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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) plenary meeting, 12-13 June 2025, Gdansk ERA from ambition to action – Setting ERA Act priorities and refining frameworks for enhanced R&I coordination and alignment

Delegations will find in annex a discussion note in view of the strategic debate on “ERA from ambition to action – Setting ERA Act priorities and refining frameworks for enhanced R&I coordination and alignment” at the plenary meeting of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) on 12-13 June 2025 in Gdansk.

ERA from ambition to action – Setting ERA Act priorities and refining frameworks for enhanced R&I coordination and alignment

Strategic debate

Discussion note

Context

Over the past two decades, the European Research Area (ERA) has relied primarily on voluntary collaboration among Member States to strengthen the EU's Single Market for research and knowledge. Building on the 2020 Commission Communication on a new ERA¹, significant steps have since been taken to advance the implementation of the ERA. In November 2021, Member States and the Commission concluded a new vision and policy framework, set out in the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe², leading to the subsequent introduction of the first ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024, a set of voluntary actions for Member States, Associated countries, stakeholders, and the European Commission to enhance Europe's research and innovation (R&I) landscape. Following an extensive and inclusive co-creation process, the Council adopted the second ERA Policy Agenda for 2025–2027 on 23 May 2025.

Despite significant progress, key structural challenges remain and there is a need to move forward with more ambition to achieve a fully functioning ERA as enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and towards the realisation of the fifth freedom and of a true R&I Union, as outlined in the Letta and Draghi reports. The latest Commission Communication on the implementation of ERA³ underlined persistent barriers, including disparities in RDI performance across Member States, insufficient public and private investments, fragmented regulatory frameworks, limited support for technology transfer, and the lack of integration across research and technology infrastructures.

The proposal to develop a **European Research Area Act (ERA Act)** – a key commitment under Commissioner Zaharieva's mandate and featured in the Commission's Competitiveness Compass⁴ –

¹ COM/2020/628 final

² [Council Recommendation \(EU\) 2021/2122 of 26 November 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe - Publications Office of the EU](#)

³ COM/2024/490 final

⁴ COM(2025) 30 final

is a direct response to these findings and aims to introduce legally binding provisions to tackle structural obstacles that voluntary measures alone have been unable to resolve.

The legislative initiative should be ambitious, but also realistically achievable across the EU, and aim for harmonisation and simplification, in conjunction with other existing initiatives.

Three main areas of intervention that the ERA Act aims to cover are identified in the **Competitiveness Compass**, corresponding to three overarching and well-documented challenges:

- (1) strengthen R&D investment and bring it up to the 3% GDP target to address the current lack of sufficient investments;
- (2) focus research support more on strategic priorities, reinforce alignment between the EU and Member States' funding priorities to tackle current fragmentation; and
- (3) foster the circulation of knowledge and talent across Europe (e.g. improving the framework conditions for research, open science, researchers' careers, research infrastructures and values & principles) to tackle current administrative barriers and formally recognised values.

Preliminary mapping exercises to identify potential areas for intervention under the ERA Act are ongoing, including a **workshop organised on 4 April with the extended ERA Forum**, which brought together Member States, associated countries and stakeholders to raise awareness and gather initial input on areas where legislative measures might be necessary or not. An overview of the main areas of intervention identified in the preparatory work done by the European Commission, as well as of the main outcomes of the ERA Forum workshop can be consulted in the Annex.

The ERA Act is also figuring in the recent Choose Europe for Science initiative. In her **keynote speech** at the “**Choose Europe for Science**” conference⁵, President von der Leyen highlighted the potential role of the ERA Act for attracting and retaining researchers from third countries, in particular by ensuring freedom of scientific research. Similarly, during the extraordinary informal ERAC plenary meeting that took place online on 16 April to address the same topic, several Member States delegations endorsed the ERA Act as a timely and legitimate initiative in the current global context to address the need for a stable and attractive research environment. Areas identified

⁵ [Closing speech by the President at the 'Choose Europe for Science' event at La Sorbonne, 5 May 2025](#)

for possible legislative intervention included the reinforcement of the **freedom of scientific research** as a main European asset, the improvement of **research careers**, and the **creation of better conditions for the circulation and retention of talent**.

