

EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

– ERAC –
Secretariat

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ERAC 1210/17

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 35th ERAC plenary meeting on
21-22 September 2017 in Tartu (Estonia)

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the summary conclusions of the 35th ERAC plenary meeting on 21-22 September 2017 in Tartu (Estonia), as adopted by written procedure.

Summary conclusions
35th ERAC plenary meeting, 21-22 September 2017 in Tartu, Estonia

- Co-Chairs:** Wolfgang Burtscher and David Wilson
- Secretariat:** General Secretariat of the Council
- Present**¹: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (33)
- Absent:** Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Israel, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine (10)

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The agenda was adopted with one AOB item requested by the Commission, relating to a letter sent by Director-General Robert-Jan Smits to ERAC members and concerning the cuts proposed by the Council to the 2018 EU budget.

The co-Chairs welcomed the new ERAC delegates.

2. Summary conclusions of the 34th meeting of ERAC

The Member State (MS) co-Chair indicated that the summary conclusions of the 34th meeting of ERAC, held in Brussels on 16 June 2017, had been approved by written procedure on 13 September 2017.

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

3. Election of a new MS co-Chair

At the ERAC plenary meeting on 16 June 2017, the Member State co-Chair David Wilson announced his decision to step down from the ERAC co-Chairmanship for personal reasons. Following the announcement, in July the ERAC Secretariat launched a call for expressions of interest for the post of ERAC MS co-Chair. By the deadline of 9 September, the ERAC Secretariat had received one candidature, from Mr Christian Naczinsky (AT).

Christian Naczinsky was elected unanimously as a new Member State co-Chair under Articles 1(1) and 2(1) of the Rules of Procedure. He would take up his position at the conclusion of the 35th ERAC meeting.

The Commission (COM) co-Chair thanked David Wilson for his long-time dedication in ERAC work.

4. Information from the co-Chairs and Presidency

Following the announcement from Katrine Nissen (DK) that she would step down from the ERAC Steering Board as a Member State representative as she will be taking up a new position in Denmark, the co-Chairs had sent a letter to ERAC members on 19 September, inviting them to express their interest in the position of a Member State representative in the Steering Board. The COM co-Chair reminded delegations of the deadline of 29 September for the submission of expressions of interest.

The representative of the Estonian Presidency, Dr Indrek Reimand, made a presentation on R&I policy in Estonia, including the Presidency priorities for Research and Innovation (the presentation has been issued as document WK 10254/17). The priorities of the Estonian Presidency in the field of R&I were "Impact and value of research: providing rationale for investing in research & innovation" and "Increased coherence and openness of EU research and innovation partnerships". He also updated ERAC on the outcome of the discussions at the Informal meeting of Competitiveness Ministers (research), held on 25 July in Tallinn.

The representative of the incoming Bulgarian Presidency, Ms Zlatina Karova, made a short presentation on its Presidency priorities (the presentation has been issued as document WK 10255/17). She explained that the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency in the field of R&I would be "Accelerating the transfer of knowledge, data and research results in support of a new generation of innovators and researchers" and "Maximizing long-term sustainability of Research Infrastructures and opening up to the industry and the society". As the main output of its incoming Presidency, Bulgaria foresees Council conclusions on knowledge transfer. The Bulgarian Presidency also intends to prepare Council conclusions on ITER.

5. ERA and Innovation Policy

5.1 Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 and preparations for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

Following the discussions at the informal meeting of Competitiveness Ministers (research) on 25 July in Tallinn on the increased coherence and openness of EU research and innovation partnerships, Ministers had requested an in-depth analysis of the function of these partnerships and their possible improvement in view of the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9). Subsequently, the ERAC co-Chairs had sent a message to ERAC members on 7 September, proposing to expand this agenda item to public-public and public-private partnerships. The purpose of the expanded agenda item was to have a first discussion of how ERAC might respond to the Council's request to assess the coherence of the partnership instruments in R&I more generally than what it had already done in the context of its work on the IE H2020, including looking at the evidence emerging from the IE H2020. The co-Chairs also proposed either to establish an ERAC ad-hoc working group to work on the task, or to have an extraordinary meeting of ERAC to discuss the issue, taken that ERAC should produce recommendations quickly due to the timescale for the preparations of FP9. Following this proposal, a revised agenda had been circulated to ERAC.

