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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations

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Subject: European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) – plenary  
session, 15-16 April 2026, Nicosia  
ERAC WORK PROGRAMME 2026- 2027

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European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) delegations will find attached a document comprising the draft ERAC Work Programme 2026- 2027 and its annex, in view of the ERAC plenary on 15-16 April 2026.

## **Work Programme 2026-2027**

### **European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)**

This Work Programme of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) covers the period 1 July 2026 – 31 December 2027. It resumes the living and dynamic document adopted for the revised Work Programme 2025–2026<sup>1</sup> and builds on the priorities, working methods and strategic orientation previously agreed, in line with what ERAC needs to fulfil in its strategic forward-looking advisory role., namely by strengthening its contribution to priority-setting, alignment and coherence across the European research and innovation landscape. It gives substance to the tasks as described in the ERAC mandate<sup>2</sup> and sets the main priorities for steering the future work of ERAC. It is complimented by Proposals for the next agenda(s) for the ERAC meeting(s) (Annex).

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Fostering a new era of cooperation within the internal market for research and innovation (R&I) is essential. Strengthening collaboration across borders and research, innovation, digital and other ecosystems is key to enhancing European scientific excellence, competitiveness, strategic autonomy, welfare and societal well-being. To achieve this, Europe must reassess its policies for R&I cooperation, ensuring they are strategically aligned with the continent’s evolving needs and ambitions.

ERAC plays a vital role in this process as the key forum where the European Commission, member states, and associated countries come together to critically assess the current landscape and provide strategic guidance on the best path forward. Given the rapidly evolving regional, national, European, and global context, this work is more crucial than ever. In response to these challenges, the Work Programme 2026-2027 should ensure ERAC remains effective and forward- looking.

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<sup>1</sup> 8540/25.

<sup>2</sup> COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2021/2241 of 13 December 2021 on the composition and the mandate of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC), OJ L 450, 16.12.2021, pp.143-147.

## I. PLANNING AND WORKING MODALITIES

### A. WORK PROGRAMME AND AGENDA

#### History of ERAC

ERAC, in its renewed form, was established by the Council Conclusions of 26 November 2021 on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA) and the subsequent Council Decision of 13 December 2021 on the composition and the mandate of ERAC<sup>3</sup>. On 13 April 2022, ERAC adopted its procedural arrangements<sup>4</sup>.

A Work Programme of the Committee shall be drawn up by the Steering Board and shall be submitted to the Committee for approval. It shall cover a period of 18 months taking into account the programmes of the incumbent and the subsequent Trio Presidencies of the Council of the European Union. It shall include the activities the Committee plans to undertake in line with its mandate<sup>5</sup>.

The first ERAC Work Programme under the “new” ERA governance for the years 2022 and 2023 was adopted on 31 May 2022<sup>6</sup>. Revised Work Programmes were adopted in February 2023<sup>7</sup>, January 2024, December 2024<sup>8</sup> and May 2025<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Idem.

<sup>4</sup> 8227/22 of 19 April 2022

<sup>5</sup> Idem, Article 7.

<sup>6</sup> 10192/22 of 31 May 2022

<sup>7</sup> 6625/23 of 20 February 2023

<sup>8</sup> 14020/24 of 13 December 2024

<sup>9</sup> 8540/25 of 12 May 2025

## Living Work Programme and dynamic agendas

To be strategic and impactful, ERAC regularly discusses the most pressing and high-impact topics while staying informed about the latest developments in R&I policies and strategies. To achieve this, the ERAC's Work Programme is designed to be flexible and proactive, enabling ERAC to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging and evolving issues. A key priority for this is ensuring that every topic discussed has a clear objective, with a well-defined impact and concrete follow-up actions.

ERAC takes a structured yet adaptable approach to planning meetings, strategic discussions, and work streams. The practice of setting agendas three meetings in advance has been discontinued, as it proved too rigid for ERAC to remain strategic and responsive to new developments.

