

EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA  
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

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– ERAC –  
Secretariat

Brussels, 7 March 2019  
(OR. en)

ERAC 1202/19

**NOTE**

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From: ERAC Secretariat  
To: ERAC delegations

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Subject: Summary conclusions of the 40th ERAC plenary meeting on 6 December 2018 in Brussels

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Delegations will find annexed to this Note the summary conclusions of the 40th ERAC plenary meeting on 6 December 2018 in Brussels, as adopted by written procedure.

**Summary conclusions**

40<sup>th</sup> ERAC plenary meeting, 6 December 2018 in Brussels

**Co-Chairs:** Jean-Eric Paquet/Christian Naczinsky

**Secretariat:** General Secretariat of the Council

**Present**<sup>1</sup>: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (36)

**Absent:** Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine (8)

**1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes. The co-Chairs welcomed the new ERAC delegates.

**2. Summary conclusions of the 39<sup>th</sup> meeting of ERAC (Salzburg, 17-18 September 2018)**

The summary conclusions of the 39<sup>th</sup> meeting of ERAC, held in Salzburg on 17-18 September 2018, were approved by written procedure on 29 November 2018 (doc. ERAC 1214/18).

**3. Information from the co-Chairs and Presidency**

- The Member State co-Chair (MS co-Chair) provided information on the main issues discussed at the latest ERAC Steering Board meeting held on 16 October 2018, which included: how to strengthen the strategic capacity of ERAC; the draft criteria and the strategic coordinating process for Partnerships, and how to set up a coherent and lean monitoring tool on national progress towards all ERA priorities with minimal administrative burden.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

- The AT Presidency (Julia Prikoszovits and Marlene Schoder-Kienbeck) provided an update on the progress of its Presidency priorities. The co-Chairs commended the achievements of the AT Presidency, including the official launch of the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) in Vienna on 23 November 2018.
- The incoming RO Presidency (Viorel Vulturescu) made a presentation on its Presidency priorities which include "Supporting Europe's wide excellence in R&I", "Reducing disparities in R&I performance between Member States and regions" and "Promoting a European strategic framework for cooperation in R&I in the Black Sea region".

## 4. ERA Governance

### 4.1 The impact of the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 on the ERA and the follow-up on the Review of the ERA advisory structure

On the basis of the ERAC Opinion adopted at its plenary in Salzburg on 17-18 September 2018 (doc. 1209/18 and 1209/18 ADD1), ERAC discussed the implementation of the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 on the governance of the ERA (doc. 14989/18) and the follow-up on the review of the ERA advisory structure.

The debate started with a presentation on the preliminary findings of the ERAC workshop (subgroup 1 on the impact of the ERA Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 and the follow-up on the review of the ERA advisory structure) held on 5 December 2018, with the purpose of establishing an Action Plan -as well as a timeline for its adoption- which should translate the 43 ERAC recommendations into concrete actions and contribute to the implementation of the Council conclusions.

The presentation, given by the Chair of the subgroup, Fulvio Esposito (IT), and the rapporteur Amaury Neve De Mevergnies (European Commission) was based on a template listing the ERAC recommendations and the Council conclusions with proposals for actions, distributions of responsibilities, deadlines, outputs and targets/indicators (this presentation has been circulated as document WK 15302/18).

The presentation included examples related to the first four recommendations of the template, as discussed in the subgroup 1. The template would be completed following a consultation round ending mid-January 2019, so that the draft Action Plan could be submitted to the ERAC Steering Board that meets on 29 January 2019.

The MS co-Chair recalled that consultation round would be open to all ERAC members.

In the ensuing debate, DE pointed out to the opportunity of revitalising ERA by profiting from the Commission Communication on ERA due in 2020, for which high level input during 2019 on future priorities and content will be needed. UK requested to draw as soon as possible a list of preparatory steps to be taken and stressed the importance of ERAC's own input to this process together with other contributions to be collected from stakeholders.

In this respect, the MS co-Chair agreed that it would be important to discuss how ERAC could take part in the process, whilst recalling that it will be up to the next Commission to

decide on a new ERA Communication. He also recalled that the organisation of ministerial conferences is under the remits of EU Presidencies.

For FR, the organisation of an ERA ministerial conference should constitute the highlight for the launch of the new ERA Priorities, at the 20th anniversary of the creation of the ERA. It also asked for reflection on how the Horizon Europe programme could support the future ERA priorities. Finally, FR considered that the first semester of 2021 was too far away for ERA-EHEA back-to-back meetings, and it would be useful to convene such a meeting sooner.