The Commission first presented the state of play regarding the Interim Evaluation of the public-public and public-private partnerships under Horizon 2020 (the presentation has been issued as document WK 10338/17). It reminded delegations that the specific interim evaluations of the Article 185 and 187 initiatives and the contractual public-private partnerships (cPPPs) were expected to be published in October and would give a more detailed picture. Nevertheless, it could already be stated that whereas there are clear advantages in the partnership approach, there are also many challenges, including ones relating to a lack of coherence, fragmentation and duplication of research efforts as well as issues with methodology, monitoring and transparency. Furthermore, the Lamy report recommends that the partnerships should have a mission-oriented and impact-focused approach to address global challenges, and that the EU should limit co-funding to partnerships clearly delivering on EU missions with a simplified and flexible co-funding mechanism.

A set of guiding questions had been circulated to delegations prior to the meeting. Delegations were invited to express their views and to agree on a way forward for ERAC to propose recommendations for the future.

Many delegations indicated that as the guiding questions had been sent to ERAC only a week before the plenary, it was not possible to have an informed debate but only to gather initial reflections. During the exchange of views, delegations stressed the following:

- A roadmap process would be needed to rationalise the current number of partnerships. This roadmap should also include the strategic criteria used to establish new partnership initiatives (with sunset clauses), an exit strategy for existing ones and possibly milestones for evaluating whether the initiative is attaining its objectives;
- It would be very important to first decide on the content and long-term objectives for each challenge and only then choose the type of instrument, while reducing the number of instruments used.

- Long-term commitment by the Member States, transparency, inclusiveness, equality of partners, clear EU added value, impact and leverage effect were the most important criteria for partnerships. Some delegations also mentioned that the level of bureaucracy needed for the Member States to participate in the partnership instruments is too high. Moreover, many delegations referred to the missions-based approach mentioned in the Lamy report and called for the alignment of the partnership instruments with such missions/thematic platforms;
- The Commission and the Member States should cooperate better and at an earlier stage to have a more transparent process when establishing new initiatives and defining the missions; several delegations also commented on the openness of the partnership initiatives.
- There are good examples of well-functioning roadmaps like ESFRI so good existing practices should be taken into account and the partnerships themselves should be listened to; furthermore, work has already been done on partnerships by eg. GPC so ERAC would not need to start from scratch.

Most delegations agreed that the establishment of an ERAC ad-hoc working group (WG) as proposed by the ERAC co-Chairs would be a good way forward, though EL was not convinced. There was, however, disagreement on the timeline for the establishment of the group. Some delegations (like DE and SI) felt that if the ad-hoc WG was established now, before the adoption of the Council conclusions on the IE H2020 and preparations for the next FP, this would hamper the discussions on the Council conclusions in the Research Working Party (RWP). They also felt that ERAC needed guidance in the form of the upcoming Council conclusions to know what the precise tasks for the ad-hoc WG would be, as they considered that there was not enough evidence for the ad-hoc WG to start its work already. The informal RWP meeting that the EE Presidency was planning to organise on 18 October to discuss, together with experts, the lessons-learnt from the existing partnering approaches and main principles for creating a more systematic approach in the future, was the right way forward according to these delegations. The ad-hoc WG could be established after the Council conclusions were adopted in December.

Other delegations (like AT and EE) felt that ERAC should already start preparing the ad-hoc WG, as there was in fact a lot of evidence in the form of the IE H2020, the upcoming evaluations of the partnership instruments (due in October as indicated above) and also the report by GPC on the future of Joint Programming. The mandate should in any case only be approved once the Council conclusions were ready. Given the planning for the proposal for FP9, the ad-hoc WG would probably not be able to produce its report to be taken into account in the preparations of the FP9 proposal, but it would be able to do this in time for the negotiations on the proposal within the Council.

The COM co-Chair recalled that ERAC did not need new guidance from the Council, as it had already been given the task by the Council in 2015 to assess the coherence of the partnership instruments in R&I, a task that the Council had reiterated in 2016. He underlined the urgency for ERAC to give its response to the Council, given the upcoming proposal for FP9 and the negotiations. The MS co-Chair agreed that in this situation, it was not necessary for ERAC to wait until the Council conclusions on the IE H2020 and preparations for the next FP were adopted before taking any action. He reminded delegations that the decisions on partnerships would not only have consequences for FP9 but also for national research systems, taken the amount of national efforts that partnerships take. He therefore urged ERAC not to wait until December but to decide already now on the establishment of the ad-hoc WG. However, the mandate for the ad-hoc WG had to be very clear, and a number of elements to be covered had emerged from the present discussion, though it would be wise not to finalise the mandate until the Council conclusions were ready . But the ERAC Secretariat could already launch a call for expressions of interest for ERAC delegates to become members of the ad-hoc WG and to start thinking about the tasks for the ad-hoc WG.

