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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations  
Subject: ERAC Plenary Meeting, 16-17 October 2025, Copenhagen (DK)  
Summary report

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Delegations will find in the annex the summary report of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) plenary meeting, held on 16-17 October 2025 in Copenhagen (DK).

**ERAC Plenary meeting, 16-17 October 2025, Copenhagen****Summary report**

On 16 and 17 October 2025, the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) held a plenary meeting in Copenhagen, hosted by the Danish Presidency of the Council. It discussed an agenda of significant topics in the area of Research and Innovation (R&I). The meeting was chaired by the two co-Chairs – Marc Lemaître, the Commission Director-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), and Feite Hofman, Director-General of Higher and Vocational Education, Science and Emancipation of Netherlands. Representatives of ten countries associated to *Horizon Europe* also participated.

The co-Chairs gave information on the recent activities and initiatives on R&I, such as the ‘Choose Europe for Science’ initiative, the European Strategy for artificial intelligence in science, and the preparation of the European Research Area (ERA) Act expected for 2026. The current Danish Presidency of the Council, as well as the upcoming Cyprus and Irish Presidencies, updated on their programmes and priorities on R&I.

**Highlights:****ERAC discussed four main topics:**

1. **Looking in from the outside: resilience and research and innovation** – exchange of views, with introduction by Lars Frølund, lecturer at MIT and member of the EIC Board.

In his key-note speech, Lars Frølund presented an analysis of the DARPA model (US Defence Advanced Research Project Agency), on the basis of his co-authored policy paper 'Enable Mission Impact: Funding strategies for high-risk high-reward innovation'.

He considered that the DARPA model for mission-driven innovation was best suited to pursuing high-risk, high-reward research investment when applied to a **targeted problem space** that can be matched to a **dense innovation ecosystem of potential solution providers**. Such an environment allows for the identification and selection of the most promising avenues of research. The successful pursuit of mission-driven research therefore relies not only on the amount of funding available or the application of specific management practices, but also on the nature of the innovation ecosystem to which it is being applied.

Based on this insight into the boundary conditions of the lauded DARPA model, Lars Frølund described four different Mission Arenas defined along two dimensions - the *scope* of the problem space and the *density* of potential solution providers within it, with varying degrees of applicability of the DARPA model. For governments and foundations around the world engaged in a range of missions these insights give an answer to the question of how investments should be made, from early R&D spending to later-stage acceleration, to most effectively fuel the full lifecycle of innovation from ideas to impact.

The speaker advocated for a more courageous, more directional and faster approach to tackle EU main strategic and critical challenges. In his view, the current system is too much based on peer review, which has a conservative risk-averse effect. Instead, more should be invested in problem-solving approaches with a highly autonomous portfolio management.

In the exchange of views, delegates expressed their interest for further reflection on possible use of some of the characteristics of the DARPA model, adapting them to the specificities of the EU environment, and stressed that more innovative thinking would be required. Participants also referred, in this context, to the negotiations on the next R&I Framework Programme and its link with the future European Competitiveness Fund, including with reference to dual-use research and the support for defence. They underlined that priority-setting and a practicable governance for implementation of FP10 were still to be clarified, reminding the paramount role of the Member States.

## **2. Promoting and protecting the freedom of scientific research as a core value of the European research and innovation ecosystems, and a foundation for trust in science - Strategic debate**

The strategic debate was initiated with a view to the preparation by the Commission of the upcoming legislative proposal on this subject, part of the ERA Act (expected in Q3 2026). The objective was to receive early input by the Directors-General on the **scope** and **architecture** of the proposal. After a presentation of a recent study on 'Comprehensive legal, policy, and comparative analysis for promoting and protecting the freedom of scientific research in Europe' by the Commission, the ERAC delegates expressed broad support for taking action for strengthening the protection of freedom for scientific research in the ERA, suggesting building on the Bonn Declaration for the Freedom of Scientific Research. Delegations were in favour of creating a **harmonised framework** and a **common definition** for this topic.

Delegations mentioned, among other points, that protections should encompass both public and private research, preserve institutional autonomy, include a non-regression clause, and secure researchers' rights. While many advocated for robust monitoring and enforcement, they simultaneously urged proportionality and warned against excessive administrative burden. A legally sound proposal and co-creation between Commission and Member States were mentioned as crucial. On the type of legislative instrument to be used, the delegations were rather divided between regulation and directive as preferred option.

**3. The role of research and innovation ecosystems and synergies between regional, national and European levels, also in the context of the new MFF proposal and the proposal for the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10) –**  
Strategic debate with breakout sessions

The debate on how to improve **synergies and alignment between European, national and regional levels and programmes**, organised in break-out sessions, offered to delegations the opportunity to exchange experiences and good practices. ERAC unanimously recognised that well-functioning and robust regional, national and European R&I ecosystems, complementing and strengthening each other, were crucial for a resilient and competitive Europe. The R&I framework programmes have supported building connections and interlinkages between regional, national and European R&I ecosystems. The development of such synergies requires strong infrastructures to build on and close cooperation between EU, national and regional authorities involved in the programming and implementation of R&I supporting funding sources.

