Council of the European Union

NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Council conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA)

Delegations will find attached a Presidency text on the draft Council conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA) with a view to the Research Working Party meeting on 13 September 2021.

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COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

ON THE FUTURE GOVERNANCE OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA (ERA)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

−	its Conclusions of December 2015 on the "Review of the European Research Area advisory structure"[1] which reiterated the importance of a well-functioning advisory structure to ensure the coherent and effective implementation of the ERA;

−	the ERAC report of December 2020 on "The 2019 Action Plan for the Advisory Structure of the European Research Area"[2] and its lessons learned and the ERAC opinion of December 2019 on the future of the ERA[3];

−	its Conclusions of December 2020 on the "New European Research Area"[4] which called on the Commission and the Member States to develop in 2021 an ERA Policy Agenda and a multi-level governance model to deliver on the "New ERA", taking into consideration the governance-related elements in the Commission communication of September 2020 on "A new ERA for research and innovation"[5].

1	Doc. 14875/15
2	Doc. ERAC 1212/20
3	Doc. ERAC 1201/20
4	Doc. 13567/20
5	Doc. 11400/20 + ADD1

NEW ERA GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

1. NOTES the need for revising the governance framework for the ERA, adapted to the changed policy environment affecting research and innovation (R&I), the need to secure our scientific leadership and the need to leverage more effectively the potential of R&I for society and the economy;

2. ACKNOWLEDGES the reinforced societal recognition and increased expectation of the role of knowledge and its exploitation in addressing societal and economic challenges as a consequence of COVID-19-induced circumstances, and REITERATES the key importance of basic, curiosity-driven science and therefore the need to strike a balance in the investment;

3. ACKNOWLEDGES that the attainment of ambitious objectives and targets defined within the ERA requires increased political ownership and a more effective translation into action at the Union, national and regional level; CONSIDERS the partnership between the Union and relevant third countries crucial and EMPHASISES the need for their appropriate involvement in the implementation of the ERA;

4. STRESSES the need to involve relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of the ERA-related actions;

5. UNDERSCORES the cross-sectoral dimensions of the ERA policy as essential characteristics for its governance, requiring shared ownership and directionality of policy actions, investments and reforms; EMPHASISES that, for R&I to enable the digital and green transitions and other cross-sectoral policy goals, improved interfaces and knowledge exchanges with all relevant sectoral policies are required;

RENEWED ERA GOVERNANCE AND POLICY SETTING

6. HIGHLIGHTS that the new ERA and its priorities require a comprehensive redesign of the current ERA governance, with a view to strengthening implementation while respecting the inter-institutional balance and responsibilities. TAKES NOTE that the new ERA governance is shaped inter alia by:

    a. [the Pact for Research & Innovation in Europe (Pact for R&I) setting out the fundamental and long-lasting R&I values and principles for the new ERA, the priority areas for joint actions and the policy coordination mechanisms;]

    b. the ERA Policy Agenda, setting out the ERA actions, designed to deliver on the main priority areas from the Pact for R&I and revised regularly; and

    c. ERA actions, with measures and actions defined and coordinated at Union level in order to attain the agreed shared ERA objectives and targets;

ERA Policy Agenda and ERA actions

7. UNDERLINES that achieving the new ERA requires an ERA Policy Agenda that is oriented towards action at all levels, ensures commitment of all actors, embraces diversity of national policy environments and employs a tailor-made and voluntary approach. It is to be approved by the Council, in principle every 3 years, while acknowledging the longer-term nature of some actions;

8. AGREES on the common ERA Policy Agenda objectives and deliverables for 2022-2024 as set out in the Annex, and CALLS FOR implementation in partnership between the Commission and Member States, in close cooperation with relevant third countries and stakeholders;

9. ENDORSES the ESFRI Roadmap updated in 2021 and invites the European Strategic Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) to update its roadmap in 2025;

10. RECALLS the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in the design, implementation and monitoring of R&I policies and WELCOMES the contribution of the Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in R&I to the ERA Action in this area;

11. STRESSES that ERA Actions are taken up by Member States on a voluntary basis and addressed in the ERA policy online platform and the ERA National Action Plans as appropriate, defining and describing measures, reforms or investments relevant for ERA and, in particular, for the implementation of each chosen ERA Action;

Governance architecture of ERA

12. AGREES that the Council's decision-making and policy-guiding role within the ERA governance are set out in particular through the adoption of [long-term guidance in the form of the Council Recommendation on a Pact for R&I in Europe], of mid-term priorities in the form of the ERA Policy Agenda, both based upon the proposal of the Commission, and through its response to the mid-term assessment of the policy cycle;

13. REAFFIRMS the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) as the main high-level strategic policy joint advisory committee, providing input to the Council, the Commission and the Member States on strategic R&I policy issues; RECOGNISES the need to assign to ERAC a mandate which will enable it to address relevant topics for European or national R&I policy in a wider context, thus reducing the need for meetings in informal settings. The revised mandate should include inter-alia, elements to:

- advise on strategic policy orientations and trends that require refinement of Union and national policies, including on the current and the next Union R&I Framework Programme and other relevant Union initiatives,

- reflect and provide input on shared new policy demands of the Member States, feeding into the ERA Policy Agenda updating process,

- interact with governance and coordination structures at similar level in other relevant policies, such as higher education and industrial policies.

