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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
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Subject: Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027 - Presidency text

Delegations will find in annex a third Presidency text on the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027, with a view to the Research Working Party meeting on 5 May 2025.

Changes in relation to the second Presidency text (7864/25) are indicated in **bold and underlined** for additions and in ~~strikethrough~~ for deletions.

2025/0034 (NLE)
Proposal for a

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

on the European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027

(Text with EEA relevance)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 292, in conjunction with Article 182(5) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) Today, the EU faces multiple and unprecedented challenges. The global order is changing and the foundations of our societal well-being and security are being shaken by a turbulent geopolitical context, rising economic competition, an unprecedentedly rapid and transformative technological revolution, and climate change and its consequences. Research and innovation (R&I) are crucial to reduce Europe's vulnerabilities and to unlock its full potential across ERA as well as playing a critical role in enhancing the European Union's sustainable competitiveness, societal resilience, prosperity and security. The need to strengthen European leadership and strategic autonomy, while preserving an open economy, in key technological domains has become urgent.

(2) Developing the European Research Area (ERA) is at the heart of our efforts to respond to these challenges. The ambition to create the ERA as a single market for research, technology and innovation was conceived in 2000 and enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty as a specific EU objective under Article 179 TFEU. While significant progress has been made since 2022 under the first ERA Policy Agenda, more needs to be done to further develop a fully functioning ERA where countries come together to coordinate and improve their national R&I policies and ecosystems, and where knowledge, researchers, innovators and technology can move freely. Greater EU-wide coordination through the ERA can help stimulate investments and reforms, **contribute to closing** ~~reduce the internal~~ innovation divide **with the EU's global competitors and within the EU**, as well as play an essential role in fostering sustainable competitiveness, ~~in line with the objectives of the Competitiveness Compass~~[†].

(3 2a) The ERA Policy Agenda is key to implement the ERA priorities, as set out in the Pact for R&I in Europe. It underpins the joint efforts of the European Commission, Member States, and, where appropriate, associated countries and stakeholders, to better coordinate R&I policies at all levels. It fosters their sense of ownership and increased commitment and contributes to working on the **concept** ~~proposal~~ of a “fifth freedom” – the Single Market for R&I. The ERA Policy Agenda for the next three-year cycle (2025-2027) aims to:

- contribute to enhancing EU competitiveness and ensuring the EU's strategic autonomy, while preserving an open economy, by coordinating dedicated investments and reforms in R&I and pooling resources at national **and, where applicable**, regional **levels**, and **at** EU level; which are available in the current Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027;
- strengthen the EU's R&I excellence and impact, its global scientific leadership and attractiveness to global talent by **streamlining** ~~enhancing~~ research career paths, facilitating researchers' mobility and knowledge sharing across Europe, and promoting access to cutting-edge infrastructures; and

[†] ~~COM(2025) 30 final.~~

- enhance the EU's sustainable development and societal impact by coordinating R&I efforts in industrial transformation, by developing synergies with other policies and by promoting a more circular and resilient economy.
- (4 3) The ERA has produced major achievements over the past 25 years in core policy areas including research infrastructures, open science, international cooperation, ~~inclusive~~ gender equality **and inclusiveness** in R&I, joint programming, research careers and researcher mobility. Contributing to these achievements, among others the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) have funded over 150,000 excellent researchers, notably through excellent doctoral programmes, postdoctoral fellowships and R&I staff exchanges, EURAXESS has supported over 2 million researchers in their career development and mobility across Europe and the Open Science Cloud (EOSC) provides seamless access to quality data and digital services while supporting collaboration across borders and disciplines.
- (5 4) In 2021, Member States and the Commission agreed on a new vision and policy framework for the ERA, set out in the Pact for R&I² and the Council conclusions on the future governance of the ERA³. The long-term vision sets out the common values and principles that will guide R&I and identifies priorities for joint action. In the Pact, Member States reiterated their commitment to work together to achieve the ERA objectives to foster cooperation and coordination of their R&I policies, and reduce fragmentation across Europe in scientific research, technology and innovation. In the 2024 Council conclusions on strengthening the competitiveness of the EU, reinforcing the ERA and overcoming its fragmentation⁴, Member States also stressed that it is essential to continue building and reinforcing R&I ecosystems, and reiterated the need for better coordination and alignment between EU and national policy planning and implementation.

² Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/2122 of 26 November 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, OJ L 431, 2.12.2021, p. 1–9.

³ 14308/21.

⁴ 16179/24.