To this regard, the FI delegation announced that the upcoming FI Presidency will organise a joint ERAC-EHEA committees meeting on 1 October 2019 to discuss synergies between research and education.

DK also agreed on the importance of the ERAC contribution to the future of the ERA, as well as on a thorough preparation of an ERA ministerial conference. Moreover, it flagged the work carried out by the SWG on Human resources and mobility and proposed that this group could deal with the links with higher education.

SE fully supported the establishment of a pragmatic Action Plan which should avoid putting excessive burden to delegations.

NL supported the swift implementation of the Council conclusions and reminded about gender equality and open science as cross-cutting issues.

The MS co-Chair put forward prospects for reflection on the future of the GPC taking into account the creation of an envisaged Forum for R&I Partnerships, which might be inspired on the ESFRI model, and would steer and monitor the life-cycle of the Partnerships. A radical option would be the discontinuation of the GPC, as the new Forum would deal with R&I Partnerships. A smoother looking-forward option would consist in the integration of key topics like openness and transparency of networks into the existing GPC mandate, for the estimated two-year transition phase, with a view to paving the way for the possible inclusion of these topics as new ERA priorities in the future.

The Commission (Kurt Vandenberghe) indicated that it would be ready to provide assistance with the elaboration of the Action Plan. On the future of the ERA, he warned that the incumbent Commission cannot pre-empt about initiatives to be taken by the next Commission. He advised to incorporate references to R&I in the documents that will be forwarded to EU leaders that will be meeting at the summit in Sibiu, Romania, on 9 May 2019, to discuss on the future of Europe, in order to send a strong political signal on the future of the ERA. Furthermore, he referred to the publication of the next ERA progress report planned in early 2019 as a good additional element for upcoming discussions. As regards the future of the GPC, Mr Vandenberghe indicated that the Commission would be ready to help with the adaptation of the GPC's role, while paying a particular attention to avoid the duplication of structures. Finally, the Commission highlighted the relevance of topics related to openness and transparency.

The MS co-Chair summarised the outcome of the debate as follows:

- ERAC delegates will be invited to contribute to the draft Action Plan by mid-January 2019 with a view to the ERAC Steering Board meeting on 29 January 2019. The draft Action Plan should be adopted at the ERAC plenary on 21-22 March 2019.

## 4.2 Highlights from the ERA-related Groups

ERAC took note of the written information on the updates of activities from the ERA-related groups (doc. 14491/18).

The main highlight was a presentation by the Chair of the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation, Marcela Linkova, on the report on the implementation of the Council conclusions of 1 December 2015 on advancing gender equality in the ERA (this presentation has been circulated as document WK 15305/2018).

The report (doc. 1213/18) has a focus on the four main areas of action of the Council conclusions: Implementation of the ERA roadmap, Sustainable cultural and institutional changes, Gender balance in decision-making position and Gender knowledge and monitoring.

The report reveals important differences among countries in the level and the way that policies and actions to advance gender equality in the ERA are implemented. In particular, the Chair of the SWG on Gender in R&I raised awareness on the disappointing situation under which, the implementation of measures appear to go backwards in some areas related to gender equality.

The report contains a set of recommendations to improve and reinforce Priority 4 in the ERA roadmaps.

A discussion followed on the relevance of gender equality policies in research and innovation against the background of political misgivings expressed by some Member States, inter alia, during the negotiations on the Horizon Europe regulation.

Delegations that took the floor showed high appreciation for the report and the work of the SWG on Gender in R&I in general. Many delegations indicated that further work was needed at national and EU level for the promotion of gender equality.

The acting Chair of the SWG OSI compared the situation of gender issues with those on open science, where three main strands can be considered: gender (and open science) in society, in decision-making processes and in the research field. He concluded that broader integration of gender equality and open science issues will in the end benefit innovation.

The Commission (Kurt Vandenberghe) welcomed the report and recalled the Commission action plan on gender that is in place since 2016. He also underlined the importance of the national level.

The Commission co-Chair (COM co-Chair) commended the rapporteur for the report.

The Chair of the SWG on Gender in Research and Innovation expressed gratefulness for the comments made and the lively debate. She agreed on the important dimension of labour and family issues and of keeping in mind the broader picture. She also stressed the very positive examples of measures taken in several countries that are working well and should serve as guidance for best practises. She concluded by stressing the importance of monitoring the progress made in order to better understand the impact of measures on people's daily lives.