Instead, ERAC has identified a limited set of priority themes that will guide the work of ERAC over the near future (see the priorities below). Each meeting's agenda is drafted in alignment with these themes, with flexibility to plan discussions across multiple meetings or with ad-hoc ways of joint work in between when necessary.

In this context, the ERAC Work Programme will be continuously updated when needed.

## Collaborative agenda setting with the Presidencies, European Commission and ERAC members

To enhance coordination with EU priorities, incoming EU Presidencies are invited to contribute topics to link their presidency agendas and the work of ERAC, in order to ensure that

ERAC's work and presidency priorities align where appropriate. Presidencies are encouraged to share their planning with ERAC at an early stage to facilitate impactful and strategic coordination. Additionally, the Commission Work Programme and other foreseeable European developments serve as key references for setting ERAC's agenda. By maintaining a dynamic and results-oriented approach, ERAC ensures that its discussions lead to meaningful outcomes and that its work remains relevant, timely and impactful.

## B. WORKING MODALITIES

Achieving palpable impact within the work of ERAC requires choosing the best possible ways to tackle each discussion and its follow-up. There are several ways of working which are already part of the standard approach of ERAC (see below). Additionally, ERAC has the ambition to innovate and keep adding new working modalities if and when required. In this context, the tools and ways of working as described below are a starting point and will over time evolve and be expanded upon.

### Optimising the approach to agenda items, themes and topics

Selecting the most effective method for addressing an agenda item, theme, or topic depends on its specific content and the intended outcomes. ERAC aims to foster dynamic and strategic discussions rather than formal exchanges of pre-prepared statements.

Given the strategic nature of ERAC's work, discussions should be interactive, allowing delegates to engage, reflect, and build upon each other's contributions.

To encourage this approach, various methods can be employed and have been already applied. For instance, structured (short) rounds of interventions can be used, where each round builds upon the insights shared in the previous one. Working with break-out sessions can also stimulate open discussions. Additionally, digital or physical tools (such as word clouds, Mentimeter, or Post-Its) can be used to gather initial thoughts and stimulate engagement. In some cases, providing a summary of points where consensus has already been reached can help direct the debate toward more contentious or unresolved issues. Over time ERAC will continue experimenting with different facilitation techniques to refine and enhance its working methods.

Moreover, discussions do not need to always focus on the contributions from the members of ERAC. Engaging expert panels at the outset of certain discussions may provide valuable insights and set the stage for meaningful exchanges. Similarly, stakeholders may be invited to contribute to the work of ERAC when appropriate and possible.

It is important to recognise that debate is not an aim in itself, but a tool to achieve specific outcomes. In some cases, topics may be addressed outside of plenary ERAC meetings—through written procedures, online discussions and surveys, or collaborative digital workspaces.

For instance, preliminary expert meetings can be conducted online to share information and address factual questions, thereby streamlining plenary sessions and allowing more time for in-depth deliberation.

To further boost that ERAC stays strategic and works in an effective and efficient way, there should be on a regular basis a reflection on past work. This to see what the impact was of the work of ERAC, to monitoring how follow-up and follow-through is being undertaken, and to evaluate what worked and what didn't. In this way regular reflections will optimise the impact and way of working of ERAC.

### Taking the lead on a topic

For each agenda item, theme or topic one or several member states and, where appropriate, associated countries can take the lead in the preparation, chairing or follow-up. This leadership role can take various forms, such as serving as rapporteurs, establishing ad-hoc task forces, or forming expert committees, depending on the nature of the topic and the contributions required.

It is a deliberate choice to give the opportunity to ERAC members to contribute in such an active and leading capacity to different topics. This will increase the relevance of the different agenda points and the work by ERAC. It will also contribute to the strategic nature of ERAC and to the commitment by its members to its work.

### Preparing written documents

If written preparation or follow-up is foreseen, then one or more volunteers prepare a draft for a background document of summary in collaboration with the Commission. The document is put forward to the ERAC Steering Board for discussion/amendment/green light. The document is then sent to the ERAC members at least two weeks before the ERAC meeting or, in the case of a summary, at least four weeks after a meeting.