In this context, several delegates agreed on the need to establish a **common rulebook** for EU and national funding in order to create a level playing field and make alignment easier. They also referred to a possible exemption of national funding from the state-aid regime if such funding is granted in the context of or in synergy with EU initiatives. The discussion being closely linked to the ongoing work on the next Framework Programme on R&I, the speakers stressed the importance of co-creative approach towards designing, from the start, between the Commission and the Member States, as well as between the relevant General Directorates of the Commission. A role for ERAC was repeatedly proposed regarding the design and the governance of directional R&I in the ERA. ERAC could provide strategic directions also for the current **FP 10 negotiations**. **A strategic debate on FP10 was proposed for the ERAC meeting in April 2026.**

A separate report providing a summary of answers to the questions formulated in the discussion paper following the breakout sessions is included as Addendum to this report.

#### **4. Team Europe on China: building on the reflections from the ERA Forum Standing Subgroup on the Global Approach -**

Exchange of views

ERAC held a discussion about the state of play and the future of the R&I **cooperation with China**. Delegations expressed full support for the work of the Knowledge Network on China (EU-KNOC) and the ERA Forum standing Sub-group on the Global Approach. They agreed to make full use of EU-KNOC in future and in particular to increase support for institutions in the Member States for their collaborations with Chinese organisations.

#### **5. Other subjects discussed:**

- **The role of R&I in Ukraine's recovery**

For this standing item, the ERAC co-Chair representing the Commission updated on the measures in support of Ukraine in the area of R&I, including the participation of Commissioner Zaharieva in the Recovery conference last July, the specific calls launched for Ukraine's SMEs and startups, and the topics for Ukrainian researchers included in the work programme 2026-2027. The representative of Ukraine as associated country expressed his gratitude.

- **ERAC agenda**

The ERAC co-Chair representing the Member States suggested to reflect on topics for discussions regarding the priority-setting mechanism and synergies, as well as science diplomacy, one of the priorities of the upcoming Cyprus Presidency of the Council.

- **Inclusion of private foundations in the ERA Forum stakeholder categories**

ERAC endorsed the proposal by the Commission.

**Next meetings:** the next ERAC plenary will take place on **15-16 April 2026 in Larnaca, Cyprus**. The ERAC Steering Board will hold an extraordinary meeting to prepare the proposed strategic debate on FP10.

**The role of research and innovation ecosystems and synergies between regional, national and European levels, also in the context of the new MFF proposal and the proposal for the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)**

Report on breakout sessions

The delegates discussed several questions in break-out groups and reported back to the plenary meeting. Summary of the answers:

***Do you have examples of emerging R&I ecosystems in your country that have effectively exploited (synergies between) instruments at different levels?***

Several examples were mentioned of emerging R&I ecosystems that are exploiting synergies between different levels, such as the R&I ecosystems emerging around the supercomputer Lumi in Finland and supercomputer Leonardo in Italy and Brainport Eindhoven in the Netherlands. These R&I ecosystems use several streams of regional, national and European funding and are interconnected in the EU R&I ecosystem.

The general difficulty is that not all elements (such as regulatory framework, infrastructure, entrepreneurial mindset of the researchers, funding possibilities) belonging to the R&I ecosystem are equally well developed.

***How did EU partnerships contribute in facilitating and strengthening synergies? How to best optimise synergies between Horizon Europe instruments and other (regional, national, European) instruments, in order to better support emerging R&I-ecosystems on strategic themes?***

During the discussions, EU partnerships were often mentioned as positive examples that facilitate and strengthen synergies within R&I ecosystems, since they bring different stakeholders together and use both national and EU-funding. They could produce even more synergy when using a whole of government approach. Specific partnerships such as EuroHPC were mentioned by several attendees as important tools to strengthen synergy.

***How do you ensure that national and regional priorities in your country are aligned with EU priorities, i.e., what mechanisms are currently in place?***

During the reporting back it was noted that there are challenges when connecting national R&I ecosystems to each other, and to the EU-level.

Often, the design regional and national R&I ecosystems is not equipped to connect to the EU level.

Hence a best practice would be for regional and national policy makers to think ahead when drafting policies on regional and national R&I ecosystems on how (and in what capacity) the EU level can add value to these R&I ecosystems. Co-creating these policies together with the Commission would increase synergies within R&I ecosystems and connectiveness between regional, national and EU levels.

***What would be needed at the EU level to further support or improve this alignment in the future?***

It was noted regulatory frameworks are needed to connect universities, research institutions and industry on a European level. Especially if there is ambition to develop something similar to DARPA on a European level, there should be more transfer of knowledge and best practices between science and industry.

Funding opportunities in the United States in relation to DARPA were considered more effective than funding opportunities in the EU, partially due to the higher degree of risk-investments. It was also noted that harmonization and a common rule book would help with alignment of instruments and R&I ecosystems.

The question remains why it is not a given for researchers to consider how their research could lead to viable applications for market and societal beneficial purposes.

Since most of the funding for R&I within the EU is national funding distributed by the Member State, it is important to keep in mind that there could be opportunities in aligning national and EU funding.