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#### NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	ERAC Opinion on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027)

European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) delegations will find in annex the ERAC Opinion on the second ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027), as adopted by ERAC at its plenary meeting on 26 June 2024.

# ERAC Opinion on the 2<sup>nd</sup> ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027)

## 1. Introduction and context<sup>1</sup>

In November 2021, the Council adopted Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA), which included the first ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024). The Council Decision (EU) 2021/2241 of 13 December 2021 on the composition and the mandate of ERAC charges ERAC with the tasks<sup>2</sup>, inter alia, to initiate updates of the ERA Policy Agenda by providing early strategic advice, informed, among other things, by consideration of the progress made in ongoing ERA actions, as well as to reflect and provide advice on new policy demands which fulfil the ERA Policy Agenda criteria<sup>3</sup>, throughout the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda.

Since the start of the implementation of the first ERA Policy Agenda, with a view to fulfilling its mandate, **ERAC was informed on a regular basis** on the progress made regarding the ERA actions as well as on the discussions in the ERA Forum.

In this Opinion, ERAC takes note of the first 18-month review of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda<sup>4</sup>, which highlighted **significant achievements through the development and implementation of the 20 ERA actions<sup>5</sup> within the four priority areas of the Pact for R&I<sup>6</sup>** at EU, national and stakeholder levels to address the 20 ERA policy actions of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024. In addition, the European Commission funded 71 Horizon Europe projects contributing a total of 122 EUR millions with a view of supporting the implementation of 14 out of 20 actions of the ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024) and engaged in 12 enhanced dialogues with Member States.

ERAC held **strategic debates** between June 2023 and April 2024 on ERA Policy Agenda related issues. The recommendations put forward in this ERAC opinion are based on the main take-aways from these discussions as elaborated on in the respective summary reports<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant documents establishing the mandate for this opinion are: Council Conclusions of 1 December 2020 on the “new European Research Area” ([ST13567/20](#)); Council conclusions of 26 November 2021 on the future governance of the European Research Area ([ST14308/21](#)); Council Decision (EU) 2021/2241 of 13 December 2021 on the composition and the mandate of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) ), OJ L 450, 16.12.2021, p. 143–147.

<sup>2</sup> Article 1 (b) and (c).

<sup>3</sup> The criteria include relevance, viability and commitment (point 10, Council conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA), ST 14308/21.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2023), *ERA monitoring 2023: 18-months review of the implementation of the ERA policy agenda* (‘EU level report’). <https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/ERA%20monitoring%20EU-level%20Report%202023-KI0423859ENN.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Some ERA actions were not implemented. This included Action 15 (regional and national R&I ecosystems) and Action 20 (prioritisation and coordination of R&I investments and reforms). The ERA action 18 was merged into ERA action 19.

<sup>6</sup> Council recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, OJ L 431, 2.12.2021, p. 1–9

<sup>7</sup> Lund plenary meeting, 21-22 June 2023, ST 11108/23; Malaga informal meeting, 9 October 2023, Summary report by the Spanish Presidency; Namur plenary meeting, 11-12 April 2024, ST 9092/1/24.

## 2. Strategic advice from the ERAC

From these discussions, ERAC provides the following strategic advice to inform the development of the next ERA Policy Agenda and to address new policy demands, without prejudice to the Commission's right of initiative.

### 2.1. ERA policy narrative

ERAC supports the introduction of a policy narrative in the next ERA Policy Agenda with the aim of providing **inspiring messages for the communication about ERA and to set the scene for the broader policy goals and ambitions towards which the ERA Policy Agenda will contribute**. Such a narrative should integrate the **current political context and global challenges**, their implications for future R&I policies and R&I investments, and the implementation of the priorities agreed in the Pact for Research and Innovation. Additionally, the foreseen policy narrative should consider the achievements and lessons learned from the first ERA Policy Agenda and the societal impact of ERA activities. More concretely, the policy narrative should elaborate on the **links between the priorities enshrined in the Pact for R&I and the concrete ERA actions with the aim of making the ERA more tangible for public administrations, stakeholders and a broader public**. ERAC strongly recommends integrating, as appropriate, R&I and ERA related elements of the Letta report of April 2024 and the forthcoming Draghi report. On the basis of these reports, new priorities of the ERA Policy Agenda should contribute to, among others, policy dimensions such as education, competitiveness, security or sustainable development.

In this respect, ERAC welcomes the policy dimensions of the proposed policy narrative that have been presented by the Commission for the Malaga meeting as a good starting point for further work in the ERA forum<sup>8</sup>.

