect of the priority. Part (b) in contrast is too narrow because it only focuses on Open Access (and not on other aspects of Open Science such as Open Data and others).
 - Priority 6 (international cooperation) needs clearer objectives and drivers. Alternatively, cross-border cooperation (together with education and training) should be a horizontal question and embedded in each other ERA Priority.
- Opinions are rather divided when it comes to the question of new ERA Priorities, so no clear conclusions can be drawn here from the survey. Individual suggestions for new ERA Priorities include (i) increasing the scientific, social, economic and societal impact of European science and fostering society interactions, (ii) paying attention to align top down (European) and bottom up (regional) priorities and coherence throughout the various levels (EU, national, regional, local), (iii) safeguarding fundamental core values, (iv) assuring the leading position of the European knowledge worldwide, (v) strengthening science integrity, (vi) increasing excellence in education and research, (vii) boosting science-based disruptive innovation, (viii) widening / spreading excellence and closing innovation gap and (ix) links between ERA and European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- Until the publication of a new ERA Communication, an intermediate solution to accommodate new ERA Priorities would be to embed emerging needs for new activities into existing ERA Priorities. As examples, a topic like ‘making ERA more inclusive (sharing excellence)’ could be included in ERA Priority 1; a topic like ‘European universities’ could concern Priority 3, and the horizontal nature of international cooperation, in line with the EC Communication from 2012, could be strengthened in Priorities 1, 2a and 5.
- There is strong support for an update of the Commission’s ERA Communication from 2012.

Recommendations

1. Keep the current ERA Priorities at this time. However, expand the scope of ERA Priority 2a (jointly addressing grand challenges) to include the new approach on partnerships, which should also take into account the missions of Horizon Europe. For the time being, embed emerging needs for new activities into existing ERA Priorities.
2. ERAC advises the European Commission to publish in due time a new ERA communication for the period beyond 2020, which should revise the priorities and their actions included in the 2012 ERA Communication and examine possible new priorities, against the background of the changes in the

R&I landscape since 2012. Such a new Communication could be complemented by a Ministerial ERA Conference in 2020 as an opportunity for priority-setting.

2.1.2 ERA Advisory Structure

Conclusions

- The current number of ERA-related groups seems rather adequate to achieve the objectives of the ERA according to survey results (mean value of 73 on a scale from 0 to 100); each group covers a relatively specific area, allowing to have the right people there and to deepen understanding on common issues. On the other hand, these groups can be stagnant, and working groups (WGs) are primarily needed in areas where there is a need for policy development. Therefore, the number of groups is not the key question, but their functionality. Given that political priorities can shift rather quickly, we need to find a right balance between guaranteeing continuity in the existing ERA-related groups while allowing for new policy developments on emerging issues. Many delegations ask for reorganisations of the existing groups. In general, it might be worthwhile to consider ERAC ad-hoc Working Groups instead of permanent ERA-related groups for some of the ERA Priorities (the ERAC ad-hoc WG on Partnerships is a very good example for a trustful cooperation of Member States/Associated Countries and the European Commission in an effective and efficient manner).
- Several suggestions to merge groups appear in the individual survey responses¹. One option put forward is to integrate the objectives of GPC and SFIC into ERAC. Several replies suggest to merge the SWGs HRM and GRI. Some delegations go as far as saying that rather than relying on permanent groups, which should all be disbanded except ESFRI, ERAC should appoint specific WGs with a limited duration and very well defined, specific objectives, to produce concrete conclusions and recommendations for ERAC to consider. This could also address the fact that certain ERA Priorities arise but then lose focus, as seen with Joint Programming Initiatives. In such a scenario of mainly temporary WGs, the role of the ERAC Steering Board would be very important, as it should produce a list of relevant topics to be addressed by WGs, and regularly submit them to ERAC for adoption. One delegation refers to the possibility to have a permanent technical, professional support unit in charge of gathering and producing the needed statistical data and suitable indicators for the use of the WGs. Several replies also consider that there is at the present not a clear need for SWG HRM and SFIC as there is no ongoing policy development in these areas, and their related priorities are better addressed in the framework programme.
- There is high agreement (mean value of 91 on a scale from 0 to 100) that ERAC needs to keep and enforce its superordinate role in the ERA advisory structure. The coordination between the ERA-related groups in the ERAC Steering Board is considered mostly useful (mean value 77 on a scale between 0 and 100). Beyond that, ERA-related groups seem to think that they should seek out more collaborations, but certain replies of the survey also clearly state that the ERA-related groups should delimit their scope (in particular SFIC).
- Finally, the Research Policy Group (RPG) should remain an informal and quite independent brainstorming platform where ad-hoc topics of particular interest can be discussed. Only some spill-overs from its debates should flow into the ERAC agenda. The RPG should not become a variation of ERAC in terms of agenda and representation and respect the formal role of ERAC. One delegation even considers stopping the RPG as it could undermine the role and operation of ERAC.

Recommendations

3. Keep and strengthen ERAC's superordinate role in the ERA advisory structure.
4. Explore options to relaunch the existing GPC to prepare Member States' and Associated Countries' participation in the strategic coordinating process for partnerships, once its design and the design of missions is decided in the appropriate forum.
5. Consider back-to-back or even joint meetings of ERA-related groups where many synergies with regard to content and target groups exist (such as SWG HRM and SWG GRI, or GPC and SFIC). In the

¹ The term "survey response" or "survey respondent" refers to the responding entity (e.g. ERAC delegation or ERA stakeholder organisation), not to the individuals representing these entities and filling out the survey.

medium term, examine options to reduce the number of groups while ensuring adequate coverage of all aspects of ERA Priorities.

6. Consider the possibility of organising future work within the ERA Advisory Structure to be carried out more often in ad-hoc Working Groups of ERAC rather than in permanent ERA-related groups. This applies notably for newly emerging topics, whose longer-lasting relevance needs to be clarified, addressing the fact that certain ERA Priorities arise but then lose focus.
7. Keep the Research Policy Group (RPG) separate from the ERA advisory structure, as an informal and independent brainstorming platform with ad-hoc topics of particular interest to participants.

2.1.3 Relations with the European Commission, Council and Council Presidencies

Conclusions

- Concerning the collaboration of the European Commission (EC) in the ERA-related groups, real co-construction with the MS/AC delegates is needed; the ERAC ad-hoc WG on Partnerships is cited as a good example. Groups should consist of both EC and MS/AC representatives, with the competent persons of the concerned EC DGs and/or units participating and bringing in specialised knowledge on relevant topics. One delegation even suggested that the PSF could provide opportunities to ‘lend’ experts from an expert pool, even though that this does not really seem an option under the current circumstances (the PSF is at maximum capacity as it is, and its role is not to provide general support to the functioning of ERA-related groups). In any case, the role of the EC should be clearly specified in each ERA-related group, including (if relevant) its relation to the ERAC Secretariat.
- Regarding communication with the Council, timely ERAC opinions on key issues are a good format, but the outputs of ERAC and the other ERA-related groups should find a smoother way to get to the Council. ERAC would actually be the right body to initiate debates in the Competitiveness Council on relevant topics. On an operational level, the Council Secretariat is very efficient. The framework conditions for the three SWGs of ERAC (HRM, GRI, OSI) have however changed significantly since the Secretariat of the groups were transferred mid-2017 from the Commission to the Council, and could be improved (e.g. meeting rooms, public visibility).
- Finally, the coordination with the Council Presidencies is of high importance and needs to be strengthened in order to achieve long term planning and coherence of the work in Council and in the ERA advisory bodies, especially with regard to the agenda setting and the uptake of advice from the ERA-related groups in Council conclusions. Presidency priorities should be reflected more in ERAC agendas. The Presidencies’ agendas should thus influence the ERAC agenda (as it often happens), but, at least partly, the reverse should also occur. The ERAC Steering Board should involve Council Presidencies two years before the beginning of their term in the planning of work programmes of the ERA-related groups. Given the difficult timing, it can be advisable to make use of the Trio Presidencies to better correlate the ERA work programmes with the Trio priorities.