## 5. ERA and Innovation Policy

### 5.1 Monitoring ERA National Action Plans and strengthening the strategic capacity of ERAC

#### *- Monitoring ERA National Action Plans (NAPs)*

ERAC held a debate on a simple and coherent monitoring of ERA NAPs, based on the outcome of discussions held at the ERAC workshop of 5 December 2018 (subgroup 2).

The debate started with a presentation on the preliminary findings of the ERAC workshop (subgroup 2: on options for a simpler and coherent monitoring of ERA NAPs), with the purpose of deciding how the monitoring of ERA NAPs could be implemented in line with recommendation 12 of the ERAC Opinion on the Review of the ERA advisory structure (this presentation has been circulated as document [WK 15305/18](#)).

The presentation was given by the Chair of subgroup 2, Cecilia Cabello Valdés (ES), and by the rapporteur Arie van der Zwan (European Commission).

The points discussed during the workshop included: 1. developments that have taken place in the method of the forthcoming ERA Progress Report 2018, including changes in the EMM; 2. the current situation of monitoring the NAPs; 3. how to be simple in monitoring NAPs and how to accommodate the different national systems without losing sight of the overall picture while keeping down the administrative burden.

It also included a proposal to use a slightly adapted GPC-like monitoring tool for the monitoring of the NAPs.

The GPC Chair (Leonidas Antoniou) warned that even though the monitoring tool developed by the GPC is simple, its use can take a lot of time. He supported the use of the tool by the other ERA groups and clarified that the GPC intends to carry out the monitoring exercise annually.

The MS co-Chair suggested that one of the final objectives of the monitoring exercise should be to create a coherent narrative at both EU and national levels to render it more useful and to increase visibility of the progress made towards the accomplishment of the ERA priorities. This narrative could also be taken up in the ERAC Annual Report. He also underlined that ERAC should take part in the exercise and monitor the progress of the NAPs in relation to the ERA Priority 1.

The SFIC representative (SE delegate) indicated that SFIC has established a benchmarking group for monitoring the ERA Priority 6 and suggested the use of the Policy Support Facility instrument for the provision of data for his purpose.

FR was of the view that the NAPs should remain a flexible instrument and that the monitoring exercise must remain voluntary, and should avoid "naming and shaming". It also asked how interlinks between the NAPs and the European Semester cycle would operate while noting that the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 contain a reference to this relationship.

DE stressed that monitoring the NAPs should be done at national level and wanted to know what would be done with the results of the monitoring.

EL also shared some concerns on the monitoring of NAPs and wondered what would be its added value, taken that the ERA Progress report already contains the same information.

The COM co-Chair explained that the European Semester is becoming increasingly relevant for R&I as it contains many recommendations related to this field. He encouraged Member States to make the best possible use of the European Semester exercise.

IT agreed with the proposal to carry out a monitoring exercise which could also contribute to the improvement of the ERA progress report. BE indicated that taking stock of the progress would also be a sign for the stakeholders.

At the end of the debate, the MS co-Chair drew the following conclusions:

- ERAC agreed that all ERA-related groups will report on the progress of their respective ERA priority by the end of March 2019. They will use an adapted GPC monitoring tool for this purpose.
- Individual countries may opt out from participating in the exercise.
- By June 2019, ERAC itself will take stock of the progress for Priority 1. The co-Chairs will propose a rapporteur for this task.
- The results of the monitoring exercise will feed into the reflections on future ERA priorities and will also be taken into account in the elaboration of the ERAC Annual Report.

#### ***- Strengthening the strategic capacity of ERAC***

ERAC discussed how to best institutionalise strategic policy debates on a regular basis, in the vein of the one held in Salzburg around performance-based funding of research and R&D tax credits. The debate was structured by means of a reflection document and a questionnaire put forward by the MS co-Chair (doc. WK 14358/18). The document also contains an annex with seven proposed topics for strategic debates and a graph on the possible way forward.

All delegations agreed on the need to hold strategic debates.

Many delegations (FR, SE, BE, SV, UK, DK, MT, PT, NL, IT, EE) were of the view that the strategic debates must be prepared well in advance, projecting the outcome of debates into the future and having a real output leading to concrete results. Preparations could take the form of gatherings in a mix of formal and informal (for instance in a world-café style) formats.

Some delegations (SE, CH, NL) proposed that ERA-groups contribute to preparations of strategic discussions and some (BE, SV, CH) welcomed the idea of producing policy briefs.

IT and ES requested to check beforehand on priority topics with EU Presidencies.

FR suggested to have meetings of research representatives at Director-General level once per semester in order to create an attractive dynamic for future ministerial discussions. Good topic for strategic discussions would be number 3 (knowledge transfer) and 6 (international cooperation). IE also shared this preference for both topics.