14. RECOGNISES the role of the ERA Forum, including its possible sub-groups, as the body for coordination and reinforced implementation of the ERA, supporting the Commission and the Member States in the delivery of the ERA objectives, including with involvement of stakeholders. CONSIDERS that the ERA Forum should:

- provide a platform for coordination among the Commission, the Member States, relevant third countries and stakeholders on the preparation of the Commission's proposal, and implementation of ERA Policy Agenda and other ERA priorities at all levels (European, national, regional, institutional) and on their alignment with other policies;

- examine the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda and other related initiatives through the ERA Scoreboard and the information provided through the ERA policy platform, and support the Commission in preparing a report to the Council;

WAY FORWARD

15. INVITES the Commission to establish by the end of 2021 the ERA Forum, as the central body for reinforced ERA implementation; EXPECTS the ERA Forum to enable Member States, the Commission and relevant third countries and stakeholders to engage in dialogue to co-design all relevant actions and initiatives for the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda. CONSIDERS that co-chairing of the ERA Forum by the Commission and a Member State representative will result in enhanced ownership and more efficient implementation of the renewed ERA. Similarly, its sub-groups may be chaired or co-chaired by the Commission and/or the Member States as appropriate;

16. INVITES the Commission to report to the Council, ERAC and the ERA Forum at mid-term of the policy cycle on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda, including on the information gathered through the ERA Scoreboard and the ERA policy online platform;

17. CONSIDERS that stakeholders must be closely involved in the work of the ERA Forum and its sub-groups and to this end INVITES the Commission to guarantee that the ERA Forum will:

    • ensure appropriate representation at its meetings of the following sectors: universities, research and technology organisations, R&I-intensive businesses, individual researchers and innovators, research infrastructures and R&I-funding organisations; SUGGESTS in this context to examine the feasibility of supporting these sectors in their work related to the ERA Forum by supporting their network and internal coordination mechanisms through Horizon Europe, and

    • set up an open online voluntary stakeholder register to increase transparency in the identification of the ERA stakeholders involved in the work of the ERA Forum and its sub-groups;

18. AGREES to review the ERAC mandate in order to reflect the new ERA governance, including limiting membership to the highest executive level or their proxy on an ad-hoc basis; ACKNOWLEDGES the added value of co-chairing of ERAC by the Member States and the Commission and ADVISES inviting involved third countries, external experts and stakeholders to relevant meetings of ERAC for specific topics; SUGGESTS that the Council Trio Presidencies, in dialogue with the Member States and Commission co-chairs, select and prepare topics and documents for strategic discussions of ERAC, supported as necessary by ERAC ad-hoc task forces or ERA Forum sub-groups;

19. DEEMS that the creation of time-limited and objectives-bound sub-groups of the ERA Forum should be the default approach for implementing ERA Actions while recognising that the creation of standing sub-groups for the governance of individual ERA Actions or priorities could be justified when they are in place for advice on the entire policy cycle;

20. Considers ESFRI as a permanent group for coordination and implementation of R&I policy in the area of research infrastructures, and SUGGESTS that it continues its work as a standing sub-group of the ERA Forum, contributing to the implementation of the relevant ERA Actions while retaining its current mandate, governance and activities;

21. RECOMMENDS that the work of existing ERA-related groups under the remit of the Council, namely the ERAC dedicated configurations GPC (High Level Group on Joint Programming) and SFIC (the Strategic Forum for International Scientific and Technological Cooperation), as well as the Standing Working Groups on Human Resources and Mobility, on Gender in Research and Innovation and on Open Science and Innovation is transferred to sub-groups of the ERA Forum as appropriate, taking into account the new ERA Policy Agenda;

22. RECALLS the new global approach to R&I as set out in the [Council Conclusions XXXXX/21] and SUGGESTS setting up a standing sub-group of the ERA Forum, chaired by Member States, to co-design its implementation;

23. INVITES the future Council Presidencies to consider within their planning of Competitiveness Council agendas an item for reporting on the progress of ERA implementation at national levels and organising an ERA ministerial conference to guide the evolution of the ERA. SUGGESTS engaging ERAC in the preparation of these conferences;

24. CALLS upon Member States and INVITES involved third countries to ensure adequate resources for satisfactory monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementing ERA actions and priorities at national and/or regional level, as a pre-requisite for their adjustments in the context of the ERA Policy Agenda.

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ERA POLICY AGENDA 2022-2024

OBJECTIVES AND DELIVERABLES

To be added later