The introduction of these policy dimensions would allow for the creation of a **clear and goal-oriented policy narrative**, which clarifies its status as a joint European effort to build a common European Research Area.

### 2.2. Structure of the new ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027)

ERAC recommends that the next ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027) includes a **clearer policy-based focus** and a more **understandable structure** in order to facilitate implementation by national administrations and stakeholders. To do this, the next ERA Policy Agenda should include the following three main chapters / sections:

1. A policy narrative for the ERA Policy Agenda to provide the context for the ambitions of the ERA and the links to the relevant dimensions in R&I policy developments and contexts;

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<sup>8</sup> ERAC background note – ERA policy agenda 2025-2027 – October 2023: “Agenda point 3: “Exchange of views on the next ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027”

2. A concise, simple and coherent list of policy-driven, concrete, and goal-oriented ERA actions that provide substantive EU added value as well as added value for Member States and stakeholders;
3. A number of long-term ERA policies (currently named structural policies), not confined to individual Policy Agendas and already embedded in MS and European ERA policy. In this regard, ERAC recommends the Commission to propose a more concrete definition for this category of ERA policies with its proposal for the Council Recommendation.

Concerning the scope of the next ERA Policy Agenda, ERAC recommends **an appropriate balance between an ambitious and comprehensive scope of the ERA Policy Agenda while allowing all Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders to easily prioritise their activities.** To aid this exercise, ERAC calls on the ERA forum to provide **outlines of the 3-year workplans of ERA actions (when appropriate).** The future ERA Policy Agenda should be **coherent and simple with actions that are clearly explained from the beginning.** This includes elaborating on the expected timeline, impact, and effort to be made by the various parties involved. The method of implementation of the actions should be simplified and streamlined as a guiding principle.

### **2.3. Securing commitment and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda**

Taking into consideration the diversity of national/regional R&I systems across the ERA, ERAC recommends **continuing with the flexible approach towards the implementation of ERA actions** together with the voluntary nature of the ERA Policy Agenda in order to allow for well-informed commitment of all R&I actors for specific policy priorities. **While endorsing the concept of variable geometry in general, ERAC calls on all parties to ensure that the implementation of the next ERA Policy Agenda contributes to achieving a “single market” for knowledge and research and to reducing the R&I divide among Member States/Associated Countries.**

ERAC recommends that all Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders as well as the EU strengthen their commitment to the implementation of the next ERA Policy Agenda. This enhanced commitment will require **sufficient political engagement and resources for the implementation of individual future actions.** This includes the elaboration of clear outlines of workplans for ERA actions (when appropriate), as well as increased involvement of public and private stakeholders to integrate their priorities in the ERA Policy Agenda. ERAC calls on the European Commission to continue to support the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda through Horizon Europe while ensuring a clear delineation between the policy actions of the ERA Policy Agenda and the supporting activities through Horizon Europe.

Concerning the next steps for the elaboration of the next ERA Policy Agenda, ERAC recommends that the further elaboration of the next ERA Policy Agenda within the ERA forum includes the **discussion of the relevance of the proposed ERA actions for individual Member States, Associated Countries, and stakeholders.**

This will contribute to clear guidance on the viability of the proposed ERA actions from the ERA forum to the Commission in its preparation of a proposal for a Council Recommendation. This should be done by means of a survey to be conducted by the ERA Forum to which the Member States and Associated Countries commit to participate.

**ERAC recommends to maintain an ambitious validation threshold and broad political support for the approval for each future ERA policy action based on the existing threshold of 50% of Member States.** In this regard, the work of the ERA Forum should now focus on the **content of the ERA proposals, which should cover expectations from Member States, outlines of 3-year workplans (when appropriate) and actionable titles.**

#### **2.4. Communication on ERA**

ERAC underlines that there is a **need to better communicate the ambition, targets and priorities of ERA policies and actions** to make the European Research Area more tangible to: 1) public administrations, 2) research funding organisation and research performing organisations as well as to 3) researchers, 4) private sector, and 5) citizens or civil society organisations at large. ERAC calls for the Commission, Member States and Associated Countries to develop effective communication tools to serve this purpose.

### **3. Next steps**

The present ERAC opinion, together with relevant elements of the upcoming Council Conclusions of the Hungarian Presidency on the current ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024) and the outcome of the ERA conference in September will represent the main contributions from Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders towards the Commission on the future ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027).

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