Following the discussion, ERAC agreed that the preparations for the establishment of the ad-hoc WG would be started shortly.

5.2 Update on ERA National Action Plans and strategies

The Commission/Ms Anette Bjornsson updated delegates on the follow-up of the National Action Plans (NAPs) as well as on the outcome of the workshop on the NAPs, held on 20 September 2017 (the presentation has been issued as document WK 10321/17). There had been three sub-groups in the workshop discussing excellence, funding and complementarity, and the discussions had been active and fruitful. Delegations participating in the workshop had proposed to have further workshops, as it was felt that the sharing of lessons-learnt was very useful.

ERAC agreed that a further workshop on ERA NAPs would be organised in Bulgaria back-to-back to the ERAC plenary meeting on 15-16 March 2018. On the basis of the input from the three subgroups, the Commission would send ERAC a proposal on the subjects for the next workshop.

5.3 Report "Science, research and innovation performance of the EU 2018"

A document relating to the agenda item (WK 9436/17) had been circulated to delegations prior to the meeting. The Commission/Mr Beñat Bilbao-Osorio made a presentation on the emerging findings of the Report "Science, research and innovation performance of the EU 2018", foreseen to be launched in mid-February 2018 (the presentation has been issued as document WK 10326/17). One of the key messages from the draft report is that innovation and its impacts are changing due to digitalisation and other longer-term forces, which provides large opportunities but also risks and uncertainty. This uncertainty should be embraced and should lead to policy experimentation and further research. There is a clear investment effort in innovation by Member States and the innovation divide was becoming more nuanced than in the past. It is clear however that the investments take time to mature, a reason why in many scientific outputs there still was a divide among the Member States.

The AT delegation stressed that innovation cycles were faster than traditional policy cycles and that this had to be taken into account in FP9. It considered that the report was very good, also in the sense that it gave the needed sense of urgency. The representative of the ERAC Standing Working Group on Human Resources and Mobility recalled that human resources should be taken into account in the report. Mr Bilbao-Osorio indicated that the report would include a whole chapter on these issues. The SE delegation asked about the role of the demand side activities in boosting innovation. Mr Bilbao-Osorio indicated that all policy implications would be discussed with Member States.

The COM co-Chair reminded delegations of the workshop on 4 October under the auspices of ERAC that the Commission, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU would organise a workshop to present and discuss the main findings of the upcoming edition of the Report with Member States and Associated Countries.

6. Standing Information Point

The document concerning the update on the Joint EC/OECD Survey on Science, Technology and Innovation Policies (WK 9437/17) had been circulated to delegations prior to the meeting.

7. ERA Governance

7.1 Updates from the ERAC Working Groups

The representatives of the ERAC Standing Working Groups (SWGs) on Gender in Research and Innovation, Human Resources and Mobility and Open Science and Innovation gave updates on the recent activities of their groups (the presentations of the two latter groups have been issued as documents WK 10329/17 and WK 10326/17; the update of the first group was circulated to ERAC members after the meeting).

The BG delegation stressed the importance of knowledge circulation and reminded ERAC that this would be one of its Presidency priorities. The EL delegation mentioned difficulties in responding to the questionnaire relating to the Amsterdam Call for Action, as different national stakeholders gave different replies. The Vice-Chair of the SWG, Mr Marc Vanholsbeeck, acknowledged that this was a problem for some delegations but encouraged them to include all different national viewpoints in the replies. The FI delegation underlined the importance for the SWG to collaborate with the other groups dealing with similar issues, like to Open Science Policy Platform. The HR delegation asked about possible links with the work of the MLE on synergies. Mr Vanholsbeeck replied that the SWG was still analysing this issue. The SE delegation commented on the challenges due to the very broad mandate of the SWG on Open Science and Innovation and asked how the group intended to tackle the part relating to open innovation. Mr Vanholsbeeck indicated that the SWG had decided to handle open innovation as a cross-cutting issue and would tackle it once it had finalised the report on the Amsterdam Call for Action.

