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#### NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on strengthening the role and impact of research and innovation in the policy-making process in the Union - Presidency text

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Delegations will find attached a Presidency text on the *Draft Council conclusions on strengthening the role and impact of research and innovation in the policy-making process in the Union* with a view to the meeting of the Research Working Party on 11 July 2023.

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**DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON STRENGTHENING THE ROLE AND IMPACT  
OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS IN THE  
UNION**

**THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,**

**RECALLING:**

- its conclusions of December 2020<sup>1</sup> on the new European Research Area (ERA), which refer to the need to exploit more effectively the potential of research and innovation (R&I) for the society and the economy;
- its conclusions on Data Technologies to Improve ‘Better Regulation’ of May 2021<sup>2</sup>, which highlight the fact that a robust, evidence-based decision-making process is a key requirement for anticipating the potential and risks of emerging challenges and the need for a common effort to enhance Europe’s resilience, and to deliver better policies and a more future-proof, innovation-friendly, predictable, consistent and efficient regulatory framework;
- its conclusions of September 2021<sup>3</sup> on the Global approach to Research and Innovation – Europe’s strategy for international cooperation in a changing world, which underline that the Union’s global approach to R&I should be built on the principles of openness, rules-based multilateralism, shared values and priorities, facilitation of knowledge circulation and exchange of ideas;
- its conclusions of November 2021<sup>4</sup> on the future governance of the European Research Area , which acknowledge the wider societal recognition and increased expectation of the role of R&I and its exploitation in addressing present and future social, environmental and economic challenges;

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<sup>1</sup> 13567/20.

<sup>2</sup> 9215/21, pp. 9 and 17.

<sup>3</sup> 12073/21

<sup>4</sup> 14308/21.

- its Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe of November 2021<sup>5</sup>, which sets out the priority areas for joint action and a common set of values and principles for R&I in the Union, including the principle of value creation and the societal and economic impact of R&I, along with enhanced policy coordination and monitoring mechanisms in the ERA;
- its Recommendation on the guiding principles for knowledge valorisation of December 2022<sup>6</sup>, referring to the need to strengthen structures, processes and practices in the use of research results and scientific knowledge for designing and implementing public policies and developing and revising standards;
- its conclusions of December 2022<sup>7</sup> on the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA), which highlight the need to improve and consolidate the innovation ecosystems as Europe continues to struggle with significant regional and national disparities and a persistent innovation divide;
- its conclusions on the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report No 23/2022 entitled ‘Synergies between Horizon 2020 and European Structural and Investment Funds - Not yet used to full potential’ of February 2023, which encourage the inclusion of synergies in strategic planning, programming and implementation, where relevant, for instance in smart specialisation strategies, in order to capitalise on the full potential of investments in Europe’s R&I sector.

**I. Science in the public policy process to improve the lives of citizens and strengthen democracy**

1. RECALLS that the Union has a long-standing tradition of using science and the best available evidence-based knowledge in all disciplines to implement and improve decision-making, as well as the quality, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of public policies (the ‘Science for Policy’ concept). The design, monitoring and evaluation of evidence-informed policies have relied, among other types of knowledge, on mechanisms of scientific advice for political authorities to support them in the exercise of their competences.

<sup>5</sup> OJ L 431, 2.12.2021, p. 1–9.

<sup>6</sup> OJ L 317, 9.12.2022, p. 141–148.

<sup>7</sup> 15602/22.

### *The contribution of science to improve public policy-making*

2. UNDERLINES that, to strengthen the Union's competitiveness and the implementation of Union policies to face up to global challenges, the ERA requires:
  - a strong R&I ecosystem that facilitates the generation of high-quality scientific knowledge, open-access policies to data and publications, and the development of technologies and innovation with a high social and economic impact;
  - thriving scientific and innovation communities both capable of and committed to contributing to the progress of our democratic societies by advancing scientific and technological objectives and delivering tangible results;
  - increased and coordinated funding at both Union and national level in order to better respond to the Union's priorities and challenges;
  - improved capacity to engage in R&I cooperation with international partners and between countries and regions while pursuing the Open Strategic Autonomy of the Union.
3. CONSIDERS that science, including humanities and social sciences, and evidence-based knowledge should play a more significant role in the policy-making process for the identification of political challenges, the analysis of the state of the art, the accurate framing of the challenges and the assessment of the potential impact, pursuant to the Better Regulation principles. Science is also a key part of the process of preparing for political decisions, as well as implementing, evaluating and communicating them.
4. STRESSES that scientific knowledge and scientific advice should be reliable, robust, pertinent and transparent, with a view to supporting evidence-informed policy-making. RECALLS that science and evidence-based knowledge have methodological limits and are subject to uncertainties. ENCOURAGES transparent and responsible communication and the dissemination of scientific evidence used to inform policy, as well as societal engagement in R&I, with full respect for scientific integrity, ethical principles and democratic values.

