Council of the European Union

NOTE

From:	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1)
To:	Council
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on the "Governance of the European Research Area"
	- *Adoption*

1. ERA is one of the cornerstones of the Innovation Union flagship initiative and a crucial component of the Europe 2020 Strategy focusing on maximising the potential of Europe's research systems, fostering innovation, strengthening the scientific and technological bases of the Member States as well as their competitiveness and capacity to address grand societal challenges.

2. In its conclusions of May 2015[1], the Council endorsed the ERA Roadmap 2015-2020 adopted by the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) and reaffirmed its commitment to make the ERA fully operational. The Council also stressed the importance of effective and efficient ERA governance and advisory structure in order to improve the coordination and monitoring of the ERA.

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[1] Doc. 9351/15

3. Subsequently, in its conclusions of December 2015**2**, the Council welcomed the Opinion adopted by ERAC on the review of the ERA advisory structure**3** and called for its swift implementation. The Council also agreed that the first full review of the ERA advisory structure would take place no later than 2018.

4. ERAC provided its Opinion on the 2018 review of the ERA advisory structure on 21 September 2018**4**. Based on this Opinion, the Presidency proposed draft Council conclusions, which have been examined by the Research Working Party at its meetings on 4 and 22 October and 7 November 2018.

5. The Permanent Representatives Committee, at its meeting on 21 November 2018, examined these draft conclusions and agreed to forward the draft conclusions to the Council (Competitiveness) of 29-30 November 2018 for adoption. ES has a reservation on paragraph 8 relating to gender.

6. The Council (Competitiveness), at its session of 29-30 November 2018, is therefore called upon to adopt the conclusions as set out in the attached text.

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2   Doc. 14875/15
3   ERAC 1212/15
4   ERAC 1209/18 + ADD 1.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

ON THE GOVERNANCE OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

− its Conclusions of 2012 on "A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth"[5] in which the existing ERA Priorities were agreed;

− the Conclusions of the European Council of 2013[6] calling for a fully functioning European Research Area by the end of 2014 as a political objective to accelerate structural reforms of national systems;

− its Conclusions of May 2015 on the "European Research Area Roadmap 2015-2020"[7] which formed the basis for the subsequent ERA National Action Plans of Member States;

− its Conclusions of December 2015 on a "Review of the European Research Area advisory structure"[8] that formed the basis for a rationalisation of the advisory structure, in which a first triennial review process of the ERA advisory structure is scheduled for 2018;

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[5]   Doc. 17649/12
[6]   Doc. EUCO 169/13
[7]   Doc. 9351/15
[8]   Doc. 14875/15

–   its Conclusions of December 2015 on "Advancing gender equality in the European Research Area"[9] which emphasised the need to foster sustainable cultural and institutional changes in the ERA national action plans, or to develop strategies to implement the ERA Roadmap and give priority to achieving gender equality and including the gender dimension in R&I content and programmes;

–   its Conclusions of December 2017 "From the Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 towards the ninth Framework Programme"[10] in which the Council reiterated the importance of continued joint efforts by Member States and the European Commission for further developing and strengthening the European Research Area, and emphasised the role of the Framework Programme as the main instrument to support the objectives and implementation of ERA;

–   its Conclusions of 29 May 2018 on "Accelerating knowledge circulation in the EU"[11], in which the Council expressed the importance of further advancing Open Access and Open Science policies within the Framework Programme and beyond, underlined the role of the European Open Science Cloud in knowledge dissemination and called for long-term sustainability of research infrastructures;

1.   ACKNOWLEDGES that making the European Research Area (ERA)[12] well functioning will decisively contribute to increasing the effectiveness, consistency and overall performance of the European research and innovation ecosystem, and that ERA requires a systemic approach; WELCOMES, in this context, the efforts undertaken by Member States and the European Commission since the Council Resolution of June 2000[13] by which ERA was established following the European Council of March 2000[14];