The background documents must clearly outline the objective(s) and/or concrete follow-up actions of each discussion to ensure that every ERAC debate leads to a well-defined outcome. Outcomes can be, for example, an ERAC Opinion, supporting Presidencies with analysis for possible preparation of Council Conclusions, an initiative taken by the Commission, the setting up of an ERAC Task Force for further elaboration of the subject, an expert session, a meeting with stakeholders, et cetera.

### C. STRATEGIC COORDINATION AND INTERACTION WITH OTHER COMMITTEES AND POLICY AREAS

Follow-up might also mean that ERAC or members of ERAC make sure the work of ERAC is seen, heard or taken up by others. In this context ERAC should reflect on possibilities to explore ways of providing the Competitiveness Council (Research and Innovation configuration) with a regular update of the work of ERAC. These updates could offer an opportunity to present results, provide advice, seek guidance, and strengthen ERAC's connection with the highest political level, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and impact of its work. The practice of the Working Party on Competitiveness and Growth (High Level) can in this case serve as a possible example on how to approach this. However, it is equally important to establish and maintain strong links with other key stakeholders and committees to ensure broader engagement and influence.

Research policy is closely connected to education and industrial policies. R&I policy meets education policy especially when addressing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Since HEIs play such an important role for our knowledge societies, it is of great importance to have an integrated policy addressing HEIs and their four missions.

Close interconnection between R&I and education policy is therefore a necessity. In this context ERAC should, where possible and relevant, exchange or cooperate with ERAC-equivalent bodies in the field of education.

On the other side of the R&I spectrum, close interaction and creating synergies with economic, business and industrial policy is also an obligation in order to maximise the impact of R&I on the EU's competitiveness. In this context ERAC will where possible and relevant exchange or cooperate with ERAC-equivalent bodies in the field of competitiveness. This will first and foremost be the Working Party on Competitiveness and Growth (High Level). Additionally, engagement with the Trade Policy and Economic Policy Committee will be of interest.

Equally important is close collaboration with sectoral policies in the context of challenge- and mission-oriented R&I. Due to its nature at the interface between European and national R&I policy, ERAC can play an important role in enabling and enhancing the interaction with other policies.

ERAC can do the above-mentioned work through its strategic advice, the consideration of stakeholders' views, designating members of ERAC in charge of covering relevant sectoral policies or holding informal joint meetings with other fora. Other ways of working should be explored to enhance the impact of ERAC in this field.

The forthcoming European Research Area (ERA) Act will likely bring a structural evolution in ERA governance, aiming to complement voluntary coordination with a more binding and coherent framework. In parallel, interlinkages between FP10 and the European Competitiveness Fund raise fundamental questions regarding strategic priority-setting, partnership rationalisation, and alignment between EU and national R&I programmes. In this evolving governance landscape, ERAC's role as a strategic coordination forum at the interface between EU and national levels gains renewed relevance.

## II. CURRENT CONTEXT OF THE EU'S R&I SYSTEM

Reports by Heitor, Letta and Draghi and other relevant publications<sup>10</sup> underline the importance of a well-functioning European internal market for R&I as a pre-condition for excellent, impact full and groundbreaking R&I. At the same time the reports conclude that this internal market has not been realised despite the many steps taken and a lot of progress already achieved.

The reports highlight several pressing challenges faced by the EU, most prominently the issue of the fragmentation of the internal market and the persistent innovation gap, exemplified by the underinvestment in research and development (R&D). Investments currently stand at an EU average of 2.3% of GDP, far below the 3% target established at the 2002 Barcelona European Council meeting, and palling compared to major global competitors such as the USA and China.

The reasons for this underinvestment are multiple, including the relative lack of high R&D-intensive sectors in the EU ('mid-tech trap') as well as relatively stagnant and uncoordinated public R&D investment that does not seem to trigger stronger private R&D investment, and large disparities in R&D performance between and within EU Member States.

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<sup>10</sup> Besides the [Heitor](#), [Letta](#) and [Draghi](#) reports, one can think of the [Competitiveness Compass](#), the different Declarations, Council Conclusions and Recommendations, the ERA Policy Agendas and more.