## *Governance in decision-making*

5. RECALLS that the formulation of public policies involves political, economic and social elements, for which scientific knowledge and advice provide input to governments and legislators.
6. RECOGNISES that sectoral policies addressing the various policy areas often have unique attributes and configurations where inter-disciplinary scientific knowledge, innovative processes and scientific advice may contribute in various ways to the strategic, programmatic and project dimensions, depending on the socio-political interest and the institutional tradition of interaction between science and policy. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the mobilisation of R&I communities in the promotion of cross-cutting and government-wide understanding can serve to break down the traditional silos of sectoral policies, promote cross-sectorial and peer-learning among Member States and improve the coherence and expected impact of public policies.
7. RECOGNISES that the use of science and evidence-based knowledge, and the means of incorporating them into public policies, vary between national and sectoral policy advisory ecosystems and regulated administrative processes, and that intermediary and mediating institutions may play a role in terms of bringing the various actors together.

## *Future actions*

8. ENCOURAGES the Commission, in cooperation with the Member States:
  - to further develop the concept of ‘Science for Policy’ and to promote the role of scientific and evidence-based knowledge and its cross-cutting integration in public policies by:
    - raising societies’ awareness of the added value of incorporating scientific knowledge into the design of public policies;
    - mapping the existing practices of knowledge valorisation in policy-making and the national institutional scientific advisory systems;

- analysing the legislative and executive authorities' needs for scientific and evidence-based knowledge and their demands for scientific advisory processes, mechanisms and instruments at European, national, regional and local levels;
  - developing evaluation frameworks for the quality of the science-for-policy ecosystem, involving both public administration and the R&I systems;
  - sharing best practices in 'Science for Policy'.
- to foster the establishment of a 'Science for Policy' ecosystem to connect the scientific and policy-making communities in Europe, on the basis of the principles and values of the Pact for R&I in Europe, and to encourage them to contribute to the policy-making process as a whole.
  - to promote the collaboration of networks of relevant actors in the Union, the exchange of best practices and mutual learning exercises, and the establishment of two-way communication channels to enrich the dialogue between the scientific communities and public policy-makers in various policy domains, including R&I; and, by extension, promoting societal engagement without prejudice to other policy dialogues established in the ERA Committee (ERAC) and the ERA Forum.
9. INVITES the Commission to promote schemes that value the 'Science for Policy' concept, including its knowledge valorisation dimension, and to explore the intersectoral mobility of staff between scientific institutions and public administrations. CALLS ON the Commission to foster the use of the Technical Support Instrument and the Policy Support Facility to build up the capacities of the scientific communities and public policy-makers and to strengthen public structures for scientific advice.

**II. Regional and local innovation ecosystems: Enhancing cooperation and territorial cohesion through research and innovation**

10. RECALLS that the new ERA should be based on shared responsibilities, the participation of stakeholders and citizens, building on the societal engagement, diversity and strengths of the European R&I ecosystems and being responsive to smart directionality. ACKNOWLEDGES the Commission's efforts to measure the performance of regional R&I systems in the Union by means of the Regional Innovation Scoreboard, which shows that Europe continues to struggle with major regional and national disparities and a persistent innovation divide, weakening the performance of the European innovation system as a whole.
11. SUPPORTS the NEIA's objective of consolidating and connecting the multiple and geographically dispersed innovation ecosystems in Europe, through the Regional Innovation Valleys and the Partnerships for Regional Innovation, a joint initiative of the Committee of the Regions and the Commission's Joint Research Centre. Those initiatives facilitate cross-border collaboration between regions with complementary Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), in particular between less and more innovative regions. Their aim is to support the cross-fertilisation and alignment of regional efforts and investments with Union strategic priorities, e.g. accelerating the green and digital transitions and strengthening European value chains. RECOGNISES that the NEIA's focus on deep-tech entrepreneurship is appropriate for consolidating and developing the Union's technological leadership and strategic autonomy. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that engaging less innovative regions in deep tech innovation projects, in cooperation with leading innovative regions, could help mitigate the growing inequality between European regions in terms of innovative capacity.