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[9]   Doc. 14846/15
[10]   Doc. 15320/17
[11]   Doc. 9507/18
[12]   ERA as defined in Article 179 of the TFEU
[13]   OJ C 205, 17.7.2000, p.1.
[14]   Doc. 100/00

2. RECOGNISES the important strategic role that ERAC plays in advising the Council to ensure that Europe maximizes the economic and social impact of R&I investment at European and national level to increase Europe's global competitiveness, support employment growth, improve the standard of living for citizens and reducing the R&I divide within the European Union;

3. REITERATES the importance of a close partnership between the Member States and the European Commission in jointly working towards strengthening of ERA, including through the 9th Framework Programme Horizon Europe, and cooperating with countries associated to the Research Framework Programme (Associated Countries) and to relevant stakeholders from science, business and society;

ERA MILESTONES

4. HIGHLIGHTS that some progress towards an improved ERA has been achieved in all ERA-related groups implementing the ERA Priorities, representing important milestones for the European Research Area;[15] WELCOMES the efforts made by ERAC in 2018 to review and adapt the ERA advisory structure as outlined in the ERAC Opinion of 18 September 2018[16];

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15 2017 ERAC Annual Report, doc. 1206/18
16 Doc. 1209/18 and 1209/18 ADD 1

5. HIGHLIGHTS the new approach to European Research & Innovation (R&I) partnership policy informed by the ERAC ad-hoc Working Group on Partnerships and the introduction in the Horizon Europe proposal of a new mechanism for the selection, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and phasing out of EU R&I partnerships; LOOKS FORWARD to the upcoming Commission's presentation to ERAC in December 2018 of a proposal for the criteria framework for partnerships and for the Strategic Coordinating Process for the entire life-cycle of R&I partnerships in interaction with the Strategic Planning for Horizon Europe; REITERATES that while the strategic coordinating process should be fully operational by May 2019, an early and structured consultation of Member States and Associated Countries on any R&I partnership initiative to be funded under the Horizon Europe should take place on the basis of their Inception Impact Assessment, in case their preparation is expected to start before the strategic coordinating process is formally established; HIGHLIGHTS the continued relevance of coordination and networking activities between Member States within and beyond EU priorities as part of ERA related efforts;

6. NOTES the 10th anniversary in 2018 of Joint Programming in ERA with ten Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs); TAKES NOTE of the recent achievements of the ERAC dedicated configuration the High Level Group on Joint Programming (GPC) in fostering the development of long-term strategies for JPIs, establishing a monitoring mechanism for national progress in this area; and the setting up of a new framework for evaluating potential new and existing JPIs; REITERATES the continued relevance of jointly addressing global challenges, especially within the JPIs, and CALLS ON the Commission to continue the support for the joint programming process and the JPIs, in line with policy objectives at national and EU level;

7.   WELCOMES the Strategy Report and the ESFRI Roadmap update of 2018[17], and INVITES ESFRI to prepare the next ESFRI Roadmap update in 2021, strengthening its strategic role in the evolving research infrastructure landscape; equally WELCOMES the second Report on the implementation of the ERIC Regulation[18], and INVITES the Commission to present the next ERIC implementation Report by 2022; NOTES the need for appropriate measures to facilitate the use of the ERIC instrument, in particular as concerns an acceptable solution for the VAT exemption for in-kind contributions, to stimulate investments in ERICs and other ESFRI Roadmap Infrastructures, to increase transnational and open access to European Research Infrastructures and to enhance their financial sustainability; CALLS upon the Commission and Member States to implement these measures as soon as possible and upon the pan-European Research Infrastructures to promote their services at international level and to reach out, where appropriate, to new international members;

8.   STRESSES the importance of concerted actions and good coordination between ERA and the Framework Programme, including the future Horizon Europe, for the development of a labour market for researchers in Europe, and for Open Science policy on improving recognition and reward mechanisms as well as skills development schemes for researchers; CALLS on all involved parties to acknowledge the cross-cutting nature of equal opportunities[19] and open science in particular as regards early stage researchers and doctoral candidates;