Recommendations

8. Clarify the role of the European Commission in each ERA-related group to ensure efficient, constructive and consistent participation in all groups. Examine also whether a stronger involvement of the Joint Research Centre JRC (e.g. preparing background material) might be interesting and useful for the activities of the ERA-related groups.
9. Make sure that all ERA-related groups have optimal conditions in their efforts to realise the goals set in the ERA roadmap. This includes resources to strengthen their activities, increased visibility (including web visibility), resources for secretariat and expert assistance. In particular, find a long-term solution regarding meeting venues for SWG HRM, SWG GRI and SWG OSI.
10. Increase coordination between Council Presidency priorities and the agendas of the ERA-related groups, by earlier involvement of future Council Presidencies in the ERAC Steering Board.

2.1.4 ERA Monitoring and Reporting System

Conclusions

- The ERA monitoring and reporting system is assessed as rather adequate (mean value of 62 on a scale from 0 to 100). However, increased overall monitoring of the ERA Priority 1 is requested. In this context, the EC recalls that it does extensive monitoring on Priority 1: European Semester Country Reports, joint EC-OECD survey, STIP Compass, SRIP Report, European Innovation Scoreboard, etc. All of these monitor and analyse national R&I performance and policies and are widely available for further study. The national context is taken into account in all of these, and explicitly addressed in the European Innovation Scoreboard for instance, which provides contextual indicators. It would be worthwhile to increase consideration of these reports in ERAC or in a reinstated working group of ERAC dealing with monitoring aspects.
- The current ERA Monitoring Mechanism (EMM) with eight headline indicators is considered by certain delegations to be too much of a 'one-size-fits-all' design, not reflecting the differences in national systems. As examples, the current indicator regarding research infrastructures seems inadequate, and we lack indicators for Open Science that reflect this aspect beyond the scientific articles listed in international bibliographic databases. In this context, it must be recalled that in the 'ERAC Opinion on the ERA roadmap – core high level indicators for monitoring progress' (3 Dec 2015), ERAC has asked for a simple monitoring mechanism with one high level indicator for each ERA implementation priority. This also explains why a composite indicator has been chosen to cover the broader policy dimension for priority 1. With the present EMM, each ERA (sub-) priority is covered by three indicators, in principle with an input, output and outcome character. Before that, there was a much more detailed monitoring mechanism in place; the two first Progress Reports included around 80 indicators, which MS/AC found too complicated and leading to extra administrative burden, as additional surveys were necessary. Therefore, it was decided by Council Conclusions that only existing data should be used. A compromise to improve the EMM without increasing administrative burden would thus consist in examining whether additional ERA-relevant data exists since 2015 that could be used for an update of the current indicators. Changes to ERA indicators should however allow for comparability with former reporting years so that progress can be monitored.
- In line with the previous point, several text replies in the online survey urge to avoid overloading stakeholders with too much monitoring and reporting exercises. In this sense, the priority on streamlining of the MT Presidency has clearly improved the situation. The steps undertaken recently are welcomed, such as merging different monitoring and reporting exercises developed at EU and OECD levels, or the adoption of a two-yearly ERA monitoring and reporting system used by the European Commission. One delegation also suggested merging the Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO) country report and the ERA progress report per country, but the RIO report is apparently not used for that purpose anymore. In general, while responsibility rests with national administrations to monitor and report on ERA progress on national level (and the Commission is responsible for monitoring the overall progress according to the ERA Council Conclusions 2012), we need to recognise the potential limitations of self-reporting and ensure a more consistent and objective approach across the priorities. One delegation thus suggests that a permanent technical, professional support unit could be in charge of gathering and producing the needed statistical data and suitable indicators for the use of the ERA-related groups.
- One delegation estimated that there are redundancies between the ERA National Action Plan (NAP) exercises and the European Semester exercises, although both processes occur at different policy levels. For MS, the implementation of structural policy reforms in line with their National Reform Programmes and within the framework of the European Semester should be the cornerstone of fulfilling the ERA Priorities. It seems, however, unclear how the results of the NAPs are used in the work of the ERA-related groups and we therefore need better reporting flows between the ERA-related groups and the NAPs. The ERA-related groups should track what is happening at national levels and create better links with the ERA progress report.

Recommendations

11. With a view to the next programming period starting in 2021, the indicators of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism (EMM) should be reviewed and improved. To do so, an ERA-wide study on the current relevance and future potential of the existing ERA indicators could be launched, ensuring alignment

with other relevant processes such as in the OECD or work of the Joint Research Centre (JRC). This process could be steered by a reinstated ad-hoc ERAC Working Group on Monitoring. As a result, the EMM (with the current eight headline indicators) will be based on more adequate data than is the case now.

12. Set up a coherent and yet lean monitoring tool on national progress towards all ERA Priorities to be used across all ERA-related groups. The system should be very simple, to accommodate the different national systems and situations with minimal administrative burden. Given that national progress towards ERA Priorities is a national responsibility, individual countries are allowed to opt out from using the tool without hindering others to benefit from it. The tool developed by GPC to follow up the implementation of the countries' individual priorities could be investigated and possibly adapted for use by other ERA-related groups.
13. Explore options to better articulate the 'ERA National Action Plans' (NAPs) with the European Semester. Consider carefully if and how NAPs should continue to be a tool of ERA policy-making in the future.
14. Strengthen the exploitation of results of Policy Support Facility (PSF) related activities and of other ERA-related evidence.

2.1.5 Links between ERA and Framework Programmes (FPs)

Conclusions

- There are conflicting views on whether the objectives of the ERA are well integrated in the EU Framework Programmes (FPs). Some delegations find the ERA objectives are not at all integrated and that this is a main historical weakness of the FPs (with mono-beneficiary programmes expanded at the expenses of collaborative research, which has a higher European added value and is more effective in structuring the ERA). By contrast, other delegations state that the FPs bring significant added value in the view of fulfilling the ERA Priorities, and that each ERA Priority is currently reflected to some extent in Horizon 2020 (e.g. PSF services; grand societal challenges addressed with collaborative research projects; support to joint programming and partnership initiatives, research infrastructures, gender equality and Open Science/Innovation; open to the world with the participation of associated and third countries). In any case, it appears that the ERA Priorities could be better reflected in the FPs, and contributions of the FPs to the objectives of the ERA could be made more visible and explicit.
- In principle, from the provisions of the EU Treaty downwards, ERA and the FPs are two sides of the same coin: The full implementation of the ERA on one side, and the main instrument to achieve that (namely the FP) on the other side. In practice, however, it appears that for some respondents ERA is in the remit of the MS/AC while the FP is a responsibility of the EC. As illustration, both Horizon 2020 and the proposed Horizon Europe seem to consider ERA only a 'supplementary dimension' of the European R&I funding system. In particular, the Horizon Europe proposal gives the impression that only the part on 'Strengthening ERA' contributes to the objective of the ERA (cf. articles 3 and 4 of the regulation). Hence, Horizon Europe seems to take the ERA objectives less into consideration. From the perspective of the EC, however, article 3 of the EC's Horizon Europe regulation proposal states that one of the objectives of the Programme is to optimise the Programme's delivery for increased impact within a strengthened European Research Area, and the part on Strengthening the ERA underpins the three pillars.
- As a consequence of the above, most delegations propose to actively promote the convergence between the implementation of the ERA and the FP, with a clear role of ERAC in this process. Some delegations even propose better linkages between the ERA advisory structure and the FP comitology, e.g. by involving ERA-related groups in the preparation of the Horizon Europe Work Programmes before there is a draft.

Recommendations

15. Encourage the European Commission, Member States and Associated Countries to look at ERA and the Framework Programme from a systemic point of view.

16. Make more explicit the inter-linkages between the Horizon Europe pillars and activities on the one hand, and the ERA Priorities on the other hand. Outline this possibly as an ERAC Opinion before the start of the new Framework Programme. This could also allow better alignment between Horizon Europe and national R&I investments, as recommended in the Lamy report.
17. Examine how specific support measures on ERA Priorities in the FP could be increased, in addition to the funding measures. This would further increase synergies between ERA Priorities and the FP.