The mentioned reports advocate for a cohesive strategy that not only addresses these investment gaps, but also promotes a unified R&I landscape to truly create a single market for R&I across Europe, including the promotion of R&I action plans developed by the EU, the Member States and all relevant stakeholders. In the way forward it will be important to build on the significant progress made to date under the new ERA structures and not to duplicate effort or create parallel structures.

The concept of a “fifth freedom” is pivotal as it aims to eliminate barriers to the free movement of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology, thereby fostering a more integrated and competitive European single market. By securing a well-functioning Single Market, the EU can leverage R&I investments and drive sustainable economic growth. It needs a fully functioning ERA.

A pivotal role must be played by the Union’s and Member States’ R&I policies in attaining several objectives, of which long-term competitiveness, prosperity, climate neutrality by 2050, and leadership on the global stage. In short, the reports advocate for embedding R&I at the heart of the Union’s and Member States’ strategies.

### **III. ERAC PRIORITIES**

ERAC, during its debate on ‘Closing the innovation gap and creating a ‘fifth freedom’ – from analysis to action’ (13 February 2025)<sup>11</sup>, discussed around five general and distinct themes that now have been incorporated in its work programme.

#### **A. FIVE PRIORITY THEMES**

The five priority themes will guide the agenda of ERAC. The main focus in the work of ERAC in these themes will be to foster the needed changes and improvements. For many of the topics there is a feel for the importance and urgency to act, but not always a clear path forward. This is where ERAC comes in. Bridging from the political level towards the implementation.

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<sup>11</sup> 7440/25.

## 1. Investment goals and strategic planning

There is broad agreement in ERAC on the critical need of the EU to achieve its 3% GDP target for R&I investments, with a strong emphasis on national commitments and increased private sector contributions. Amid rapid technological change and growing global competition, targeted investments in key strategic technologies and R&I sectors, while maintaining strong support for fundamental research and disruptive innovation, are needed. Stable, long-term funding must span the entire research chain, from fundamental research to industry and societal applications, requiring both strategic partnerships and a balanced approach between top-down directives and bottom-up scientific excellence.

Strengthening public-private collaboration, particularly in deep tech and other critical sectors, should be a priority, with initiatives that encourage shared investments and risk-taking to accelerate innovation and enhance commercial viability. Furthermore, improved alignment of different funding sources at EU, national, and regional levels is crucial to maximise impact and coherence of R&I investments.

## 2. Coordination and simplification

ERAC emphasizes the need for better coordination of R&I policies across the EU to reduce fragmentation and improve efficiency, ensuring that national and EU-level efforts complement rather than compete with one another. Fragmentation leads to inefficiencies and redundancies that hinder effective collaboration and resource allocation, making it essential to develop a more cohesive strategy that aligns national and European R&I initiatives.

A key priority is the simplification of funding mechanisms and administrative procedures to ensure fairness, openness, and broader participation, particularly from startups and smaller research institutions. While there is no consensus on whether existing frameworks should be leveraged or if new mechanisms are needed, there is some agreement on the need for a coherent EU-wide governance framework for joint R&I efforts, enabling more effective resource pooling and raising competitiveness at the European, national, and regional levels.

### 3. Improving framework conditions

The EU's competitiveness depends on its ability to attract, train, and retain skilled researchers and innovators, making it essential to remove barriers to mobility and access to resources. Ensuring a dynamic and interconnected research landscape requires policies and reforms that facilitate researcher movement, while addressing the risks of brain drain. ERAC agrees on the need for supportive frameworks and incentives that promote talent retention and cross-border collaboration. The EU can enhance its appeal to global R&I talent by upholding values like scientific freedom, democracy, and quality of life. Additionally, streamlined access to data (including open science regulations), well-developed research and technology infrastructures, as well as strengthened collaboration between research performing organisations with common or complementary interests, are crucial for fostering innovation, attracting top talent, and strengthening Europe's R&I capabilities.