Objectives

The objective of this ERAC debate is to support the ongoing consultation process for the preparation of the ERA Act, by inviting delegations to identify the **most critical barriers** to a truly integrated ERA, while considering whether those barriers could be most effectively addressed through EU-level legislative action, through strengthened coordination mechanisms or even other measures, and to reflect on how such measures could be implemented in a way that supports Member States, while upholding the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Because strengthening investments in R&I is also one of the objectives of the ERA Act, this debate should also be seen as complementary to the “**Current and future R&D investments – Mobilising and complementing EU initiatives, national commitments and private sector investments**” strategic debate, scheduled for the same ERAC plenary. While that debate will likely address the first core pillar of the ERA Act (related to investment trajectories and financing strategies and possible links to the Semester), the present discussion is expected to focus more on the remaining two pillars: improving coordination and alignment of R&I strategies and funding priorities and enhancing the framework conditions for the circulation of talent and knowledge.

ERAC delegations are invited to reflect on what is needed (e.g. clearer structures) to align policies, select strategic priorities and possibly move to co-funded initiatives, also in view of the recent pilots launched under the Competitiveness Coordination Tool, and to assess whether existing governance structures and coordination mechanisms (such as partnerships, hubs and other alignment tools) could be built on and scaled up to maximise impact and coherence of R&I policies across the EU and to produce joint impactful projects. In this context, the debate may also have implications for the future role of ERAC itself, as the Committee could play a more strategic part in supporting a structured and potentially more binding coordination model within the ERA governance.

ERAC delegations will also be asked to take into consideration the fragmented nature of existing framework conditions for researchers and knowledge, including challenges and corresponding measures around employability and working conditions for researchers, mobility, data access and open science, research infrastructures, knowledge valorisation, international cooperation and research security, or the legal reinforcement of ERA values, such as freedom of scientific research,

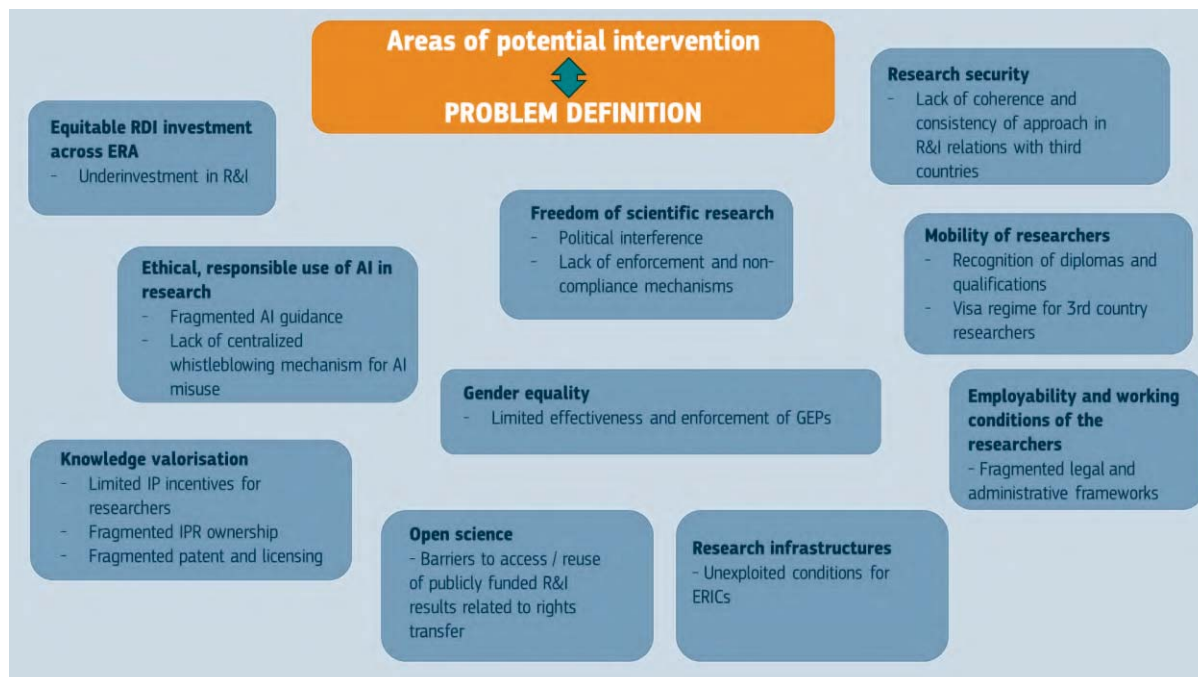
ethics and integrity, or gender equality. An order of priority would also be welcomed, especially in view of the urgency of establishing measures to attract research talents.