***The need to improve the governance of regional cooperation and the alignment of the policy portfolio***

12. RECALLS that the Commission has activated regional innovation ecosystems through the smart specialisation framework and HIGHLIGHTS the importance of initiatives such as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology Regional Innovation Scheme. RECALLS that the NEIA underlines the challenge of enhancing the interconnection between European innovation ecosystems through a more ambitious mix of policies, building on existing policy initiatives such as Interreg. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the regional dimension simultaneously hosts rural and urban areas requiring greater flexibility and specificity in support instruments, especially those targeting local innovation ecosystems and place-based innovation, and requiring advances in multi-level policy coordination between national, regional and local authorities. SUPPORTS the application of the EU place-based approach to design R&I policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, as a relevant tool for enhancing the international synergies of European innovation ecosystems towards sustainability, leaving no one and no place behind.
13. RECALLS that regional development is primarily the responsibility of national and regional governments, which can use Union cohesion policy funds and the S3 to achieve more balanced territorial development, while the Union plays an important role in promoting inter-regional cooperation and the exchange of best practices beyond national borders. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the initiatives supporting European R&I ecosystems and the new initiatives launched to deploy the NEIA should be designed to create synergies with cohesion policy funds and R&I funds, as in the calls under the Interregional Innovation Investment Instrument under ERDF and the European Innovation Ecosystems programme of Horizon Europe.
14. STRESSES that the widening measures of the R&I framework programmes already address disparities at regional level across the Union, and may further help to bridge the scientific and innovation gap between low and highly innovative performance regions fostering excellence in the ERA.

15. RECOMMENDS that the Commission further develop a more ambitious approach to facilitate inter-regional collaboration by expanding recent initiatives such as the Regional Innovation Valleys and Partnerships for Regional Innovation. RECOMMENDS that the Commission establish connections between the various NEIA Flagship Initiatives, e.g. by explicitly linking the public procurement of innovation and the testing and experimentation spaces with national, regional and local development. INVITES the Commission to accelerate the inclusion of the local dimension in the European innovation framework through, inter alia, closer alignment between Horizon Europe Missions and place-based strategies.

### ***Future actions***

16. URGES the Commission:
- to harness the diversity of European innovation ecosystems, and to promote interregional smart specialisations and exploit complementarities in technological capabilities in a way that strengthens the involvement of low-performing and rural innovation ecosystems.
  - in cooperation with Member States, where appropriate, to introduce measures to coordinate Union, national and regional initiatives enabling low-performing regions and local actors to attract or retain talent and improve their R&I capacities, and to increase coordination between innovation policies and other relevant policies, to support transformative innovation.
  - in cooperation with Member States, to identify and empower tailor-made innovation policies, with a view to meeting specific local challenges and needs, while contributing to Union and national strategic priorities.
  - in cooperation with Member States, to strengthen collaboration between the Union and third countries in a Team Europe approach, through specific actions supporting international R&I ecosystems within the framework of the Commission's EU Global Gateway and the Global Approach to Research and Innovation. In particular, to strengthen collaboration with Latin American and Caribbean States, in the context of the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State, and with the African Union and its Member States through the AU-EU Innovation Agenda.