7.2 Updates from the ERA-related Groups

The representatives of GPC, ESFRI and SFIC gave updates on the recent activities of their groups (the presentation of GPC has been issued as document WK 10337/17). In the context of the discussion on day 1 on the partnerships, the GPC Chair, Mr Leonidas Antoniou, recalled that apart from the GPC report on the future of Joint Programming, a GPC taskforce had in 2016 also produced a report on the Monitoring and Evaluating of JPIs in which minimum conditions for the assessment of new and existing JPIs had been developed.

The ESFRI Vice-Chair, Mr Jan Hrusak, presented the recent activities. The ESFRI Annual report 2016 was ready and a link had been circulated to ERAC. The preparation of the ESFRI Roadmap 2018 was proceeding smoothly and 12 new research infrastructure projects had been presented to ESFRI by the deadline and would undergo evaluation and assessment. The Roadmap would be ready and published during the AT presidency. ESFRI had also decided to create a new strategic working group on Data, Computing and Digital Research Infrastructures (DIGIT). Furthermore, the report of the ESFRI ad-hoc group on Long term sustainability was approved in June 2017 was ready to be published.

The SFIC representative, Mr Peter Spyns, indicated that SFIC was in the process of renewing its working methods and that this would be discussed further in the next plenary. It seemed that the country groups as such had fulfilled their objectives and that it was now time to see how to develop the methods. SFIC had also started collaborating with the Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation on Gender aspects in international cooperation. There was excellent cooperation between the Member States and the Commission on the International Cooperation INCO Service Facility, with a standard procedure for the submission, endorsement and evaluation of request to the Service Facility in preparation. SFIC was also planning to invite different stakeholders and partners to the upcoming meetings (such as COST, EUREKA).

7.3 Review of ERA governance foreseen in 2018

The MS co-Chair updated delegates on progress and feedback received since the latest ERAC Plenary. A draft document with main issues and a first set of questions to the DGs, drafted jointly by Mr Christian Naczinsky and the Bulgarian, Danish, Estonian, German, Italian and Swedish delegations, had been circulated by the Steering Board following its meeting on 27 June.

Mr Naczinsky reminded ERAC that it had decided to have a light approach to the review this time, because the National ERA Action Plans had just been concluded and were in the process of being implemented. The draft questions reflected this approach and were mostly hands-on, rather than strategic.

The BE delegation wanted to see a more specific focus on the sub-components of the ERA governance structure, i.e. the groups themselves, in question 1. Mr Naczinsky reminded ERAC that at this stage, it was just preparing the questions for the DGs and that the actual review would be launched by the DGs' discussion on 5 December. The FR delegation was wondering whether the word "urgent" should not be deleted from the third question in block 2. Mr Naczinsky and the MS co-Chair agreed that the ERAC Steering Board could reflect whether "urgent" was the best word there.

ERAC agreed on the draft set of questions, with a minor modification of words in the third question in block 2. The ERAC Steering Board would at its next meeting finalise the questions and decide on the procedure to follow in view of the plenary on 5 December.

7.4 ERAC Annual Report 2016

The MS co-Chair indicated that the ERAC Annual Report 2016 had been adopted by written procedure on 8 September 2017. He thanked the other ERA-related groups for the excellent collaboration on the report, and noted that all groups were agreed that the more uniform structure for the separate groups' input had been helpful and worth taking further in next year's report. He emphasised the importance of ERAC and the other groups communicating clearly and pithily the real-world impact of their work.

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

The MS co-Chair indicated that the Report of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Measuring the Impact of EU Framework Programmes for R&I at National Level had been adopted by written procedure on 4 July 2017.

8. Any other business

8.1 *36th ERAC meeting (5 December 2017, Brussels)*

The MS co-Chair indicated that at its next meeting, the Steering Board would draw up the provisional annotated agenda of the next ERAC plenary meeting on 5 December 2017 in Brussels, on the basis of the updated Work Programme 2016-2017.

8.2 *Letter sent by Director-General Robert-Jan Smits to ERAC members concerning the cuts proposed by the Council to the 2018 EU budget*

The COM co-Chair referred to the letter sent by Director-General Robert-Jan Smits to ERAC members concerning the cuts proposed by the Council to the 2018 EU budget.