2.1.6 Impact and Outreach of the ERA-related Groups

Conclusions

- Several ERAC delegations and ERA stakeholders regret that there is currently no direct link between ERAC and the ERA Stakeholder Platform. The online survey indicates that ERA-related groups should interact more with relevant ERA Stakeholder organisations (such as EUA, LERU, EARTO, CESAER, Science Europe, and others), according to a mean value of 78 on a scale from 0 to 100. More direct connections are recommended in various forms, e.g. (i) involve ERA stakeholder organisations and their experts in ERA-related groups (however normally not in ERAC itself), (ii) organise common meetings / discussions, (iii) invite ERA stakeholders to individual agenda points of a given ERAC or GPC meeting, (iv) give regular information in ERAC on discussions of the ERA stakeholder platform, (v) have an ERAC delegate participate on a regular basis in the ERA stakeholder platform, or simply communicate the ERAC agenda to the ERA stakeholder platform.
- A number of survey respondents and most notably the ERA stakeholder organisations perceive the visibility of the ERA, ERAC and the other ERA-related groups as insufficient. To address this, ERA and the impact of the ERA advisory structure should be strengthened overall through more proactive and up-to-date communication (e.g. on a website for all ERA-related groups), stronger branding, more integration, more ambitious priorities, and more openness. Communication regarding ERA-related groups is however subject to the rather restrictive Council rules.
- The online survey results suggest that the link between ERA and the European Higher Education Area should be strengthened (mean value of 84 on a scale from 0 to 100 for this question). Many plausible justifications for this are mentioned in the individual replies, but there are few tangible suggestions for concrete actions. Proposed activities are above all to plan common or at least linked annual meetings between ERA and EHEA committees, e.g. between ERAC and the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), or the Research Working Party (RWP) and the Education Committee. Regarding the latter proposal, one must however keep in mind that EHEA is not closely linked to the Education Council but is a process independent of the EU consisting of a significantly larger group of countries. An alternative recommendation could thus be to set up a joint ERA/EHEA ad-hoc working group. On a political level, one must recall that research policy is a shared competence (article 4 TFEU) whereas education policy is a national competence supported by the Union (article 6 TFEU). Consequently, the link between ERA and EHEA should be strengthened only in selected areas of mutual benefit, such as in the area of university networks or EIT-KICs. In addition, links between ERA and EHEA exist and have been thoroughly explored: The former SGHRM has produced guidelines and toolkits for higher education institutions (e.g. for innovative doctoral training, for open, transparent and merit-based recruitment etc.). Associations of universities (e.g. the EUA, the LERU) have always been involved in the preparation of those tools. In addition, the new SWG HRM has a clear ambition to integrate educational perspectives into its work. Higher education institutions should therefore consider and value the ERA Priorities and promote open access, networking and mobility of researchers as well as an entrepreneurial culture. Making the link between education and research is of course the responsibility of universities and applied research universities themselves, and they do cover both education and research in their daily business. Our goal as policy makers should thus be to make their framework conditions (through ERA, FPs, education programmes etc.) as simple as possible, not more difficult by treating education and research as two totally separate issues. With this in mind, there is, however, no need for legal or top down measures and institutional funding at this stage.

Recommendations

18. Consider ways to improve the dissemination and valorisation of all ERA-related groups' outputs and to increase their impact and relevance for ERA Stakeholders, EU Presidencies and Member States / Associated Countries, e.g. through regular ERA-related events, as well as through enhanced visibility. In particular, consider updated websites for ERAC and the other ERA-related groups containing mandates, lists of delegates, reports etc. in a way compatible with Council regulations, or link the group's work to platforms such as OECD/EC's 'STIP Compass'. The Austrian ERA website can serve as a good-practice example. All groups should develop an output, communication and impact strategy, in order to improve visibility and uptake of recommendations by different target groups.
19. Increase the use of the expertise present within ERA stakeholder organisations in the ERA-related groups. Explore options to increase direct exchanges between concerned ERA-related groups and e.g. the ERA Stakeholder Platform, such as inviting members of the ERA Stakeholder Platform to selected meetings of concerned ERA-related groups.
20. To foster exchanges and discussions about common policy interests between ERA and the EHEA, examine the possibility of an annual back-to-back meeting between ERAC and the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and/or DG Higher Education.

2.1.7 Procedures and Working ConditionsConclusions

- The procedures and working conditions were addressed at several levels during this review (e.g. during the documentary analysis, in the self-assessment report of each ERA-related group, in the online survey for each ERA-related group and in the phone interviews with several Chairs of the ERA-related groups). Given the repeated nature of certain issues, they are grouped in this set of recommendations, even though some of them are more relevant for a given ERA-related group.
- The request that Member States and Associated Countries need to make sure to be represented by the right mix of representatives from national authorities and delegates with expertise was formulated e.g. particularly for the SWG GRI, where more expertise in gender issues was requested, as well as for SWG OSI and for SFIC. It appeared however also as general issue for ad-hoc working groups and in ESFRI and its sub-groups.
- The last recommendation (more concise, concrete and targeted work programmes, more substantial meeting documents, and timely sending thereof) stems from comments to SFIC, but is of course generally applicable.

Recommendations

21. Member States and Associated Countries need to make sure to be represented in the ERA-related groups (including their working groups) by competent representatives from national authorities and, if appropriate, additional national experts.
22. Ensure that the mandates of all ERA-related groups give each group a clear mission with concrete and tangible tasks, while allowing it to respond to newly emerging topics.
23. The work programmes of each ERA-related group need to be more concise, concrete and targeted. The competences expected from delegates should be clarified and properly communicated. Furthermore, meeting documents should be substantial and sent in due time. Drop the possibility of interpretation services given that also ERAC does not use interpretation any longer.

2.2 European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* Even though ERAC's mandate is very broad and ERA Priority 1 is not explicitly mentioned, the mandate is largely in line with ERA Priority 1. Furthermore, ERAC's work and activities are largely in line with its mandate. However, there is not enough time for substantial and strategic discussions around ERA Priority 1. This finding came out in the analysis of the work programmes as well as in a large number of replies to the survey. Many respondents consider that discussions about the functioning of the group itself or coordinating and reporting exercises, particularly those by the other ERA-related groups, consume too much time on the agendas of ERAC plenaries, thus cutting other, more strategic agenda items short. Some suggested that the update from the other ERA-related groups could be delivered only once or twice a year and/or be used in a way to instigate discussions about more effective R&I systems. Further ideas for improvement from survey respondents were for ERAC to enforce in its mandate the link to the PSF, by devoting more time to reflections of PSF outcomes in ERAC plenaries, or to include topics like Responsible R&I, reducing the R&I divide, the balance between institutional and competitive funding, or modernising universities, evaluation and reward system. Finally, the interaction with ERA stakeholders could be intensified as well.
- *Organisation and working conditions:* In general, the organisation and working conditions of ERAC are very good (regular meetings, effective Co-Chair system and mostly also effective Steering Board, mostly adequate participation and support from the Commission services, very good administrative support from the Council Secretariat, clear and transparent decision-making processes). With regard to the composition of ERAC delegations, their level of representation is mostly perceived as adequate (mean score of 74 on a scale from 0 to 100), with several survey respondents noting that the political, budgetary and managerial influence of delegates is more important than their status in the national hierarchy. However, others think that countries should be represented by higher-ranking national officials, especially if discussions were to become more strategic (see 'Scope of the group' above). Some concerns were also raised with regard to the level of active participation, commitment and turnover of country delegates as well as countries' participation in the PSF activities. Furthermore, various specific suggestions emerged from individual survey responses concerning the organisation and working conditions of ERAC:
 - The system with Co-Chairs from participating states and the European Commission could be considered for other ERA-related groups as well, to provide more impact to their work. However, it is to be noted that, at least according to the MS Co-Chair's self-assessment report, the collaboration between the Co-Chairs has sometimes been time-consuming and complex, due to several layers of coordination within the Commission services.
 - A better coordination between the work of ERAC and advisory or working groups within the European Commission (e.g. the European RTD Evaluation Network) as well as between ERAC and the Research Working Party should be sought.
 - The agenda of ERAC should be planned longer in advance, in order to influence Presidency priorities (maybe 3-6 months before a Presidency starts).
 - More attractive background papers with engaging questions as well as the presentations could be circulated before the plenary meetings to allow for a better preparation.
 - New formats to structure ERAC plenaries should be explored: More debate-oriented, strategic discussions based on the inputs of the other ERA-related groups, introduction of a system of A-points and B-points like in the Council, brainstorming in break-out sessions, mutual learning exercise debates, less intensive reporting of ERA-related groups in the ERAC Plenary.
 - The format of the ERA workshops is good but their scope and objectives need to be clarified.
 - Most of the ERAC work should take place in specific, short-lived working groups to tackle current important issues and produce concrete conclusions and recommendations. This would make ERAC meetings a lot more interesting and productive.
 - More meetings should be held.
 - In the medium to long term, an inclusive and transparent governance system (Reform Delivery Tool) should be set up to follow the national reforms. In this sense, it would be logical to strengthen the link between ERA and the European Semester process.

