Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 5 October 2023
(OR. en)

13705/23

RECH 430
COH 69
COMPET 941

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	12834/23
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on strengthening the role and impact of research and innovation in the policy-making process in the Union - Presidency text

Delegations will find attached a revised Presidency text on the *Draft Council conclusions on strengthening the role and impact of research and innovation in the policymaking process in the Union* with a view to the meeting of the Research Working Party on 12 October 2023.

Changes in comparison to doc. 12834/23 are marked in **bold underline** for additions and in ~~strikethrough~~ for deletions.

ANNEX

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON STRENGTHENING THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS IN THE UNION

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

– its conclusions of December 2020[1] 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[2], 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[3] 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, and highlight the importance of integrating the Global Approach to R&I in the Union's external action;

– its conclusions of November 2021[4] 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;

---

1 13567/20.
2 9215/21, pp. 9 and 17.
3 12073/21
4 14308/21.

– its Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe of November 2021[5], 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 conclusions of October 2022[6] on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 15/2022 "Measures to widen participation in Horizon 2020 were well designed but sustainable change will mostly depend on national authorities", which take notes of the Court's recommendation to aim for a more geographically balanced participation of widening countries in widening measures, and also call on the Commission if continuous significant imbalances emerge, to assess the need for more tailor-made actions and targeted networking activities, while ensuring the allocation of funding continues to be based on the principle of excellence;

– its Recommendation on the guiding principles for knowledge valorisation of December 2022[7], 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[8] 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, **and which also underline that innovation ecosystems have a strong regional and national dimension that should be fully taken into consideration when developing the innovation policy;**

5 OJ L 431, 2.12.2021, p. 1–9.
6 13426/22.
7 OJ L 317, 9.12.2022, p. 141–148.
8 15602/22.

– 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;

– its conclusions of June 2022[9] on Research assessment and implementation of Open Science, which suggest that the evolution of the research assessment systems in Europe should be guided, inter alia, by guiding principles taking into consideration the "diverse career paths and all research and innovation activities, including (…) support for evidence-informed policymaking";

– **Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) whereby the scope of the application of the Facility refers to policy areas of European relevance structured in six pillars, which are the green transition; the digital transformation; smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion, jobs, productivity, competitiveness, research, development and innovation, and a well-functioning internal market with strong SMEs; social and territorial cohesion; health, and economic, social and institutional resilience, with the aim of, inter alia, increasing crisis preparedness and crisis response capacity; and policies for the next generation, children and the youth, such as education and skills.**

UNDERLINING

– **that the ERA's ambition to create a single, borderless area for research, innovation and technology across the EU has been present to some extent in the policy mix delivered by the EU.**

[9] 10126/22.

– **that the mutually complementary dimensions covered in the present Conclusions reveal that R&I policy measures, through an appropriate design of their actions, facilitate a positive impact on society and the economy, and contribute to strengthening democracy and increasing the resilience of the Union.**

– **that science-informed policymaking processes can enhance the quality and reinforce the coherence of policy initiatives in different sectors and administrations.**

– **that in current times, policy initiatives across sectors project the constant need for innovation to promote economic and social development, which requires strong R&I ecosystems. The role of ecosystems is of utmost importance for avoiding inequalities between territories, and the current innovation divide at national, regional and local levels requires a common strategic orientation from the Member States.**

– **that the RRF is temporarily helping Member States to make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions. By strengthening the response to cyclical or circumstantial events - mitigating the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic - consistent with the relevant country-specific recommendations identified in the European Semester Recommendations, the RRF has allowed several Member States to develop new evidence-informed policy-driven investments and reforms complementary to other national and other EU funds and instruments.**

*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 relying on science and the best available evidence-based knowledge in all disciplines to support 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 **processes of direct involvement of the scientific communities and/or** mechanisms of scientific advice for political authorities to support them in the exercise of their responsibilities.

The contribution of science to improve public policymaking

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. a strong R&I ecosystem in all Member States**,** grounded in excellence**,** that will further facilitate the generation of high-quality scientific knowledge, the implementation of open-science policies as well as the development of technologies and innovation, including social innovation, with a high social, economic and environmental impact;

   b. thriving scientific and innovation communities encouraging talents, both capable of and committed to contributing to the progress of our democratic societies by advancing top-down and bottom-up scientific and technological objectives, delivering tangible results and communicating them **to** ~~with~~ **policymakers and the general** public;

   c. increased**,** ~~and~~ coordinated **and targeted** funding at both Union and national level**s** in order to better respond to the Union's and the Member States' priorities and challenges, **such as building capacity throughout the Union and reducing R&I fragmentation and disparities between and within Member States.**

d. improved capacity to engage in R&I cooperation with international partners and between countries and global regions while pursuing the Strategic Autonomy of the Union to defend the Union's interests globally ~~and~~ **while** preserving an open economy;

