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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) – plenary session, 12-13 October 2026, Dublin European Partnerships under the next Framework Programme - state of play on priority areas

European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) delegations will find attached a background note on "European Partnerships under the next Framework Programme – state of play on priority areas", in view of the ERAC plenary on 12-13 October 2026.

European Partnerships under the next Framework Programme – state of play on priority areas

Exchange of views

Background

The Commission proposal for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation aims to establish a **more strategic, coherent and dynamic portfolio of a limited number of European Partnerships**. Partnerships should be used selectively, where they provide clear added value compared with other implementation approaches and where the scale and nature of the challenge justify it.

This ambition needs to be considered in the context of the **new architecture proposed for EU competitiveness funding**, notably the interplay between the future Framework Programme and the European Competitiveness Fund. The future funding landscape provides an opportunity and a need to clarify the specific role of European Partnerships within a broader toolbox of instruments supporting research, innovation, competitiveness and deployment.

Within this toolbox, partnerships can provide particular added value where achieving strategic R&I objectives requires **long-term alignment of priorities, resources and activities across the Union, Member States and, where relevant, industry and other partners**. The partnership instrument should therefore not be considered the default approach for addressing an important R&I priority: its use should be justified by the nature of the challenge, the need for sustained cooperation and commitments, and its added value compared with other available instruments.

Current status of preparations

Since the ERAC discussion in April, work has advanced substantially towards the identification and configuration of the future European Partnerships portfolio. The process is designed to move from the **identification of specific R&I needs towards an increasingly selective and coherent portfolio**, rather than starting from the existing partnership landscape or assuming the continuation of current initiatives.

The process combines several complementary strands of input:

- **Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC)**, at technical level through the Partnership Knowledge Hub (PKH), contribute their national perspectives and priorities and provide feedback on the emerging portfolios, while ERAC provides the strategic-level forum to take stock of progress and provide guidance on the ambition and coherence of the future portfolio¹.
- **Commission services** provide thematic and policy expertise to identify needs, scope Partnership areas, assess added value, and examine opportunities for aggregation and rationalisation across policy domains.
- the independent **Commission Expert Group on the Design and Selection of Directional Initiatives**² provides methodological advice and an external perspective on the portfolio-building approach, including its strategic coherence and the rationale for using partnerships.
- the **ongoing public consultation** on the future Treaty-based partnerships will provide a further source of input to the portfolio-building process. Following its closure on 16 October, relevant results will be analysed and integrated into the portfolio reflections and scoping of partnerships, as appropriate.

As discussed at the April meeting, the process started with a broad consultation of Commission services and MS/ACs in May-June, on thematic needs that could potentially require a partnership approach. The inputs are now being translated into possible partnership areas and alternative portfolio configurations. Portfolio-level consolidations are being used to assess strategic coherence, critical mass, opportunities for integration, complementarity with existing initiatives and other instruments, and the added value of a dedicated partnership. This approach allows the portfolio to be informed by policy priorities, relevant expertise and interest from stakeholders, while remaining open to new areas and the rationalisation of existing structures.

¹ In the spirit of the ‘guidance’ foreseen in the PGA text (Art. 11(1)).

² [Commission Expert Group on the Design and Selection of Directional Initiatives under the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(E03996\)](#)

ERAC-plenary on October 12-13

A state of play of the portfolio-building process, including the criteria and key considerations underpinning the development of the portfolio and first indications of an emerging portfolio configuration, will be shared with ERAC³ in early October, ahead of the plenary discussion.

The timing reflects the sequencing of the ongoing MS/AC consultations. The **Partnership Knowledge Hub will discuss the emerging portfolio configurations on 23 September**, and the outcome of this exchange will feed into their further consolidation towards a single emerging portfolio configuration. The document subsequently shared with ERAC will therefore **build on the PKH discussion**, allowing the ERAC exchange to focus on the issues requiring further strategic guidance rather than duplicating it.

By that stage, this work will have resulted in an **emerging portfolio configuration**, reflecting a proposed prioritisation and thematic aggregation. This portfolio configuration will remain **work in progress**: it is intended to support convergence towards a coherent portfolio and should not be considered a final Commission proposal. The emerging portfolio will continue to evolve through its iterative process, in light of exchanges with MS/ACs, further discussions within the Commission, advice from the Expert Group, and in particular, the results of the **open public consultation**. On the MS/AC side, the PKH will support in-depth technical discussions, while ERAC will provide strategic guidance, with a further exchange, if needed, towards the end of 2026 to support convergence towards the final portfolio.

At the plenary, the Commission will present the state of play of the portfolio-building process, the emerging portfolio and the approach through which it is being developed (the presentation will be shared shortly in advance of the meeting to support the discussion). The presentation will be followed by an exchange with delegations.

ERAC delegations will therefore be invited to reflect on:

- **the emerging portfolio configuration**, in particular whether it provides a sufficiently coherent and strategically focused basis of areas where a Partnership approach brings clear added value;

³ Doc. 13355/26 (to follow)

- the most appropriate **format or forum for collecting expressions of interest and commitments** for future European Partnerships (the Commission will present possible options for consideration that will be shared shortly in advance).

Tentative timeline

With a view to preparing the partnerships quickly after the adoption of the Horizon Europe 2028-2034 regulation, the following timeline is envisaged:

- a) Identification of thematic areas requiring a partnership approach, and their configuration into a coherent partnership portfolio throughout 2026 (the Commission retains its right of initiative, including in the preparation and implementation of the Union budget);
- b) Convergence with Member States on the partnership portfolio by the end of 2026;
- c) Subject to the final legal framework: preparatory work towards the selection of partnership proposals, including partnership consortia and Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas, as well as indicative commitments from partners other than the Union throughout 2027;
- d) Launch of partnerships in 2028.