- *Output:* The number of publications of ERAC is satisfying, and they are quite practical and substantial according to the documentary analysis as well as according to the survey for ERAC, the European Commission and the EU. However, the ERA stakeholders do not find ERAC's outputs practical and substantial, which according to one survey is because they are the results of too much political compromise. A number of suggestions for improvement of ERAC's output were submitted in the survey, going into different directions: while some consider that position papers and Council Conclusion inputs should become the rule for every ERAC activity, others argue for fewer but more substantial, targeted and concrete reports.
- *Impact:* The results of the ERA review for this aspect are quite mixed. Judging from the documentary analysis, the impact of ERAC's work is satisfactory. However, ERA stakeholders expressed very low levels of relevance and uptake of ERAC's recommendations for/in their respective organisations (mean values of 37 and 18, respectively, on a scale from 0-100). As for the EU Presidencies, they consider ERAC's publications to be rather relevant but overall, they did not influence their Presidencies to a large extent. Finally, while ERAC delegations themselves and the European Commission find ERAC's recommendations moderately relevant for their respective countries/organisations (mean score of 65 out of 100), only the European Commission seems to be taking them up. Suggestions for improvement of ERAC's impact by survey respondents include:
 - More proactive and timely reaction to important issues.
 - Better consideration of the potential impact of the output while it is being prepared.
 - Better communication (strategy) and public visibility, e.g. by a more attractive and updated website about ERAC and the other ERA-related groups (reference: Austrian ERA Portal), by showcasing outcomes and tackling future issues at an ERA ministerial conference, by exploitation of social media or by engaging with European and national stakeholders.
 - Better monitoring of the implementation of recommendations from ERAC.
- *Continuation of the group:* There is a clear and strong preference across all replies to continue ERAC (mean value of 92 on a scale from 0-100). It is much appreciated as a coordinating forum for the ERA where strategic and cross-cutting exchanges on policy issues of common interest can (or could) take place in a less formal environment than the Council.

Recommendations

24. Introduce an explicit reference to ERA Priority 1 into the ERAC mandate.

25. Increase the focus on substantial discussions around ERA Priority 1. The ERAC Steering Board should make sure to draft balanced plenary agendas in terms of strategic discussions and information items. In this sense, also make the interactions with the other ERA-related groups more strategic.

26. Where appropriate, adapt the organisation and working conditions of ERAC: In particular, explore new ways to stimulate debates during plenary meetings, such as e.g. the use of break-out sessions, or circulation beforehand of background papers that highlight central questions for debate.

2.3 High Level Group for Joint Programming (GPC)

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* The GPC mandate has been amended and significantly broadened in 2016 in order to cover the whole Joint Programming Process (JPP, including Public-to-Public (P2Ps) and potentially also Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)) and not only Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), in order to fully cover the issue of jointly addressing the grand societal challenges as defined in priority 2a. However, GPC did not extend the scope of its work according to the extended mandate but kept its focus on the JPIs and thus remained instrument-driven (JPIs) rather than priority-driven. GPC itself considers focussing on the entire Joint Programming Process a complex issue, with the explanation that certain P2Ps are in the remit of the EC. Hence, both ERA Priority 2a and the mandate of a potentially revised GPC should explicitly mention all partnership initiatives and also make a link to the missions under Horizon Europe (see also chapter 2.1.1). Most delegations agree that the future GPC should become an arena where MS/AC and the Commission have an overarching view of all the

partnership initiatives and can analyse, discuss, recommend and decide on the totality of partnerships, in accordance with the design of the strategic coordinating process for future partnerships and the timeline thereof. Therefore, the group should play a much stronger role in creating synergies and avoiding redundancy in the funding landscape. There are, however, also voices that are not in favour of a GPC overseeing all partnership initiatives, and some delegations indicate specifically that PPPs probably need to be looked at in a specific and separate way.

- *Organisation and working conditions:* The effectiveness of the Chair receives moderate ratings (lowest average among all ERA-related groups), and there seems to be room for improvement concerning the participation of GPC in the ERAC Steering Board. GPC itself does not have a Steering Board in the current situation. According to some replies, meetings seem to focus on providing information, and certain issues and topics have been repeatedly discussed without reaching a substantial endpoint. The role of the EC is considered rather dominant according to several replies, but the Commission representatives are at the same time perceived as constructive, very knowledgeable and contributing a lot, even though they are observers. In general, there seems to be a good working relation between GPC and the Commission's Joint Programming sector, with helpful information and advice of good quality. In contrast, the level of involvement of country delegations has dropped since the JPI selection period, and some country delegates are apparently not sufficiently aware of their national situation with respect to JPIs and other JP initiatives or lack background knowledge. There is, however, a clear statement that meetings would *not* be more 'successful' if they were attended by representatives of a higher hierarchical level (DG). The key of success rather lies in the delegates being able to speak on behalf of their country in the topics discussed and mastering the content of the agenda items, for which they should receive documents timely to prepare the meeting at the national level. When it comes to the organisation and working conditions of the possibly 'reformed GPC' after this review, suitable members should be represented in such a 'GPC 2.0', and a strong commitment of the EC will be important. The extended mandate implies a strong support in gathering the necessary data, input, mappings of EU and national investments etc..
- *Output:* From the documentary analysis, it becomes clear that GPC is an active group with regular meetings and outputs, and productive sub-groups. It has worked actively on the framework conditions for JPIs, but not sufficiently on the Joint Programming Process as such. The number of publications is judged satisfactory. However, a better 'institutional memory' and re-use of reports and results seems indicated, which would allow output to be better known and impact to increase. Like for other ERA-related groups, the visibility of GPC should be greatly improved, at least with updated information on a specific website. For the moment, only the Austrian ERA Portal seems to publish work by the GPC (apart from of a space on the ERA-learn 2020 platform, which publishes reports from GPC).
- *Impact:* Despite the satisfactory number, the group's publications are not always considered substantial and practical, and their overall relevance for the individual countries / organisations seems rather low, with few recommendations formulated by the group taken up for implementation. GPC also had a low impact on the definition of priorities for Council Presidencies in the considered evaluation time (2016-2018). In the potentially new configuration after this review (see below), the 'GPC 2.0' should provide MS/AC and the EC with a rationalised R&I partnerships landscape, giving evidence for prioritising national commitments and the EC support. This would significantly increase its impact.
- *Continuation of the group:* As a consequence of the above, the continuation of GPC in its present form seems rather questioned (lowest average score for continuation among all ERA-related groups, even though with a high variance). Some delegations think that GPC as such is not fit for purpose, and keeping it is questionable in the light of the revised policy approach on European partnerships under Horizon Europe. Certain delegations even clearly recommend terminating GPC and transforming it into several specific, time-limited, thematic working groups with clear mandates to propose conclusions and recommendations for specific issues. The vast majority of replies indicates however, that GPC should be changed significantly to cover all partnership initiatives and continue in this modified constellation. Several delegations also suggest that this revised GPC should be co-chaired by Member States and the European Commission. GPC should however remain an ERAC configuration with reimbursement of travel costs to delegates. The change towards the new 'GPC 2.0' could be done either by establishing a new group or modifying the scope of the existing GPC. Some delegations warn, however, that it is useless to dissolve GPC and create a new ERA-related group on partnerships if all delegates were the same as in the 'old GPC'. They therefore suggest replacing the delegations in GPC by the delegations of the ERAC ad-hoc Working Group on Partnership Initiatives

(which are in some cases the same persons), given that these delegates have acquired specific knowledge on the partnership initiatives and on the new approach linked to it. The choice of delegates must however remain in the remit of each country.