DE proposed to look beyond the debate to anticipate first the utility of the outcome of those debates, having in mind the next Commission communication on the ERA. Some topics of interest could be the relation of R&I with: productivity/economic issues; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); ERA policy framework; higher education.

UK agreed on the way forward proposed in the reflection document and proposed a topic on competitiveness in the international context of the innovation systems.

NL considered topics 1 (goal of 3% of GDP), 3 (knowledge transfer), 5 (start-up ecosystems) and 6 (international cooperation), as being more related to the implementation of the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018.

AT asked for taking into account other related contexts in the selection of strategic topics. It suggested to involve relevant experts in preparations and requested the active coordination of the ERAC Steering Board in the process. It pointed out at topics 5 (start-up ecosystems) and 7 (balances in public funding) as relevant ones.

DK found of interest topics 1 (goal of 3% of GDP) and 4 (organisation of public research systems). IT also indicated a preference on topic 4.

MT agreed with having more strategic debates and mentioned the 3% of GDP target and the future ERA framework.

FI mentioned as important topics: R&I links with productivity and economic cycles; SDGs and links R&I/higher education, and SE: the 3% of GDP target and international cooperation.

BE asked for selection of topics with direct relation with the ERAC mandate, such as topic number 2 (research integrity) and 5 (start-up ecosystems), while avoiding to increase the workload of its members in excess. Better interaction among all ERA-groups could be improved through a greater coordination of their respective agendas by the ERAC Steering Board.



ES also shared the preference for topics 2 and 5, and added topic 6 on international cooperation, and EE found topics 2 and 3 as the most relevant ones.

For PT and CH the seven proposed topics are relevant for strategic discussions.

The COM co-Chair summarised the debate as follows:

- ERAC agreed to hold strategic debates which should lead to practical conclusions.
- The ERAC Steering Board will examine how to organise the strategic debates in an efficient way, including the sort of inputs to be provided.
- A distinction is to be made between formal ERAC sessions and informal preparatory meetings which could be organised in innovative and dynamic formats.
- The outcome of the strategic debates should feed into preparations of future ERA ministerial conferences.

The COM co-Chair also mentioned a possible strategic debate on the future of R&I, in connection with the upcoming EU summit in Sibiu, Romania, in May 2019 on the future of Europe.

The MS co-Chair concurred that preparing a short written input on the future of R&I with a view to the Sibiu summit would be important, while recalling the need to take the time to well prepare the strategic debates so that their outputs can be meaningful. He also agreed that the ERAC Steering Board should prioritise the strategic topics and outlined that the priority topics might evolve along the time.

## **5.2 Criteria Framework for Partnerships, Strategic Coordinating Process and Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships**

### ***- Report of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships***

ERAC endorsed the final report of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships (doc. 1215/18).

### ***- Criteria framework for Partnerships and proposal for a strategic coordinating process for Partnerships***

ERAC held a debate on the draft criteria framework for Partnerships and a proposal for the strategic coordinating process for Partnerships under Horizon Europe, following a presentation by Jörg Niehoff (European Commission) (this presentation has been circulated as document WK 15301/18).

EL agreed with the methodology used to establishing Partnerships, but expressed some misgivings regarding the selection phase and how the identification of Partnerships will be made, while arguing that the selection criteria must be applied for both existing and future Partnerships.

UK supported partnerships that are open to the world and recalled that the UK is currently acting as the Eureka chair.

ES supported the boundary conditions for Partnerships proposed by the Commission and the strong link with the strategic planning. It said that the process should be led by consensus among Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders. It also expressed concerns about the future role of the GPC in this respect.

IT also noticed that the GPC was missing in the picture and put forward the hypothesis of transforming the current GPC into the proposed "Forum for R&I Partnerships" subject to a revision of the GPC mandate to entrust it with the new tasks.

The MS co-Chair explained that the centre of gravity on Partnerships was moving from the GPC to the future Forum. He was of the view that the GPC, during the transitional phase, could provisionally take up possible future ERA priorities linked to openness and transparency. In addition, this would take advantage of the existing GPC infrastructure.

MT showed disappointment with the idea that the GPC wouldn't be entrusted with the new tasks to be carried out by the Forum, while understanding the underlying line of reasoning.

BG supported the proposals by the Commission and welcomed the opening of Partnerships to newcomers, but stressed the need for more transparency.

PT also agreed with the Commission proposals. It added that the future Forum would need different representation as compared to the current GPC.