3. CONSIDERS that all fields of science, including social sciences and humanities, **by** ~~and~~ **producing** evidence-based knowledge, should play a more significant role in the policymaking process for the identification of political challenges, the analysis of the state of the art, the framing of the solutions, being part of the findings included in foresight activities and impact assessments. **RECALLS that this should be achieved in line with** the Better Regulation principles ~~which~~ recognis**ing** scientific evidence as a cornerstone. Science should also be a key part of the process of preparing for political decisions, as well as for implementing, evaluating and communicating them. **STRESSES the importance of including the best available scientific evidence in impact assessments to support the political decision-making process to increase the credibility of public action and the added value of the legislation.**

4. STRESSES that scientific knowledge and scientific advice should be reliable, verifiable, robust, pertinent and transparent, fully respecting scientific freedom, integrity and ethical principles, with a view to supporting evidence-informed policymaking. RECALLS that science and evidence-based knowledge are built on a rigorous methodological framework, even though there are methodological limits and they are subject to uncertainties. **RECOGNISES the need to build and expand capacities for scientific policy advice in order to facilitate the valorisation of knowledge for policymaking.** ENCOURAGES transparent and responsible communication about scientific processes and the dissemination of scientific evidence used to inform policy**makers,** as well as societal engagement and citizens participatory processes in R&I, in line with democratic values. **HIGHLIGHTS that open science is also key for policymakers and other groups in society for accessing and using free scientific knowledge of highest quality, which enhances resilience to disinformation and to knowledge resistance and promotes public trust in science and evidence-informed policy making.**

Governance in decision-making

5. RECALLS that the formulation of public policies aims at supporting citizens' well-being and involves political, financial, economic and social elements, for which scientific knowledge and advice should serve as input to policymakers.

6. HIGHLIGHTS that inter-disciplinary, evidence-based knowledge, innovative processes and scientific advice may contribute to sectoral policies' objectives in various policy dimensions. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the mobilisation of R&I communities in the promotion of cross-cutting and government-wide understanding of scientific knowledge can serve to break down the traditional silos of sectoral policies, promote cross-sectorial learning within the EU and peer-learning among Member States, and improve the coherence, relevance and expected impact of public policies.

7. RECOGNISES that the use of evidence-based knowledge and scientific advice, and the means of incorporating them into public policies, vary **across Member States** according to the level of governance**,** sectoral policy advisory ecosystems and regulated administrative processes. **TAKES NOTE** ~~RECOGNISES~~ that intermediary~~y~~**ies, such as scientific counselling** structures **or mechanisms,** may play a role **for** ~~in terms of~~ bringing **together researchers and policymakers, and may present evidence-informed policy options to support policy development.**~~the various actors together.~~

Future actions

8. ENCOURAGES the Commission, in cooperation with the Member States:

   a. 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:

      i. continu**ing**~~e~~ to raise societies' awareness of the added value of incorporating scientific knowledge into the design, development and deployment of public policies, and, by extension, raising the trust in researchers among policymakers;

ii. continu**ing**~~e~~ the actions on mapping the existing practices of knowledge valorisation in policymaking and the national institutional scientific advisory systems and mechanisms;

iii. analysing the policymaking authorities' needs for scientific and evidence-based knowledge **as well as** ~~and also~~ the **researchers'** ~~scientists'~~ and innovators' needs for understanding the policymaking process. **These needs can be met by** ~~including in terms of~~ **respective** training **actions** ~~and~~ **covering the** use of scientific and academic expertise to evaluate public policies, ~~and~~ **following** ~~their~~ demands for scientific advisory processes, mechanisms and instruments at European, national, regional and local levels. **These actions should aim at fostering the uptake of scientific advice in decision-making processes by promoting the science and policymaking literacy.**

iv. developing **relevant tools** ~~evaluation frameworks~~ that allow continuous peer-learning**,** ~~from the European science-for-policy ecosystems; sharing~~ **encouraging exchange of best practices in 'Science for Policy' at both national and Union level, and promoting intersectoral mobility and capacity building measures, with particular emphasis on their tangible benefits for society.**

v. recognising science-for-policy activities as one of the elements for assessing the scientific excellence of **research** institutions and the researchers' career progress, **and supporting and incentivising the participation of early stage career researchers in these activities.**

~~vi. sharing best practices in 'Science for Policy' at both national and Union-level and promote intersectoral mobility, capacity building measures and training, with particular emphasis on their tangible benefits for society.~~

vii. **acknowledging women in science policy and promote research, careers, and expertise of women in science policy.**

b. to foster the establishment of a 'Science for Policy' ecosystem to support and connect the scientific and policymaking communities in **the Union** ~~Europe,~~ on the basis of the principles and values of the Pact for R&I in Europe.

c. to promote the collaboration of networks of relevant actors within 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 policymakers in various policy domains, including R&I; and, by extension, promoting societal engagement without prejudice to existing policy dialogues.