Recommendations

27. Explore options to relaunch the existing GPC to prepare Member States' and Associated Countries' participation in the strategic coordinating process for partnerships, once its design and the design of missions is decided in the appropriate forum (see recommendation 4).
28. Seek the best organisational form for this new 'GPC 2.0', either as a configuration of ERAC or in closer cooperation and co-ownership with the Commission.

2.4 European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI)

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* Both the online survey and the documentary analysis reflect that ESFRI's mandate and mission are clearly defined and that the mandate covers its respective ERA priority (2b: Research Infrastructures (RIs)) perfectly well. The group's work and activities are fully in line with its mandate. According to one survey reply, ESFRI's specific strength has been its self-limitation to strategy issues, setting clear limits on extending ESFRI's operational activities. However, ESFRI's overlaps with and connections to other research infrastructure related groups (i.e. e-IRG, EIROForum etc.) could be better clarified.
- *Organisation and working conditions:* Next to the ESFRI plenary forum meeting, ESFRI consists of six Strategy Working Groups (SWGs) in different thematic fields and several Working Groups (WGs, currently five) on cross-cutting aspects, all linked to the evaluation process of pan-European research infrastructures or for addressing specific aspects of RIs. The scientific community and national authorities are very responsive to contribute to these ESFRI groups, which have a clear mandate and deadline for delivering their results to the Forum. ESFRI also has an Executive Board where MS/AC and the EC are represented; the Executive Board is responsive and generally non-biased according to ESFRI itself. ESFRI benefits from its Secretariat's professional work, which is provided by the European Commission. ESFRI as a Strategy Forum of MS and AC has a special status within the ERA advisory structure and is thus the only ERA-related group not solely under the remit of the Council. The role of the European Commission is thus twofold: Being a regular ESFRI Member, the EC is mediating a broader European policy perspective in different areas, and by providing the Secretariat, it directly participates in the ESFRI Executive Board. This participation by the EC is perceived as appropriate, professional, constructive, stimulating and efficient. According to isolated answers, ESFRI seems to depend a lot on the Commission services, and several delegations state that MS/AC should have more say when setting the priorities. The Chair and Executive Board of ESFRI are considered effective, and only the participation in the ERAC Steering Board could be improved. The setting of SWGs and WGs with MS/AC and EC experts provides a very unique mixture of expert/expertise-based opinion and merit-based national policies unified in one body. The level of representation is considered good in ESFRI, and country delegations participate mostly actively in the debates and tasks (including in subgroups). An interesting feature is that active involvement by delegations during meetings is encouraged by ample space for sharing information and for exchange of views on topics of general interest to the ESFRI members. The quality of expertise among delegates is "at the highest level" according to certain replies. Indeed, delegates represent both the scientific community and ministries; it seems important to enforce this balance as ESFRI needs both roots in the science community and direct dialogue with the Governments. The rules of ESFRI (delegation = up to two delegates and two experts) have sufficient flexibility to acquire external expert competence if it is needed. Decision-making processes are very well defined in the ESFRI procedures, notably the roadmap methodology, and seem mostly clear and transparent. However, a possible area of concern for ESFRI is the last update of its procedural guidelines, which may risk to compromise the transparency and objectivity of decision-making in the ESFRI Executive Board. In order to increase transparency, all Executive Board meeting reports and documents should be available for delegations, and regarding the evaluations of RIs, they must be unbiased and adhere to the evaluation standards of excellence-based interna-

tional reviews. One proposal put forward in the survey to assure objective evaluations is to have an independent (rotating) committee of leading scientists that can scrutinise the proposals, voice its scientific advice and report to ESFRI every odd year (when the next roadmap is being prepared). Another suggestion is that in the future, the forum should focus on its strategic and mentorship role, and delegate the evaluation and monitoring of projects to appropriate, external actors. Some delegations ask for a simplification of processes, fewer meetings and a prolongation of the roadmap update cycle. Such measures would allow reducing the heavy workload.

- *Output:* ESFRI is a very active committee with a comprehensive and substantial output and considerable impact between 2016 and 2018, responding well to its mandate. In addition, ESFRI has two dedicated and up-to-date websites (one through a Horizon 2020 project², and one hosted by the EC³), so the output produced by ESFRI is easily accessible and thus widely distributed. External stakeholders have, however, difficulties understanding that ESFRI is an ERA-related group since it does not appear on the Council website of ERAC.
- *Impact:* ESFRI's impact is directly linked to the development and publication of its roadmap, which has gained high visibility and is mostly relevant for countries / organisations. In addition, the role of ESFRI in structuring the national research infrastructures processes, roadmapping and strategic planning is immense. ESFRI is an ERA-related group with a clearly defined mandate, mission, and a specific role in the ERA-group landscape. This contributes to its high impact in practical terms, but also to its rather low relevance for EU Presidencies, at least during the evaluation phase. Another fact contributing to ESFRI's practical impact is the direct link between this ERA-related group and the Framework Programme: One cannot deny the impact of the fact that Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument to support the preparatory phase of the ESFRI RIs and to support the implemented RIs in different ways. Variable geometry and a working bottom-up approach have proven essential as a guiding principle for ESFRI's activities, bringing about a rich landscape of European RI, covering all domains and encouraging participation in accordance with national specificities and priorities. ESFRI can thus be considered as having among the highest impact of all ERA-related groups for the structuring of pan-European research infrastructures and the ERA more generally.
- *Continuation of the group:* ESFRI functions in a very effective and efficient way, therefore no substantial changes in its organisation or procedures are needed, and the group should definitely continue its work. The increasing maturity of the research infrastructure ecosystem in Europe requires incremental adaptation of the activities of the group and its ways of working. These adaptations are happening on regular basis, especially when new ESFRI Roadmaps are completed, to ensure constant improvement of ESFRI methods and to foster the effectiveness and impact of the European Research Infrastructures. Adjustments should be considered for the evaluation of RI projects.

Recommendations

29. ESFRI functions in a very effective and efficient way, therefore no substantial changes in its organisation or procedures are needed.
30. Explore ways to further increase the transparency of the evaluation process of research infrastructures for the ESFRI roadmap, e.g. by enhancing the role of external experts in the evaluation and monitoring of projects.
31. Explore ways to simplify processes and reduce the workload, e.g. by prolonging the roadmap update cycle.

2.5 SWG on Human Resources and Mobility (HRM)

Preliminary note: Until mid-2017, this group was called 'Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility' (SGHRM). Unless indicated otherwise, conclusions about SWG HRM include the former SGHRM.

² <http://www.esfri.eu>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/index.cfm?pg=esfri>

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* The mandate of SWG HRM does not directly refer to the top action priority or other elements of Priority 3 and only makes an explicit reference to ERA Priority 3 in the reporting section. Nevertheless, ERA Priority 3 can be subsumed under the objectives of SWG HRM as specified in its mandate. According to the survey, the SWG HRM mandate covers its ERA Priority to a large extent (even though there are voices suggesting otherwise, but overall mean score of 77 out of 100). Similarly, the SWG HRM work programmes and activities are perceived as well in line with the group's mandate, and this finding is also supported by the documentary analysis. However, some survey respondents feel that the topics dealt with by the group used to be more relevant and up-to-date under the former SGHRM. The SWG HRM is supposed to advise ERAC and the Council but the mandate is less clear with regard to the group's link with the Commission. In accordance with these conclusions, it was proposed in the survey that the SWG HRM mandate and the target groups could be better specified and that it should define a specific 'mission' for the group with appropriate indicators and targets to be fulfilled in a defined time period. A further idea was to create a working group looking at mobility patterns of researchers or migration and research. Finally, the relation and distinction between SWG HRM and EURAXESS needs to be defined as the current (perceived) overlap in topics and meetings seems to lead to confusion.
- *Organisation and working conditions:* While the effectiveness of the SWG HRM Chair is generally rated as excellent, there seems to be some room for improvement with regard to the composition of country delegations and particularly their active participation (mean values of 69 and 67, respectively). Looking at the more detailed answers to the survey provides explanations for these numerical results: Some respondents feel that while levels of representation and engagement were good in the former SGHRM (good combination of national authorities and national experts), it is too early to tell for the still developing SWG HRM. Moreover, there was quite some turnover of delegates when the group transferred from the Commission to the Council in mid-2017, and attendance at all has been disappointingly low in recent meetings. In general, the transfer seems to have impeded the group's working dynamic, which is most evident with regard to the marked differences in activity and output before and after the transfer. Overall, the role of the Commission in SWG HRM is indicated to be mostly adequate, i.e. neither too passive nor too dominant. However, from the perspective of a number of survey respondents, including the group itself (survey and self-assessment report), the Commission has become much less involved and engaged in SWG HRM since its transfer. This is for example evident by the fact that the units with the relevant expertise do not necessarily participate anymore. Hence, whereas the activity of the group used to be closely linked to the Commission's policy and activities regarding human resources, its connection to important tools, such as the HR4R assessment/logo and the EURAXESS network seem to be considerably weakened. In conclusion, this is certainly an issue to be clarified.

