

EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

– ERAC –
Secretariat

Brussels, 29 November 2018
(OR. en)

ERAC 1214/18

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 39th ERAC plenary meeting, 17-18
September 2018 in Salzburg, Austria

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the summary conclusions of the 39th ERAC plenary meeting on 17-18 September 2018 in Salzburg, Austria, as adopted by written procedure.

Summary conclusions
39th ERAC plenary meeting, 17-18 September 2018 in Salzburg, Austria

Co-Chairs: Jean-Eric Paquet/Christian Naczinsky

Secretariat: General Secretariat of the Council

Present¹: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (34)

Absent: Albania, Armenia, Faroe Islands, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine (10)

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The agenda was adopted with three AOB items requested by the Commission concerning the distribution at the meeting of the CORDIS Research*eu results Magazine, the evaluation of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF) and a joint project between the Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the OECD.

The co-Chairs welcomed the new ERAC delegates.

2. Summary conclusions of the 38th meeting of ERAC

The Member State co-Chair (MS co-Chair) indicated that the summary conclusions of the 38th meeting of ERAC, held in Brussels on 17 May 2018, had been approved by written procedure on 9 July 2018.

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. Information from the co-Chairs and Presidency

The MS co-Chair referred to the last ERAC Steering Board (SB) meeting on 26 June 2018, and to the summary sent to ERAC following the ERAC SB meeting.

The representative of the Austrian Presidency, Director-General Barbara Weitgruber, made a presentation on R&I policy in Austria (the presentation has been issued as document WK 11126/18). Among the current initiatives in R&I policy in Austria, Ms Weitgruber mentioned the on-going OECD Review of the Austrian R&I landscape and the evaluation of the implementation of Horizon 2020, EUREKA, COSME, EEN and ERA in Austria that was finalised in June 2018. She also indicated that the reflection on and drafting of a new R&I strategy in Austria until 2030 would start in 2019. Reflection was also on-going relating to Austria's participation in the Framework Programme for R&I (FP), including improvement of the strategic positioning of Austria as a research partner and a more frequent role as a coordinator in the FP projects. For R&I partnerships and future missions, national strategic prioritisation was necessary, as well as improved coordination at national level. Furthermore, the Austrian ERA governance was being adapted to allow for more targeted and cross-sectoral cooperation between ministries.

The representative of the incoming Romanian Presidency, Cristian Staicu, made a presentation on its Presidency priorities (the presentation has been issued as document WK 11006/18). "Supporting Europe-wide excellence in research & innovation to increase competitiveness by suitable measures and instruments at the European and regional levels" is the main priority of the incoming Romanian Presidency in the field of R&I, and it covers the following:

- Reducing disparities in research and innovation performance between Member States through appropriate measures and instruments;
- Developing a European strategic framework for cooperation in research and innovation at the Black Sea;

- Supporting European policies and initiatives in research, innovation and space, such as: missions and partnerships, European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), European Innovation Council (EIC), EU Space Programme.

Several R&I events will be organised in Romania during the Presidency.

4. ERA Governance

4.1 Review of the ERA advisory structure

The draft report for the 2018 review of the ERA advisory structure, drafted by the rapporteur team for the exercise (Philipp Langer (CH), Lisa Müller (CH) and Kari Balke Øiseth (NO), was circulated to ERAC Members on 3 August for comments, with deadline 31 August. Following this consultation round, a final draft report, prepared on the basis of the comments received, was circulated to ERAC Members on 10 September in view of the discussion and subsequent adoption of the report at the ERAC Plenary.

Lisa Müller and Philipp Langer presented the final draft report (the presentation has been issued as document WK 10814/18). It consists of several parts, starting with an overview of the recommendations that are derived from the main results (conclusions and recommendations made by the rapporteur team). There is also a separate Technical Annex describing 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 presents detailed information on the methodology used.