9. INVITES the Commission to promote instruments and activities that value the 'Science for Policy' concept, including its knowledge valorisation dimension, and to develop tools and programmes for the intersectoral dialogues, training and mobility of staff between scientific institutions and public administrations. The important role of this staff as facilitators and "bridges" between different structures should be recognised and supported.

9 bis. CALLS ON the Commission to foster the use of the Technical Support Instrument, which **can build up the capacities of the scientific communities,** and the Policy Support Facility to **support** ~~build up the capacities of the scientific communities and~~ public policymakers and ~~to~~ strengthen public structures for scientific advice.

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

A stronger role for regions and cities to strengthen competitive R&I ecosystems.

9 ter. **RECALLS that there is a strong role for communities, cities and regions to build globally competitive R&I ecosystems and growth strategies. Local capacity building and seed investing lay the foundations for a successful European innovation ecosystem that delivers European competitiveness.**

10. RECALLS that the new ERA should be based on trust and shared responsibilities, the participation of stakeholders and citizens, building on the societal engagement, diversity and strengths of the European R&I ecosystems. ACKNOWLEDGES the Commission's efforts to measure the performance of national and regional R&I systems in the Union by means of the annual European Innovation Scoreboard and the biennial Regional Innovation Scoreboard, which show that **despite the persistent innovation divide, there is a lot of potential across** Europe ~~continues to struggle with a persistent innovation divide, weakening~~ **in strengthening** the performance of the ERA R&I ecosystem. **UNDERLINES the potential of closer R&I cooperation and coordination in the ERA between the European, national and regional levels in order to reduce the R&I divide across the Union.**

10bis. RECALLS that the NEIA underlines the challenge of enhancing the interconnection between European innovation ecosystems. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the regional dimension simultaneously hosts rural and urban areas requiring greater flexibility and specificity in support instruments, as well as advances in multi-level policy coordination between EU, national, regional and local authorities.

11. **SUPPORTS** ~~TAKES NOTE of~~ the NEIA's objective of consolidating and connecting the multiple and geographically dispersed innovation ecosystems in Europe, ~~notably through~~ **and TAKES NOTE of** 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 aim**ing** to facilitate cross-border collaboration between **less and more innovative** regions with complementary Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)~~, in particular between less and more innovative regions~~.

11bis RECOGNISES that ~~even though~~ innovation spans a variety of sectors and encompasses technological as well as social innovation**. CONSIDERS that** the NEIA's focus on deep-tech innovation, talents and entrepreneurship is appropriate for consolidating and developing the Union's technological leadership, competitiveness and strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy. ~~CONSIDERS that, despite its advantages, a focus on a deep-tech innovation approach could widen the innovation divide. HIGHLIGHTS that, to avoid this, it is important to ensure that less innovative regions participate in deep-tech projects in cooperation with leading innovative region.~~ **HIGHLIGHTS that it is essential to ensure that emerging and moderate innovative Member States and regions participate in deep-tech projects, cooperating with leading and strong innovative Member States and regions, connecting businesses with cutting-edge science and facilitating access to funding and talents.**

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

~~12. RECALLS that the Commission has stimulated regional innovation ecosystems through the smart specialisation framework and HIGHLIGHTS the importance of impact of instruments such as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology's Regional Innovation Scheme. RECALLS that the NEIA underlines the challenge of enhancing the interconnection between European innovation ecosystems. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the regional dimension simultaneously hosts rural and urban areas requiring greater flexibility and specificity in support instruments, requiring advances in multi-level policy coordination between EU, national, regional and local authorities.~~

13. RECALLS the role of Union cohesion policy and the S3 to foster innovation and competitiveness in all EU **Members States and** regions. UNDERLINES that the Union also plays an important role in promoting R&I inter-regional **and cross-border** 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, while taking into account the national and regional responsibilities and different legislative frameworks.

14. STRESSES that, besides other funding programmes**,** the R&I framework programme should contribute to fostering **research** excellence in all Member States ~~and regions of the ERA~~**.** CONSIDERS that, **without prejudice to the negotiations of future EU programmes**, a greater coordination across ~~European~~ innovation ecosystems **and a more efficient use of all capabilities and resources at European, national and regional levels** ~~will~~ **would** improve competitiveness and innovation performance of the Union~~, and this should be better addressed in the future EU programmes~~.

15. HIGHLIGHTS that close exchange and cooperation between less and highly innovative EU **Member States and** regions **may** ~~can~~ contribute efficiently to further develop R&I capacities and reduce disparities between **them** ~~regions~~. **RECALLS that the Commission has stimulated regional innovation ecosystems through the smart specialisation framework and** RECOMMENDS that the Commission evaluates the impact of recent initiatives such as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology**'s** Regional Innovation Scheme~~.~~ ~~RECOMMENDS that the Commission evaluates the impact of recent initiatives such as the Regional Innovation Valleys and Partnerships for Regional Innovation~~ ~~RECOMMENDS that the Commission~~ **and** establishes 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~~.