**III. A qualitative leap in European R&I policies to improve competitiveness and welfare: Policy impact of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) on Europe's key objectives and the ERA**

17. STRESSES that the RRF can significantly improve the Union's competitiveness and strategic autonomy, and has the capacity to contribute to transforming the European R&I ecosystem through:
- sustainable reforms and related public investments at national level, with many Member States devoting a substantial proportion of their RRF investments and reforms to R&I, aiming to achieve systemic changes as a driver of a knowledge-based economy.
  - building a diverse and well-functioning ERA, with shared and converging policy instruments and priorities and R&I actions, aimed at finding solutions in the Union's and national priorities such as the green and digital transitions, as well as addressing other significant societal challenges.
  - fostering synergies and ensuring effective coordination between the Facility and other Union programmes and instruments, including the Technical Support Instrument, and in particular with measures financed by the Union, the Member States and, where appropriate, the regions.
18. STRESSES that the Member States have focused the design of their RRF actions on complementing, strengthening and establishing synergies, including the additionality of the Facility with other Union funds, and with the traditional R&I instruments and actions found in the R&I national and European funds, and have aimed at improving the valorisation of knowledge and technology at national level, facilitating the use and reuse of data in a safe and secure manner, improving the management of intellectual assets including intellectual property, and supporting companies and new research programmes, increasing industry/academia collaboration and promoting the development of technologies with a low level of technological maturity, among others.

### *Towards a new generation of European R&I-based policies*

19. RECALLS that synergies between Union, national and regional funding R&I programmes still constitute a major opportunity for accomplishing the objective of strengthening European scientific and technological bases. Synergies play an important role in addressing the challenges faced by the Member States, especially in less R&I-developed and transitional regions, in terms of attracting and retaining talented researchers and investments and generating a significant and lasting impact on their respective economies. STRESSES that Member States, in cooperation with the Commission, should identify obstacles hindering synergies between regional, national and Union funding instruments and consolidate their national and regional innovation support structures and mechanisms for creating a robust and connected innovation ecosystem in Europe. WELCOMES the efforts made by the Commission and the Member States to address the above initiatives through the European Innovation Council Forum and the ERA Forum.
20. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the RRF is characterised by a short design and implementation period and clear rules of additionality and complementarity of funds that have allowed Member States to act on national and European priorities. UNDERLINES the fact that the RRF approach allows for synergies, and RECALLS that its temporary nature, ending in 2026, should not prevent Member States from combining RRF actions with R&I-related investments that require longer timeframes to deliver results, subject to compliance with the conditions laid down by the RRF Regulation.
21. RECOGNISES that the RRF has enabled specific and novel actions in R&I to be addressed in areas which are among the priorities of the new ERA, such as:
- the promotion of gender equality in R&I. STRESSES that Member States have implemented programmes to support female entrepreneurs and their professional development, to attract female talent to careers in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as actions that address the gender gap in R&I.
  - the promotion of territorial cohesion through R&I. STRESSES that Member States have included measures to strengthen regional R&I ecosystems and territorial cohesion, and to facilitate coordination and better governance systems among national and regional bodies.

22. ACKNOWLEDGES that the RRF has represented a pragmatic policy tool at Union level, linking investment measures to the need to implement reforms and the importance of better understanding the full impact of the R&I measures, which will require time. RECALLS that the Commission is conducting a mid-term evaluation of the RRF, which will be delivered by February 2024.

### *Future actions*

23. URGES the Commission to consider the RRF as an example of a more flexible funding instrument for related R&I investment measures linked to performance targets that could inspire future R&I Framework Programmes, the new ERA and the development of the Union's industrial technological base.
24. CALLS on the Commission to complement its mid-term review in the RRF with an R&I dimension, and to apply a learning-oriented assessment which will be essential for drawing lessons from this major policy initiative, while taking into consideration the design differences between the RRF and other Union funds, and to define, as a matter of priority:
- the contribution to fostering the green and digital transition, strengthening territorial cohesion, reducing R&I disparities at regional and national level, and promoting gender equality
  - the contribution to strengthening national innovation R&I systems
  - the contribution of the R&I measures of the RRFs to advancing the ERA Policy Agenda and the New European Innovation Agenda.
  - the extent to which Member States have exploited synergies between the RRF and other Union funds in R&I and sectoral policy actions where science and technology play a significant role, identifying the instruments and mechanisms implemented and the obstacles that have hindered the combination of different sources, as well as documenting best practices to facilitate mutual learning.

25. INVITES the Commission and Member States to consider the conclusions of this review for future R&I policy developments at European and national level. On that basis, ENCOURAGES Member States to identify persistent bottlenecks concerning their R&I system and to strengthen reform efforts. RECALLS that existing Commission tools, such as the Technical Support Instrument and the Horizon Policy Support Facility, can help in designing and implementing such reforms.
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