Setting

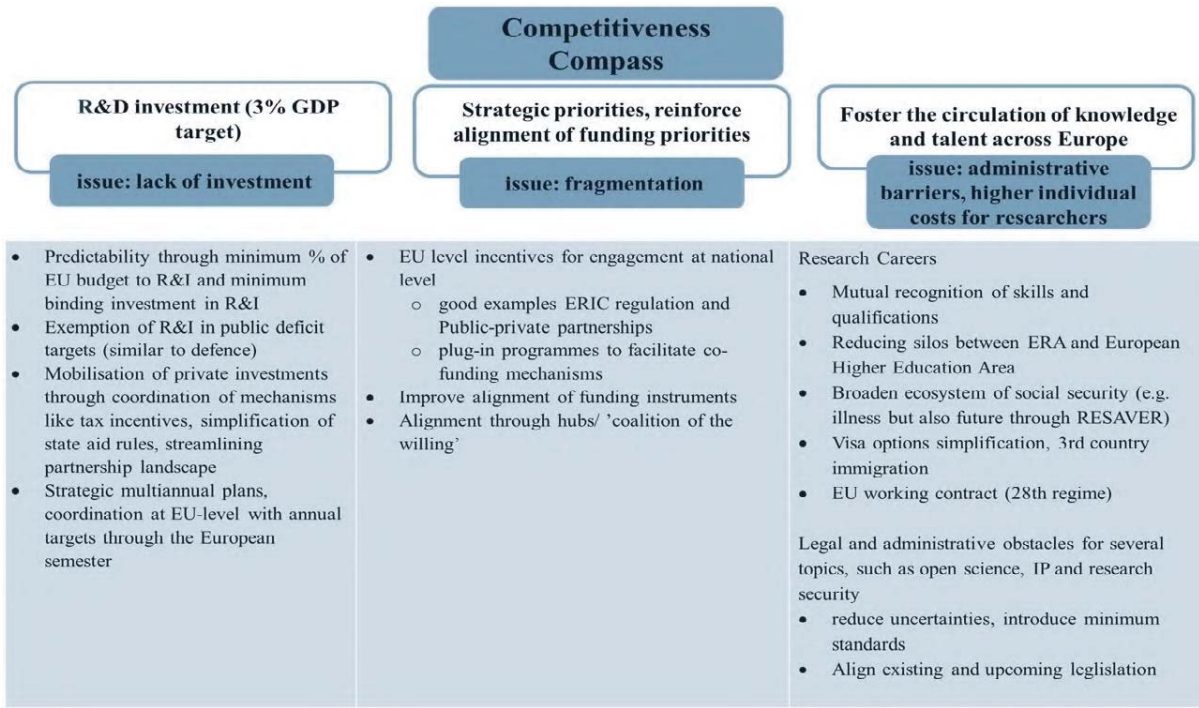
To ensure full intake of all information shared and to allow for room for discussion, the session will be structured in two concise tours de table:

- **First Tour de Table:** Delegations will have 2 minutes to highlight **one key challenge or priority** which they believe should be addressed by the ERA Act, and propose corresponding specific legislative measures (at EU level and eventually scaling-up existing national solutions) to address it.
- **Second Tour de Table:** Delegations will have 1 minute to select two more key challenges and corresponding measures and solutions flagged by the other delegations.

Main areas of intervention flagged in the preparatory work done by the European Commission



Main outcomes of the breakout sessions of the ERA Forum workshop of 4 April 2025⁶



⁶ The image serves as an informal visual representation and should not be interpreted as a formal or agreed-upon outcome of the ERA Forum's work.