The decision-making processes and working methods of SWG HRM are not always assessed as clear and transparent, especially not by the Commission. Survey replies indicate that the organisation of the meeting needs improvement, with earlier provision of work programmes, meeting dates, topics and background material. Work should more often take place in subgroups. In the period covered by the review, SWG HRM's plenary meetings were largely aligned with the calendar of ERAC plenaries. One survey respondent proposed that up to six meetings per year should be held.

Finally, an issue to be resolved – as for all Standing Working Groups of ERAC – is the availability of meeting rooms and the changed working conditions for SWG HRM after the transfer to the Council (such as less secretarial support or no travel reimbursement). This was stressed by a number of survey respondents.

- *Output:* The number of publications of SWG HRM is more or less satisfactory according to the survey as well as the documentary analysis, despite the already noted differences in productivity before and after the group's transfer. Besides publications, SWG HRM has also co-organised a conference and a seminar during the period under review. The group's outputs are considered rather practical and substantial by most survey respondents even if there seems to be room for progress in this respect. Individual survey responses recommend that SWG HRM should develop an output strategy that defines clear expectations and strategic orientations of outputs. The outputs should contribute more to the analysis of the challenges and national effects faced by countries by an open market for researchers. It is noteworthy that the SWG HRM has elaborated a report analysing the implementation of National Action Plans with regard to ERA Priority 3 and generally makes an effort to considering monitoring aspects.

- *Impact:* It is difficult to draw a clear conclusion with regard to SWG HRM's impact. Overall, the relevance of the group's publications was considered moderately high in the survey even though assessments vary between and within respondent categories. At the same time, the uptake of recommendations could be better by all entities but in particular the ERA stakeholders (mean value of 40 on a scale from 0 to 100). Interestingly, however, SWG HRM seems to be the ERA-related group with the largest impact on the definition of Presidency priorities during the period covered by this review. Furthermore, judging from the documentary analysis, the impact of SWG HRM as measured by citations seemed satisfactory. It has to be noted that the references registered can mostly be attributed to the former SGHRM. It remains to be seen what wider impact SWG HRM can have. Specific suggestions by survey respondents to increase the group's impact include:
 - Visibility and awareness about the group and its activities could be improved by a better communication strategy (such as more intensive use of social and other types of media as well as a better online presence where documents and information are accessible). In this sense, EURAXESS should be further developed as an information platform.
 - The group should develop an impact strategy, especially with a view to the Commission and choosing the right topics to work on. This also includes the monitoring and evaluation of the real impact of the group and its work, notably following-up on the implementation of its publications and the National Action Plans.
 - Cooperation with other relevant groups dealing with Higher Education should be enhanced.
- *Continuation of the group:* Overall, the past achievements of the group are widely acknowledged and support for the continuation of SWG HRM is quite high (although third lowest comparing all seven ERA-related groups; overall mean score of 76 in the survey). Whereas the Commission, the EU Presidency responding and SWG HRM itself are clearly in favour of continuing the group, opinions are more diverse with regard to the other respondent categories. More than one answer raised the question of whether a permanent group on human resources was (still) needed or could be transformed into a temporary ad-hoc working group of ERAC. A couple of survey respondents suggested that a merger of SWG HRM with SWG GRI should be considered because of the significant interlinkages between their respective domains, and in order for them to reinforce their respective impacts. Others pointed out the horizontal nature of human resources aspects, which implies that it could be integrated into the mandates of the other ERA-related groups or at least that there should be more collaboration. This is actually foreseen, as the work programmes and the self-assessment report provided by SWG HRM indicate.

Recommendations

32. Make the responsibility for ERA Priority 3 more explicit in the mandate of SWG HRM. On the one hand, a direct reference to ERA Priority 3 needs to be included under the objectives. On the other hand, the top action priority according to the ERA Roadmap should be integrated.
33. Consider back-to-back or even joint meetings between SWG HRM and SWG GRI, given the many synergies between the two groups with regard to their content and target groups (also see recommendation 5).

2.6 SWG on Gender in Research and Innovation (GRI)

Preliminary note: Until mid-2017, this group was called 'Helsinki Group on Gender in Research and Innovation'. Unless indicated otherwise, conclusions about SWG GRI include the former Helsinki Group.

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* According to the documentary analysis, the mandate of SWG GRI – although being broader – covers ERA Priority 4 very well. The same was true for the former Helsinki Group, which basically had the same mandate. The group's activities according to the work programmes are concrete, practical and much in line with its mandate. In general, the same conclusions can be drawn from the SWG GRI's self-assessment report as well as the survey results, even if there is some variance in the answers of ERAC delegations with regard to these questions. According to the mandate,

SWG GRI has a clear advisory role for the Council and the Commission, and only indirectly for Member States and Associated Countries. Considering this, some respondents feel that the group focuses too much on mutual learning among countries even if this is very useful for some countries. Others suggested that the SWG GRI mandate should define a specific 'mission' for the group with appropriate indicators and targets, to be fulfilled in a defined time period.

- *Organisation and working conditions:* The effectiveness of the SWG GRI Chair is generally rated as excellent, but there seems to be some room for improvement with regard to the composition of country delegations (both level of representation and expertise) and particularly their active participation (on a scale from 0 to 100, mean values of 71 and 70, respectively). A number of survey respondents indicated that the quality of country delegations varies depending on the political priority given to gender issues at national level and that it would be interesting to have more representatives from research ministries in the group, beside gender experts. Moreover, the presence of Associated Countries could be better (only six participate). On average, the role of the Commission in the group is considered adequate. Individual survey responses point to a change in the participation of the Commission since the group's transfer. While it seems to have played a rather dominant if not prohibitive role in the former Helsinki Group, it is now sometimes estimated as not supportive enough. Hence, the new SWG GRI is perceived as more strongly based on Member and Associated States. A couple of respondents suggested that the relation of SWG GRI with the Commission is something to be clarified.

The decision-making processes of SWG GRI seem to be clear and transparent. In the period covered by the review, SWG GRI had several active sub-groups but only met twice a year in plenary form. These meetings were not very well aligned with the calendar of ERAC plenaries. Some survey participants feel that the group should meet more often, ideally four times a year. In return, the meetings of several ERA-related groups could be organised in a row, in order to save travel costs for delegates represented in different groups. Finally, an issue to be resolved – as for all Standing Working Groups of ERAC – is the availability of meeting rooms and the changed working conditions for SWG GRI after the transfer to the Council (such as less secretarial support). This was stressed by many survey respondents.