All delegations that took the floor were generally in favour of the draft report and the majority of the recommendations. Some (BE, EE, EL, IE, IS, PT and the Commission) were somewhat disappointed that the draft report didn't take a more radical view on the need to streamline the ERA advisory structure. The MS co-Chair reminded delegations about the agreement at the ERAC Plenary at Directors-General level in December 2017 that the 2018 review should be a light and evolutionary rather than revolutionary. He also indicated that a new round of discussions on the ERA priorities and possibly more radical changes in the ERA advisory structure could be foreseen following a potential new Communication from the Commission on the ERA Roadmap.

A discussion on the individual draft recommendations followed, during which the recommendations n° 2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 32, 33 and 35 were slightly modified following comments and suggestions made by delegations. Some of the changes also reflected comments from the representatives of the ERA-related groups. Following the modifications, all delegations could agree to the report which was subsequently adopted by ERAC by unanimity².

4.2 Updates from the ERAC Standing Working Groups and from the ERA-related Groups

Following the established practice, updates by the ERAC Standing Working Groups and the ERA-related groups had been provided in writing to Delegations prior to the meeting, accompanied by a cover note highlighting the key issues that would be brought up at the Plenary and that ERAC delegates should focus on during the discussion. This time, the key issue was the ESFRI Roadmap 2018.

² The FR delegation objected to the sentence relating to interpretation in recommendation n° 23 but not to the adoption of the report in its entirety.

Giorgio Rossi, the ESFRI Chair, gave a presentation of the Roadmap 2018 which is a strategy report on Research Infrastructures (this presentation has been issued as document WK 10830/18). He outlined the structure of the Roadmap, described the ESFRI methodology and mentioned some of the challenges ahead. He also referred to the fact that the report on the 2018 review of the ERA advisory structure named ESFRI as a good example of a group that works in a very effective and efficient way and expressed his opinion that this is partly because of the spill-over of knowledge from the ESFRI projects and because the output of the group has a bearing in reality. To the question by the BE delegation as to good practices that the group could share with the other ERA-related groups, the ESFRI Chair mentioned the strategic working groups in different areas in which delegates and experts sit together.

The updated GPC Work Programme 2018-2019 had been circulated to ERAC Members for information prior to the meeting. There were no comments to the draft from Delegations.

5. ERA and Innovation Policy

5.1 Strategic debate: how to improve national Research and Innovation systems of Member States and Associated Countries

At the ERAC Plenary in December 2017 at Directors-General level, many Delegations indicated that ERAC should take a more strategic stance and hold discussions on strategic, cross-cutting and new emerging policy topics. Consequently, the ERAC Steering Board proposed to have a first exchange of views on two strategic policy topics at the Plenary in Salzburg. The aim was for Delegations to exchange views on how to further optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of their national Research and Innovation (R&I) systems –priority one in the ERA agenda-, with a focus on performance based funding of public research and on R&D tax incentives. A policy paper with lead questions was circulated to Delegations prior to the meeting. The paper drew to a large extent on the outcomes of Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility mutual learning exercises on these two topics, which actively mobilised a large set of Member States and Associated Countries around policy discussions on these two topics.

The Commission/Román Arjona made an introductory presentation to launch the debate (this presentation has been issued as document WK 11004/18). During the exchange of views that followed, Delegations reported on the state of play in their national R&I systems relating to the two focus areas and possible plans for the future.

Overall Delegations underlined the usefulness of having a higher engagement of ERAC in strategic discussions, including around good (and bad) practice, drawing when possible on the outcomes of the Policy Support Facility mutual learning exercises. The SE delegation proposed that strategic discussions at ERAC could give inspiration to Mutual Learning Exercises by the PSF. PL expressed its opinion that there can be limitations as to what issues can be discussed in Plenary, and other delegations mentioned the relevance of bringing in specialists when needed (IE, ICE).