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17   http://roadmap2018.esfri.eu/
18   Doc. 11022/18
19   ES: reservation

9. CALLS on ERAC, including the Standing Working Group on Human Resources and Mobility to strive for better synergies between ERA and the European Higher Education Area on issues related to higher education, training, research careers and the knowledge triangle; in this context, NOTES with interest the messages on promoting a better link between higher education and research in the "Paris Communiqué" of 25 May 2018[20];

10. TAKES NOTE of the work done by the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation regarding the joint guidelines on integrating the gender perspective in international cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), together with the ERAC dedicated configuration Strategic Forum for International Cooperation in STI (SFIC), including the recommendations on how to address gender equality in Horizon Europe; NOTES with concern that this ERA Priority 4 on gender is unequally implemented across Member States, which affects the implementation of comparably fair and gender-balanced working conditions in research in Europe; WELCOMES the joint efforts made by SFIC and the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in R&I as an example of good practice for the collaboration across different ERA Priorities;

11. NOTES the steps taken, including the work of the ERAC Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation, towards launching the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)**,** which constitutes a major milestone to making all research data in the ERA FAIR**[21]**; STRESSES the need to design a sound governance framework for EOSC in coordination with Member States that empowers the scientific communities and can evolve over time; CALLS upon all involved parties to implement EOSC fully in due time, and NOTES the important role of research infrastructures in this context; RECALLS the need for effective coordination between EOSC and ESFRI, including the governance level;

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[20] *Paris Communiqué, Conférence ministérielle européenne pour l'enseignement supérieur*, 25 May 2018.
http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf

[21] Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable.

12. In the light of new developments in the field of knowledge transfer, e.g. Open Innovation, INVITES the Commission to revisit its 2008 Recommendation on the management of intellectual property in knowledge transfer activities, and the Code of practice for universities and other public research organisations to further boost the impact of R&I through knowledge transfer;

13. INVITES Member States, the European Commission, and, where appropriate, private actors as well as NGOs and citizens, to put more effort in the context of SFIC, into closer coordination in international cooperation, inter alia through joint meetings and possible science and technology agreements as well as further multilateral activities, including for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, whereby synergies and added-value will be created at national and European level; in this context, activities under Horizon Europe should also be taken into account;

14. WELCOMES the 2018 Report of the European Commission on "Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU"[22] as valuable evidence of the state of play of the EU research and innovation ecosystem; RECOGNISES the increase in innovation performance of the EU since 2010 as reported by the "European Innovation Scoreboard 2018"[23]; however, NOTES with concern the unequal development across the European Research Area and in this context UNDERLINES the need for making ERA better equipped to address the above challenges;

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[22]   European Commission, Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU 2018, Strengthening the foundations for Europe's future, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/rec-17-015-srip-report2018_mep-web-20180228.pdf
[23]   European Commission, European Innovation Scoreboard 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/facts-figures/scoreboards_en

15. WELCOMES the new approach of ERAC to hold strategic policy debates on a regular basis to further develop the policy-mix for research and innovation for ERA; RECOGNISES the important role these strategic policy debates can play in providing a forum for Member States to better understand how effective the policies and tools at their disposal are at national and European level, to implement the ERA priorities and deliver on Europe's wider economic and social objectives; INVITES the Commission to collect the agreed evidence on the design and impact of R&D policies, including by continuing its cooperation with the OECD, that could inform national policy making;

REVIEW OF THE ERA ADVISORY STRUCTURE

16. WELCOMES the ERAC Opinion on the Review of the ERA Advisory Structure, and CALLS on ERAC and the other ERA-related groups to implement swiftly its recommendations through an Action Plan in 2019, including the revision of their Mandates as appropriate;

17. ACKNOWLEDGES that the current ERA Priorities should continue to be the basis for collaboration between Member States, Associated Countries, the European Commission and public and private stakeholder organisations within a strengthened ERA partnership; NOTES that the ERA Roadmap 2015-2020 will continue to apply, fully respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality while at the same time drawing on the diversity and strengths of the national research and innovation systems;