- *Output:* According to the documentary analysis, the output of SWG GRI during the period assessed must be considered satisfactory. However, from the perspective of a number of survey respondents, especially the Commission and the Council Secretariat, the number of publications by the group could be better. In addition, the group's outputs during the period under review are only indirectly linked to the ERA Priority 4. In terms of their practical and substantial value, SWG GRI's outputs were considered satisfactory in the documentary analysis and are highly rated by the Commission, most ERAC delegations, the EU Presidencies replying and the group itself. However, a few ERAC delegations and particularly the ERA stakeholders were more hesitant in this respect. It was for example suggested that more opportunities for reflection and discussion on the outputs for better implementation would be welcome. It is to be noted that SWG GRI and SFIC have elaborated a joint report and opinion on gender in international cooperation in STI.
- *Impact:* When it comes to the relevance of SWG GRI's publications for the different entities taking part in the survey, there seems to be room for progress. Only very few respondents, though among them the Commission, find them highly relevant. Overall, the extent to which SWG GRI's recommendations are taken up is rather low (mean score of 52 out of 100 overall, but much lower for some respondent groups). However, the work of SWG GRI found entry into a number of Council Conclusions and the group has contributed greatly to – and is referred to in – the She Figures. The She Figures is a fundamental and highly visible report, both at the public and at the policy-making level, to increase awareness on gender issues and to foster the implementation of policy measures to tackle them. Specific suggestions by survey respondents to increase SWG GRI's impact include:
 - The visibility of the group and its output could be improved by a more intensive use of social media as well as a better online presence. Public visibility completely disappeared since the group's transfer to the Council.
 - Better interaction with and engagement of stakeholders, both at European and national level.
 - More interaction with other ERA-related groups, in order to embed gender issues as a cross-cutting topic. This would require, however, clarification of target groups and expected deliverables. It is to be noted that SWG GRI is already one of the ERA-related groups that liaises most with other groups, as collaborations are also foreseen with SWG HRM and SWG OSI.

- The implementation of SWG GRI's recommendations at the national level could be facilitated by the design of specific support instruments as well as by national delegates with certain decision-making capacities.
- *Continuation of the group:* Overall, the support for SWG GRI and its mission is high (overall mean score of 82 on a scale from 0-100), and the past work and achievements of the group are well appreciated. However, a fair number of survey respondents suggested that a merger of SWG GRI with SWG HRM should be considered because of the significant interlinkages between their respective domains.

Recommendations

34. The interactions with other ERA-related groups should be intensified, given that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue.
35. Consider back-to-back or even joint meetings between SWG GRI and SWG HRM, given the many synergies between the two groups with regard to their content and target groups (also see recommendation 5).

2.7 SWG on Open Science and Innovation (OSI)

Preliminary Note: The views of SWG OSI itself could not be included in the following conclusions and recommendations because the group neither provided a self-assessment report nor replied to the survey.

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* SWG OSI is supposed to provide advice to ERAC, as the mandate stipulates clearly. The mandate of SWG OSI covers ERA Priority 5 quite well. This finding is reflected in both the survey results (mean value of 80 on a scale from 0 to 100) and the documentary analysis. However, it was also concluded from the documentary analysis that accommodating the wide and heterogeneous spectrum of ERA Priority 5 in a single mandate, followed-up by appropriate activities, is very challenging. While 5a (Knowledge Transfer) seems rather broad or even somewhat unspecific and overambitious, 5b (Open Access) is rather narrow. At the same time, SWG OSI is also expected to respond to newly emerging topics in its domain, an increasingly complex and fast developing field. This may explain why most of the activities carried out by SWG OSI were not directly specified in the mandate, although considered compatible with it, and also seem very unbalanced. Up until the time of analysis, SWG OSI mainly worked on issues related to Open Science (evaluation of the Amsterdam Call at the request of the Council; European Open Science Cloud, EOSC) and has only very recently started looking at Open Innovation. But even within the area of Open Science, there was an imbalance of topics covered, according to some survey respondents. Too much focus was placed on the EOSC, at the expense of other aspects such as the development of institutional Open Access repositories and negotiations with publishers. Further suggestions with regard to the scope of the group were expressed in the survey:
 - Include open educational resources.
 - Include more specific and tangible tasks in the mandate.
 - Alignment of national OSI policies should be a priority.
 - Synergies and overlaps with other working or expert groups outside of the ERA advisory structure (such as the Open Science Policy Platform, the National Points of Reference on Scientific Information, or also e-IRG) should be identified, and a coordination task could be included in the mandate.
- *Organisation and working conditions:* The ratings of SWG OSI's Chair are somewhat mixed in the survey, leading to an overall favourable assessment (but third lowest comparing all seven ERA-related groups; mean score of 74 out of 100). Some respondents indicated that the Chair could be more responsive, consider better the contributions provided, make sure to give more time for feedback and to prepare and generally improve the organisation of meetings. The coverage of Member States in

the group is good but the Associated Countries could be represented better (only five countries). At the same time, there also seems to be room for improvement with regard to the composition of country delegations and their active participation (mean scores of 68 and 69, respectively). This is expressed by ERAC and the Council Secretariat but apparently not considered a problem by the European Commission. Some respondents feel that it is difficult to find delegates who have the expertise to cover the wide spectrum of SWG OSI's mandate. Others noted that not all delegates have the necessary decision-making power and need to consult back with their superiors, thus slowing decision-making processes. The role of the European Commission in SWG OSI is seen as adequate overall but too dominant according to some ERAC delegations. However, it was also pointed out by different survey respondents that Commission representatives do not always participate or do not have the right expertise, thus making it sometimes difficult to have proper exchanges and information. Especially with regard to the EOSC, the role of SWG OSI for the Commission should be clarified. The decision-making processes of SWG OSI are assessed as mostly clear and transparent. SWG OSI has held many meetings since its inception (which coincides with the period under review), especially in 2017, but they were not well aligned with the calendar of ERAC plenaries. No sub-groups have been established up to the time of the documentary analysis for this review (March 2018) but, as one survey respondent proposed, this might be a way to tackle the diversity of topics to be covered by SWG OSI. Finally, an issue to be resolved – as for all Standing Working Groups of ERAC – is the availability of meeting rooms. This was stressed by a couple of survey respondents. In addition, it was mentioned that more secretarial resources would be good.

- *Output:* On average, survey respondents are satisfied with the number of publications of SWG OSI even though not all ERAC delegations seem to think so. Compared with other ERA-related groups, the output of SWG OSI is rather modest but reasonable, given that the group was only created in 2016. The existing outputs are considered largely practical and substantial by ERAC, the Commission and the Council Secretariat, but less so by ERA stakeholders and the EU Presidency responding. Some respondents think that the reports by SWG OSI could be more innovative, clearer and shorter and include more practical guidelines and best practices. So far, an analysis of national practices, the evaluation and follow-up of the National Actions Plans as well as monitoring more generally does not (yet) seem to be priority in the work and outputs of SWG OSI.
- *Impact:* SWG OSI's publications are considered highly relevant for the Commission as well as – to a somewhat lower degree – for the ERA stakeholders and the Council Secretariat. By contrast, the EU Presidency responding indicates the opposite, and within ERAC, answers to this question vary widely. Furthermore, the uptake of recommendations by the group appears to be generally low for all almost all types of respondents (overall mean value of 47 on a scale from 0-100). According to the documentary analysis, the impact of SWG OSI's work appears to be limited in terms of references and citations. However and again, this can be explained by the group's young age. In addition, since SWG OSI is mainly supposed to advise ERAC and it is not very visible publicly, its wider impact is difficult to assess. From the perspective of a number of survey respondents, most impact could and can be achieved by the group with regard to the EOSC. However, it seems that SWG OSI's input is given less importance in comparison with other advisory groups involved in the process. In order to improve the group's impact, it was suggested that outputs should be made more easily available and digestible to a wider audience (in both content and language). In relation to that, SWG OSI's lack of visibility was pointed out by a number of ERA stakeholders, who would welcome more interaction with the group. In a similar vein, SWG OSI could benefit from establishing more and better links with the EU Open Science Policy Platform (OSPP).
- *Continuation of the group:* The support for the continuation of SWG OSI is very high and quite unanimous (third highest comparing all seven ERA-related groups; mean score of 84), given that Open Science and Open Innovation are increasingly important topics to work on and constitute key pillars of Horizon Europe. SWG OSI is also the main voice of Member States and Associated Countries on EOSC issues. However, the distinction between the missions of SWG OSI and the numerous other working or expert groups in the field is tricky and this may weaken the position of SWG OSI, particularly with respect to the Commission. Furthermore, the diversity of aspects entailed in the group's mandate and the unequal way by which they have been dealt with so far leads a number of survey respondents to reflect on whether SWG OSI should be split in two groups or even more temporary ad-hoc groups (within ERAC).