### 4. R&I alignment with industry and other non-academic sectors

Ensuring a stronger connection between research, innovation, and industrial policy, as well as with the broader non-academic sector, is key to maximise the societal and economic value of R&I. ERAC highlights the importance of supporting deep-tech innovation, disruptive technologies, and the commercialisation of research outputs.

This requires forging strategic partnerships, pooling resources, and balancing top-down directives with bottom-up scientific excellence. Key actions include developing initiatives that connect research institutions with industry, such as public-private partnerships, venture capital, and innovation hubs, as well as enhancing support for startups and scaleups—particularly in deep tech—through tailored funding programs and business acceleration initiatives. While industry remains a key partner, the alignment must also extend to other non-academic actors such as public authorities, civil society or non-profit organisations.

### 5. Regional and global cooperation

ERAC highlights the need to address regional disparities in innovation performance while strengthening the EU's position in the global R&I landscape. Given the interconnected nature of global challenges, international collaboration with associated and like-minded countries is essential and should be guided by shared values and principles.

Strengthening regional and global cooperation requires initiatives that integrate regional R&I ecosystems with broader European strategies, optimizing resource utilization and fostering cross-border collaboration. Delegations emphasized the importance of incorporating the perspectives of smaller Member States, whose adaptability can provide valuable insights for regional growth and innovation.

## B. RECURRING TOPICS

In addition to the priorities mentioned above ERAC has some responsibilities that require regular attention.

### R&I related measures in the context of the recovery of Ukraine

In the ERAC meeting on 14 February 2023, the committee decided to have a standing agenda item in the future on R&I related measures in the context of the recovery of Ukraine. This decision is still valid. The Commission offered to give updates on the state of play and discussions will be held, if necessary.

### ERAC's role in the design, adaptation and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda

In the current ERA governance and policy coordination approach, the ERA Policy Agenda is a central document for the advancement of the ERA. It is therefore a very important subject for the work of ERAC. Based on the Pact for R&I in Europe and the Council Conclusions on the future governance of the ERA of 26 November 2021, ERAC should contribute to the ERA Policy Agenda in several ways, namely monitoring the progress made in the implementation of the ERA actions (to this end, the co-Chairs of the ERA Forum inform ERAC regularly), initiating the discussion process of each ERA policy agenda no later than 18 months ahead of the end of the 3-year policy cycle, reflecting on new policy demands that fulfil the criteria for the ERA Policy Agenda, and providing advice on any relevant matter in the context of the ERA Policy Agenda in accordance with its mandate.

## **Proposals for the next agenda(s) for the ERAC meeting(s)**

Please find below the first suggestions for the next agenda and a longlist of agenda items for next meetings.

### Standing agenda items

1. Opening of the plenary and adoption of the agenda by the ERAC co-Chairs
2. Updates by the ERAC co-Chairs
3. Presentation and updates on the current and incoming Presidencies' priorities on R&I
4. Any other business
  - The role of R&I in Ukraine's recovery – updates by Ukraine on the state of affairs, by the ERAC co-Chair representing the Commission on European measures and by Member State delegations of the national measures
5. The agenda of the next ERAC meeting(s)

### Preliminary non-standing agenda items for the ERAC meeting on 15-16 April 2026 in Nicosia, Cyprus

1. EU competitiveness funding: Priority-setting mechanisms and governance (Member States proposal)
  - Strategic debate
2. Science Diplomacy (Cypriot Presidency proposal)
  - Debate with introductory presentation by Professor Costas N. Papanicolas

### Longlist of possible future agenda items

- Tools and initiatives to foster R&I and business and industry alignment (co-Chairs proposal)
- High-level discussion about the defence (dual use) component of the next FP, in articulation with the current debate on Research Security and International Cooperation (Portuguese proposal)

- AI in Science (German Proposal)
  - The role of Science and Innovation on extreme weather and climate events: reshaping risk management and climate adaptation objectives. The role of the Mission on Adaptation and the Mission on Climate Neutral Cities. (Spanish Proposal)
-