The following ideas were expressed relating to the performance based research funding system (PRFS): it is difficult to start introducing PRFS in already well established R&I systems (AT); having a limited number of research organisations makes it difficult to consider using PRFS (CY); how to best pull together a system with PRFS in an effective manner? (DK); a new kind of thinking on PRFS is needed (FI); there is a need to look at the long-term effects of PRFS (FR); there are risks and side effects to a PRFS; PRFS could be one of the topics for a future ERA workshop (IT); a comprehensive overview of the situation in all Member States and Associated Countries relating to PRFS would be useful (SI); going further in the evidence base about PRSF would be appreciated (SK).

During the exchange of views on R&D tax incentives, Delegations expressed notably the following: how to get the SMEs and start-ups on board? (IE); assessment of the effect of the R&D tax incentives is difficult because the variables are numerous (IT); what is the right balance? (DK); even small incentives have an effect (NO). BE suggested that reflection is needed on the most appropriate format and that focussed workshops on this topic would be useful.

Mr Arjona responded to questions and notably stressed the relevance of ensuring consistency with the wider set of performance incentives for public research organisations and of maintaining a balanced policy mix for R&D. He highlighted as well the value of ERAC providing policy input beyond what stems from the mutual learning exercises, and at a different level of granularity. Such input is particularly valuable in view of improved evidence-based policy making on science and innovation, across the EU.

The Commission co-Chair (COM co-Chair) concluded that it is necessary for ERAC to reflect how to continue with the strategic debates and urged ERAC to be innovative in the way the strategic discussions are handled. He said that there was a need to analyse how to best integrate the discussion on strategic topics, including through a dedicated ERA workshop, interaction between ERAC (or an ERA-related group) and the PSF.

5.2 ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships and follow-up

The Chair of the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group (WG) on Partnerships, Maria Reinfeldt, made a presentation on the recent work of the Ad-hoc WG (this presentation has been issued as document WK 10834/18). She explained that since the ERAC Plenary in May, the draft reports by the Ad-hoc WG on "Rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape" and on "Increasing the efficiency of implementation" had been modified on the basis of the comments received and approved at the level of the Ad-hoc WG. The final draft reports had been circulated to ERAC Delegations in July in view of the Plenary. The key message of the draft report on "Rationalisation" is that rationalisation should lead to fewer and more strategic R&I partnerships with a clear position within the thematic priorities. It proposes distinct rationalisation strategies at three levels. The draft report on "Efficiency" identifies key efficiency issues and measures for the different types of partnerships that need to be addressed with the highest priority.

The Commission (Joerg Niehoff) informed Delegations that an expert hearing on the criteria framework for partnerships would be organised by the Commission on 25 September 2018. At the ERAC Plenary in December, in addition to the adoption of the final report of the Ad-hoc WG, the Commission would present a draft for a further elaborated criteria framework for partnerships and a proposal for the ‘Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships’. Following questions from Delegations about the next steps, Mr Niehoff explained that the draft criteria framework that will be presented at the ERAC Plenary in December will remain work in progress until the proposal for the next Framework Programme for R&I, Horizon Europe, is adopted. The implementation of the next generation of partnerships will only start in 2021.

There was wide agreement among ERAC Delegations that the Ad-hoc WG had continued the good work, like with the previous two reports, and Delegates who took the floor thanked the Chair and the members of the Ad-hoc WG warmly for their efforts. The NL delegation indicated that the "Efficiency" report by the ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships stated that a common and harmonised management of national funds is not widely supported. It will have an effect on institutional partnerships. For NL it is of particular importance for projects such as Eurostars under article 185. The DE delegation indicated that the conclusion and the recommendation on ESIF funding in the draft report on "Efficiency" could imply a certain obligation to use the ESIF funding as the national contribution to co-funded calls of partnerships. Furthermore, this delegation considered that ERAC should not stipulate how the national managing authorities should design the operational programmes. The FR delegation inquired what would be the follow-up to the adoption of the reports by the Ad-hoc WG. The PT delegation underlined that the four reports produced by the Ad-hoc WG so far and the final report to be adopted in December should be a package.