AT broadly agreed with the new framework and the setting up of a Forum, while recalling that the criteria framework are still under development and would have to be adjusted. It regretted that the JPIs and the KICs didn't seem to be included in the proposal. AT inquired when the Commission could present the inception impact assessments.

The COM co-Chair pointed out to the difficulty of establishing, for the time being, a precise timeline, as all depends on the progress of the negotiations at the Council on the specific programme implementing Horizon Europe.

DK concurred that it makes sense to anchor the future Forum into the Programme Committee context but stressed that there should also be a link to ERAC. It acknowledged the useful work carried out by the GPC, but considered that the situation has evolved and the GPC could be either finished or transformed.

For FR, the Commission documents are good working tools. They should be used in a flexible manner, without imposing heavy burdens on Partnerships. It was of the view that setting sunset clauses for Partnerships could hamper long term commitments on investments. It finally wondered how to ensure the follow-up to the Joint Programming Process if the GPC was to be transformed.

SE also recommended to consider the criteria framework in a flexible manner. It welcomed the setting up of a Forum by taking advantage of the experience gained in the GPC and the ESFRI.

NL supported the proposed framework and outlined the importance of bringing it in line with the central management of funds.

For SI, both the GPC and the Forum could monitor Partnerships, but the current mandate of the GPC is too narrow.

IE supported the Commission proposals and showed openness to consider a revised mandate for the GPC.

EE agreed with the Commission on the creation of a Forum and warned about the risk of duplication of work, which might be particularly burdensome for countries with smaller representation capacities. It stated that a role for the GPC along the lines proposed by the MS co-Chair was worth considering.

DE also warned about the risk of duplications. It acknowledged the work done by the GPC but didn't consider it as having the right configuration to be the proposed Forum. Subject to further reflection, it considered positively the MS co-Chair proposal to re-orient the role of the GPC.

The Commission (Kurt Vandenberghe and Jörg Niehoff) made the following clarifications:

- The design of the proposed criteria framework had been the result of successful collaboration between the Commission and the Member States and recalled that the criteria will be applied during the identification process of the Partnerships.
- All partnerships will be considered either entirely new or renewed. All of them will have to comply with the new criteria framework.
- Until the formal establishment of the Strategic configuration of the Programme Committee, it is proposed that the shadow configuration will be used as the entry point for structured and early consultation of countries. The inception impact assessments will be published after the discussion in the shadow Strategic configuration of the Programme Committee.
- It is necessary to avoid any duplication between the work of the GPC and the strategic coordinating process for Partnerships to reduce the administrative burden and optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall R&I advisory system.
- In the future, it is important to ensure a priority-driven approach, not an instrument-driven one.

At the end of the debate, the COM co-Chair drew the following conclusions:

- ERAC welcomed the Commission proposals on the draft criteria framework for Partnerships and on the strategic coordinating process for Partnerships under Horizon Europe.
- ERAC welcomed the proposal to set up a transitional Forum for R&I Partnerships which will be co-chaired by the Commission and a Member State representative.
- ERAC will reflect further on the future role of the GPC.

***- ERAC workshop on 5 December 2018 (subgroup 3)***

The Committee took note of the preliminary findings of the ERAC workshop (subgroup 3: on "Sharing information on the national governance for the transition period and of partnerships in a longer perspective") held on 5 December 2018, following the presentation given by the Chair of subgroup 3, Erik Hansalek (DE), and the and the rapporteur Maria Reinfeldt (European Commission) (this presentation has been circulated as document WK 15306/18).

Among other things, the rapporteur highlighted the importance of having mirroring national systems in place to give timely and high-quality input to the strategic coordinating process, as well as robust monitoring of partnerships at national and EU level .

**6. Standing Information Point - Update on the 2019 European Semester**

The Committee took note of written information (doc. WK 14473/18) provided by the Commission on the 2019 European Semester cycle of economic and social policy coordination.

The main novelty of the 2019 European Semester is the strengthening of the links between the Semester and EU funding so as to better ensure synergies and complementarity.

**7. Any Other Business**

***- 41st ERAC meeting (21-22 March 2019, Bucharest)***

The Committee was informed that the ERAC Steering Board will draw up the provisional agenda for the next ERAC plenary scheduled on 21-22 March 2019 on the basis of the updated Work Programme 2018-2019.

***- Election of a Member State representative for the ERAC Steering Board***

Marina Villegas (ES) announced that she would step down as an ERAC delegate and as a Member State representative at the ERAC Steering Board, as she will be taking up a new position in Spain. A call for expressions of interest with a view to her replacement in the position of a Member State representative in the Steering Board will be launched shortly by the ERAC Secretariat.