15bis SUPPORTS the EU **Global A**~~a~~pproach **to Research and Innovation** to design R&I policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, in order to enhance the international cooperation of **European** innovation ecosystems**, on the basis of the principles and values of the Pact for R&I in Europe.**

Future actions

16. URGES the Commission:

a. to harness the competitiveness of European regional innovation ecosystems, to promote their impact in interregional smart specialisations and exploit complementarities in R&I capabilities**,** paying attention to the **need to make progress in closing the innovation gap in Europe by strengthening the science base and innovation ecosystems in lower-performing R&I countries and regions** ~~participation of low-performing regional innovation ecosystems~~.

b. in cooperation with Member States, where appropriate, to introduce measures to coordinate Union, national and regional initiatives to attract or retain talent and improve their R&I capacities.

c. in cooperation with Member States, to increase coordination between R&I and other relevant policies, notably the digital and industrial policies, in order to **target excellence and impact, and to** support transformative innovation, innovative industrial value chains and to mobilise innovation hubs.

d. in cooperation with Member States, to identify and promote tailor-made evidence~~-based~~ **informed** R&I policies, with a view to **targeting** ~~meeting~~ specific **national**, regional and local challenges and needs, while **reducing inequalities and** contributing to Union and national strategic priorities.

e. 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 R&I. 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 **and with the Indo-Pacific region through the EU strategy for this region.**

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

17. STRESSES that reforms and investments under the Facility should promote the Union's economic, social and territorial cohesion **policy areas** notably by improving the resilience, crisis preparedness, adjustment capacity and growth potential of the Member States, and thereby contributing notably to the strategic autonomy of the Union alongside an open economy and generating European added value. Research and Innovation measures funded by the RRF have the capacity to contribute to transforming the European R&I ecosystem through:

    a. 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 social impact and changes as a driver of a knowledge-based economy.

    b. building a diverse, excellent 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.

18. STRESSES that, in several instances, Member States have included at the design stage of their RRF actions, where possible, some investments to complement, strengthen and establish 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.

19. HIGHLIGHTS the fact that the RRF is characterised by a **time limited** ~~short~~ design and implementation period ~~and~~ **as well as** 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~~ **facilitates** synergies **with other Union programmes and instruments**. RECALLS that synergies between Union, national and, where available, regional funding R&I programmes still constitute both a major challenge and opportunity for accomplishing the objective of strengthening European scientific and technological bases. WELCOMES the efforts made by the Commission and the Member States to address the persistent challenges and INVITES them to continue this work.

20. **RECALLS the role that the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs), the Union R&I Framework Programme and Cohesion policy instruments can have in supporting the new ERA.** RECOGNISES that ~~the RRF~~ in several instances **Member States have allocated RRF funding to** ~~supported some specific and novel~~ actions in R&I **policies** ~~which are among~~ **that can support some of** the priorities of the new ERA, such as:

    a. the promotion of gender equality in R&I. STRESSES that **some** Member States have implemented further 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.

    b. the promotion of territorial cohesion through R&I. STRESSES that **some** Member States have included measures to strengthen **national and** regional R&I ecosystems and territorial cohesion, and to facilitate coordination and better governance systems among national and regional bodies.

21. ACKNOWLEDGES that the RRF ~~links 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.~~ **Regulation was established to provide effective and significant financial support to step up the implementation of sustainable reforms and related public investments in the Member States and the specific objective of the Facility shall be to provide Member States with financial support with a view to achieving the milestones and targets of reforms and investments as set out in their recovery and resilience plans.**

Future actions

22. RECALLS that the Commission is conducting a mid-term evaluation of the RRF, which will be delivered by February 2024. INVITES the Commission **to carry out a separate study that** ~~to~~ complement**s** ~~it~~ **this evaluation and focuses on the R&I actions included in the RRF to support policy learning and** ~~it 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~~ take**s**~~sing~~ into consideration the design differences between the RRF and other Union funds **to promote**~~, and to define, as a matter of priority~~:

    a. the contribution to fostering the green and digital transition, strengthening territorial cohesion within R&I and reducing R&I disparities at regional and national level, and promoting gender equality.

    b. the contribution to strengthening national ~~innovation~~ R&I systems.

    c. the contribution of the R&I measures of the **national** RRPs to advancing the ERA Policy Agenda and the New European Innovation Agenda.

    d. 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.

23. INVITES the Commission **to inform** ~~and~~ Member States t~~o consider~~ **about** the **findings** ~~conclusions~~ of this ~~review~~ **study** for future R&I policy developments at European and national levels. 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.