The MS co-Chair indicated that the follow-up included four strands: the adoption of the final report by the Ad-hoc WG, the draft Council conclusions on ERA that the Research Working Party, the Council's preparatory body for R&I issues, would start discussing in October, the ERAC workshop on 5 December and the ERAC Plenary meeting on 6 December at which the Commission was expected to come up with the presentation of the draft criteria framework for partnerships and the proposal for the ‘Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships’.

The draft reports by the Ad-hoc WG on "Rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape" and on "Increasing the efficiency of implementation" were adopted unanimously by ERAC.

Ms Reinfeldt informed delegations that she would change positions starting from 1 October 2018 and would thus resign from her duties as the Chair of the Ad-hoc WG at the end of September. This information had already been circulated by email by the ERAC Secretariat prior to the Plenary, together with a call for expressions of interest for those ERAC delegates who would be interested in becoming the new Chair of the Ad-hoc WG. The MS co-Chair reminded ERAC Delegates of the deadline of 24 September to send in the expressions of interest.

6. Standing Information Point

Documents concerning the Information on the ERA Workshop to be held on 5 December 2018 in Brussels (WK 9852/18), the ERA Progress Report 2018 (WK 9842/18) and the Outcome of the 2018 European Semester process (WK 9987/18) were circulated to delegations prior to the meeting.

Subgroup 1 of the ERA workshop on 5 December 2018 will cover the implementation of the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 on ERA. The MS co-Chair indicated that this subgroup should also work on a more detailed follow-up on the review (possible 'Action Plan'), as some of the aspects in the recommendations were too detailed for the Council conclusions. He also mentioned that some ERAC Members had already volunteered to chair the two first subgroups at the Workshop: Fulvio Esposito (IT) for Subgroup 1 ("The impact of the ERA Council conclusions of 30 November 2018") and Cecilia Cabello for Subgroup 2 ("Options for a simple and coherent monitoring of ERA National Action Plans"). The proposal of the MS co-Chair was that the new Chair of the ERAC Ad-hoc WG on Partnerships would chair Subgroup 3 ("Sharing information on the national governance for the transition period and of partnerships in a longer perspective"). ERAC agreed with this proposal.

7. ERAC Work Programme 2018/19

The draft updated ERAC Work Programme 2018/19 had been circulated to Delegations prior to the meeting. The MS co-Chair proposed to remove the following topics under the title "ERAC strategic topics for 2018/19": Digitalisation in the context of the societal challenges; Open innovation, acceleration of knowledge transfer and access to research results; European Open Science Cloud, Open Science and Open Access; European Innovation Council, and Foresight (e.g. The Knowledge Future: intelligent policy choices for Europe 2050), as he considered that they were not relevant for ERAC at this stage. Delegations agreed to this proposal. The draft updated ERAC Work Programme 2018/19 was unanimously adopted by ERAC with the agreed modification.

8. Any other business

8.1 *40th ERAC meeting (6 December 2018, Brussels)*

The MS co-Chair indicated that at its next meeting, the ERAC SB would draw up the provisional annotated agenda of the next ERAC plenary meeting on 6 December 2018 in Brussels on the basis of the updated ERAC Work Programme 2018-2019.

8.2 *Distribution at the meeting of the CORDIS Research*eu results Magazine*

The Commission/Rosalinde van der Vlies informed Delegations that the CORDIS Research*eu results Magazine would be distributed to all participants to the Plenary meeting.

8.3 *Evaluation of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF)*

The Commission/Román Arjona informed Delegations that an expert group had been established to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF) and to provide recommendations to improve its services under the proposed new Framework Programme, Horizon Europe. David Wilson, the Rapporteur for the expert group, invited Delegations to contact the expert group to share their views on the PSF. Jacqueline Grech (MT), one of the members of the expert group, reminded Delegations of the online questionnaire sent in July for which many replies were still expected.

8.4 *Joint project between the Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the OECD*

The Commission/Román Arjona informed Delegations about a joint project between the Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and the OECD on better evidence based policy making. He called on ERAC Delegations to raise awareness of the project with the responsible national authorities in order to gain access to the necessary micro-data.