Recommendations

36. Revisit the mandate of SWG OSI, in order to give the group a clear mission with concrete and tangible tasks, while allowing it to respond to newly emerging topics in a fast developing field. In its current version, the mandate appears too fragmented and too diffuse in certain areas.
37. Make more efforts to pay equal attention to Open Science and Open Innovation topics. One approach could be to work more often in focused sub-groups or meet in different configurations, to deal with the increasingly complex fields of Open Science and Open Innovation.
38. Clarify the position of SWG OSI with regard to other working and expert groups active in Open Science.
39. Improve the organisation of the group (more time for feedback and to prepare meetings, structure of meetings).

2.8 Strategic Forum for international S&T Cooperation (SFIC)

Conclusions

- *Scope of the group:* According to the documentary analysis, the group's self-assessment as well as the survey results, the SFIC mandate covers ERA Priority 6 to a large extent. Interestingly, the lowest agreement with this statement comes from SFIC itself, but the value is still considerably high in the survey (70 on a scale from 0-100). Similarly, the activities of the group are found to be mostly in line with the mandate, but for this question, it is the Commission who is most hesitant. Furthermore, the analysis of the work programmes revealed that they list a large number of activities, but they are not very specific and do not commit to any milestones. According to its mandate, SFIC has an advisory role regarding international S&T cooperation, but it does not specify for whom. Specific suggestions given in the survey with regard to the scope of SFIC's mandate and format of its activities include:
 - A specific 'mission' with appropriate indicators and targets should be identified for this group, to be fulfilled in a defined time period (e.g. three years).
 - According to a number replies, the aim of SFIC should be to mobilise and facilitate mutual exchanges, joint reflections and activities among Member States and Associated Countries with regard to bi- and multilateral S&T cooperation that are of European relevance (such as e.g. joint transnational calls with third countries). To this aim, the group could consider obtaining funding from Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe or other programmes to help support such activities. Invitations to join consortia setting up regional CSAs, bilateral and other instruments funded by the Framework Programmes could be made through this group to allow all the Member States to participate on an equal footing, particularly with the more important targeted third countries. Furthermore, SFIC could be the focal point to coordinate joint calls with third countries.
 - Others feel that the focus should be on international cooperation in the context of the Framework Programmes, as there is no dedicated programme configuration for this anymore (with concrete deliverables, such as e.g. useful, up to date statistics for research fields and specific third countries).
 - More attention should be paid to the innovation dimension (science/business interface).
- *Organisation and working conditions:* Overall, the effectiveness of the SFIC Chair and the Steering Board receives moderate ratings in the survey (in fact, second lowest among the seven ERA-related groups studied in the case of the Chair), including both very low and very high values attributed by different ERAC delegations. While the coverage of countries in the group is good, the level of representation and especially the active participation of delegates are assessed as rather mediocre (mean scores of 64 and 58, respectively). So even though SFIC's self-assessment report states otherwise, the survey findings do not imply a very productive working dynamic. Concrete comments and ideas as to this problem were expressed in individual responses:
 - Delegates have very different backgrounds (political, scientific, administrative...) and it may be worthwhile to clarify which kind of competences are expected from delegates. In addition, frequent turnover of delegates is always a problem because it leads to limited institutional memory and affects the quality of contributions and discussions.

- Plenary meetings should be rendered more attractive by providing strategic documents in due time to prepare for meetings. This would increase attendance from delegates with the appropriate level of responsibility, instead of substitutes from Permanent Representations.
- More round table exchanges among participating countries (either orally or in written form ahead of meetings) could promote reflections on effective cooperation or synergies.
- Work could more often be carried out in flexible sub-group formats, looking at common challenges (e.g. innovation or science diplomacy) or certain geographical partner areas.
- Associated Countries should be granted access to the delegates' portal where documents are shared prior to the meetings.

The European Commission's role in SFIC is not clearly specified in the group's mandate. In practice, the Commission's involvement seems to be more or less appropriate on average but individual survey opinions go in very different directions here. Whereas SFIC itself would welcome a closer cooperation with the Commission and clearly considers the Commission as too passive in the group, the Council Secretariat gravitates towards the opposite end of the scale. Within ERAC, assessments vary as well. A problem identified in the survey is that the different Commission units concerned do not appear to be very well coordinated internally and are not always able to answer the delegates' questions. It was further suggested that the Commission should collaborate with and consult SFIC systematically for strategic input on international cooperation in the context of the Framework Programmes and the INCO Service Facility, which is not always the case now.

The transparency of decision-making processes in SFIC is adequate according to the survey, with the lowest agreement to this question coming from the Commission. During the period covered by the review, three sub-groups have been active and SFIC has held regular plenary meetings. However, these were only to some extent aligned with the calendar of ERAC plenaries.

Finally, in terms of working conditions, several survey answers expressed the importance of providing meeting rooms for sub-groups and/or a small budget to be able to invite external experts and representatives from target third countries or to send "SFIC ambassadors" to events.

- **Output:** SFIC has organised various workshops between 2016 and 2018 but its number of publications is lower than for other groups. Hence, the output of SFIC seems rather modest in relation to the ambitious work programme. While this finding is not shared in the group's self-assessment report, it is reflected in the survey as well: the results clearly indicate that there is room for progress with regard to the number of publications but also – and especially – their practical and substantial value (on a scale from 0-100, overall mean scores of 63 and 56, respectively). While ERAC and the Commission are more benevolent in this respect, the ERA stakeholders and the Council Secretariat are most sceptical. But even SFIC seems to be quite self-critical when it comes to the number and applicability of its publications. However, it also pointed out that the group's output often takes the form of information sharing, joint workshops and instruments (such as the toolbox), which are appreciated and important, especially for small countries.
- **Impact:** During the documentary analysis, it became clear that the impact of SFIC is difficult to measure because a major part of its work consists of exchanges and discussions rather than tangible outputs (see "Output" above). As for the survey results, the levels of agreement to all of the questions relating to the group's impact are relatively low (overall mean values of 50, 42 and 40 for relevance for country/organisation, uptake of recommendation and impact on definition of Presidency priorities, respectively). This is the case for all groups of respondents, with the Commission and a few ERAC delegations being most favourable. According to SFIC itself, impact can be seen in shared knowledge of participating countries (exchange of best practices, new strategies, collaboration initiatives, STI policies of third countries). A few specific suggestions to improve SFIC's impact were given in the survey:
 - As for all ERA-related groups, the issue of better public visibility and communication in order to increase impact was also addressed for SFIC. A clear impact analysis and a visibility plan are needed.
 - The lack of visibility was particularly emphasised by ERA stakeholders who would welcome more interaction with SFIC. Furthermore, SFIC should liaise more with institutions like IGLO, GSF, G7 or G20, which are all working on international cooperation as well.

- *Continuation of the group:* Overall, international cooperation is considered important, and SFIC is the only committee in EU R&I policy to discuss and exchange on this issue. Thus, the support for the continuation of SFIC is moderately high on average but second lowest comparing all seven ERA-related groups (mean value of 70 on a scale from 0-100, but significant variance between responses). For many survey respondents, the future of the group hinges on its ability to create more relevant output and impact as well as a clarification of its objectives and relations with the Commission. In addition, international cooperation may be regarded as a horizontal priority and SFIC should link its work to the domains of other ERA-related groups. One survey response even argues that the scope and activities of SFIC should be entirely integrated into ERAC.

Recommendations

40. The SFIC mandate should specify more clearly whom the group is supposed to advise. In relation to this, clarification of the group's main purpose is needed: dealing with the international cooperation dimension within the FPs or fostering exchanges between MS/AC about their international S&T cooperation policies. Such a clarification may also help defining more strategic and targeted activities and, in consequence, contribute to increase SFIC's impact.
41. SFIC should improve its working dynamic. This includes more substantial meeting documents and a timely distribution thereof.
42. SFIC needs to consider ways to increase the quality and impact of its opinions and reports.
43. Keep SFIC as a configuration of ERAC (including travel reimbursement and access to Council premises for plenary meetings).

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