18. EMPHASISES the relevance of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF) as a Framework Programme supported instrument to strengthen ERA policies; in this context, UNDERLINES that the results of PSF mutual learning exercises, peer reviews, and specific support activities and of other ERA-related evidence, such as the ERA Progress Report and the European Innovation Scoreboard, should be exploited by all parties, including by the ERA-related groups, as appropriate; AGREES that there should be a greater focus on improving the relevance and impact of the ERA-related groups;

19. CONSIDERS that emerging needs for new ERA activities can be embedded into existing ERA Priorities; RECOGNISES the horizontal nature of some ERA activities, which calls for further collaboration across ERA Priorities;

20. CALLS for adapting the ERA Advisory Structure as follows:

– ERAC shall explore options to relaunch the existing GPC to prepare Member States' and Associated Countries' participation in the strategic coordinating process for partnerships, once its design and the design of missions is decided in the appropriate forum.

– ERA-related groups shall organise back-to-back or joint meetings where many synergies with regard to content and target groups exist. In the medium term, examine options to optimise the number of groups while ensuring adequate coverage of all aspects of ERA Priorities.

– All ERA-related groups should explore ways to increase direct exchanges with relevant ERA stakeholder organisations and involve high quality experts in their work.

– To foster exchanges between ERA and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) policies, regular back-to-back meetings on relevant topics between ERAC and the Bologna Follow-Up Group and/or Directors General for Higher Education should be established.

21.   UNDERLINES that the efficiency and effectiveness of the ERA Advisory Structure should be optimised:

–   ERAC's guiding role in the ERA Advisory Structure should be maintained and strengthened. In doing so, ERAC should assist the other ERA-related groups under its responsibility to have optimal working conditions for their efforts to realise the goals set in the ERA Roadmap.

–   The mandates of all ERA-related groups should give each group a clear objectives with concrete and tangible tasks;

–   In case of emerging topics not covered by existing groups, ERA-related groups could continue to set up ad-hoc Working Groups with clearly defined objectives for a limited period of time. Member States, Associated Countries and the European Commission should ensure that the participants in all types of groups have the appropriate profile at the right level and also consider the use of PSF in achieving the objectives.

–   Coordination between the Council Presidency priorities and the agendas of the ERA-related groups shall be increased, in particular by involvement of future Council Presidencies in the ERAC Steering Board starting 18 months prior to their term.

–   The European Commission, including its Joint Research Centre, is encouraged to continue to foster cross-fertilisation with expert advisory groups of the Commission and the ERA-related groups, if appropriate, in order to avoid duplication of efforts, and to optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall R&I advisory system, e.g. for the European RTD Evaluation Network, or in the area of open science and innovation.

FUTURE OF ERA

22. INVITES the Commission, to publish by mid-2020 a new ERA Communication for the period beyond 2020, based on sound evidence, which may propose revised ERA policy priorities and ERA governance and monitoring mechanisms at national and EU level;

23. INVITES the Presidencies of the Council to consider organising regular ERA ministerial conferences, starting in 2020 with the new ERA Communication as a basis for setting ERA priorities by the Council;

24. CONSIDERS the "ERA National Action Plans" of Member States and Associated Countries to be important instruments to implement ERA. These plans require a coherent and lean monitoring tool to be used across all ERA Priorities and Groups that would accommodate the different national roadmaps and should be used on a voluntary basis; NOTES the need to explore options to better articulate the "ERA National Action Plans" with the European Semester;

25. Furthermore, in view of the expiration of the "ERA Roadmap 2015-2020", SUGGESTS that the Commission, in close collaboration with Member States, undertakes a careful evaluation of this kind of ERA policy-making tool;

26. LOOKS FORWARD to the next review process of the ERA advisory structure no later than 2021, taking into account the possible new ERA Communication and the potential outcome of the first ERA ministerial conference.

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