(6 5) The first ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 created a solid foundation to achieve the ERA objectives. It translated the Pact for R&I priority areas into a set of concrete actions. 17 actions were jointly implemented by the Commission, Member States, Horizon Europe associated countries and EU-level stakeholders. As part of the new governance, the ERA Forum and its sub-groups ~~play a unique role in discussing, designing and~~ **assist the Commission in** supporting **the** implementation of the ERA and its actions. They provide an efficient framework for collaboration between the Commission, the Member States, associated countries and relevant stakeholders in an inclusive and participatory approach. This fosters innovative strategies and a shared ownership of policies to strengthen Europe's R&I ecosystem. As a high-level strategic policy joint advisory committee, the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC)⁵ provides early advice to the Council, the Commission and the Member States on strategic R&I policy issues, including on strategic policy orientation and future trends that require the refinement of Union and national, including regional, R&I policies, including on the current and the next Union R&I Framework Programme and other relevant R&I-driven Union initiatives.

⁵ 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, p. 143–147.

- (7 6) The Commission highlighted the achievements of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 and the new governance in the 2024 Communication ‘Implementation of the European Research Area’⁶. The achievements in addressing a range of R&I needs across Europe under the first ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 include, for instance, (1) creating the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), (2) publishing the ‘Zero tolerance code of conduct on counteracting gender-based violence in the EU research and innovation system’, (3) successfully carrying out the very first Multilateral Dialogue on principles and values for international cooperation in R&I and adopting a ministerial statement, **(4) creating the European framework to attract and retain research, innovation and entrepreneurial talent in Europe and launching the Research and Innovation Careers Observatory** (4 5) stimulating the green energy transformation by implementing the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda of the ERA pilot on green hydrogen, (5 6) reinforcing and recognising the importance of research management capabilities, and (6 7) developing a new ERA monitoring and evaluation framework.
- (8 7) The second ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 builds on this approach and is designed to help reinforce the national R&I systems and tackle the complex global challenges Europe is facing. Using the Pact for R&I priority areas for joint action and the implementation outcomes of the first ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 as a basis, it sets out 11 long-term structural ERA policies and 8 concrete ERA actions, as defined in paragraph 1 of this recommendation. These are the result of an extensive co-creation process within the ERA Forum, **that has** focused on the content of the **structural ERA** policies and **ERA** actions. Complementarily, ERAC has contributed by providing early strategic advice on the need of an ERA policy narrative, on the structure of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027, on securing the commitments **of at least half of the Member States for the** implementation of the Agenda, and **on** the need to better communicate its ambition, targets and priorities. The aim is to start its implementation in 2025. The ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 provides continuity on ongoing policies under the first agenda, tackles the ERA’s core long-term objectives, and has the flexibility needed to respond to new strategic needs. It should increase the visibility and raise awareness on ERA, its objectives and its actions.

⁶ COM (2024) 490.

HEREBY RECOMMENDS THAT:

1. The Member States adopt the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 which includes 11 structural ERA policies and 8 ERA actions. ERA structural policies are longer-term activities, embedded in national and European policy and R&I systems, that require efforts beyond the **three-year** cycle of the ERA Policy Agenda. They have a three-year work plan to ensure implementation of measures towards achieving the expected longer-term impact. ERA actions are concrete, policy-driven and goal-oriented to provide substantive added value for the EU, Member States, associated countries and stakeholders, and they are to be completed within the three-year ERA Policy Agenda. All proposals for ERA structural policies and ERA actions for the period 2025-2027 are outlined in more detail in the Annex.
2. The Member States implement the structural policies and actions set out in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 voluntarily and on the basis of the variable geometry principle, with the Commission and in coordination, where appropriate, with the associated countries and stakeholders, in line with the four priority areas for joint action identified in the Pact for R&I. These structural policies and actions focus on (i) bringing clear added value at national and European level, (ii) making an impact by producing specific deliverables and tangible outcomes within three years, (iii) building on constant co-creation between Member States, Commission, and, where appropriate, associated countries and stakeholders, (iv) being self-standing with one core activity, and (v) being implemented voluntarily and in variable geometry, allowing for flexibility in the extent to which countries can get involved. **Implementation of ~~The~~ ERA structural policies and ERA actions should secure participation of at least half of the Member States for their implementation. Such a broad political support should be ensured by a survey conducted by the Commission.** ~~aim at achieving participation of at least 50% of the Member States in each of those policies and actions. Mechanisms for flexible implementation, allowing Member States to join ERA structural policies and actions at a later stage should be defined as soon as possible by the ERA Forum.~~

3. The ERA structural policies and ERA actions, listed by priority areas as set out in the Pact for R&I in Europe, are as follows:

PRIORITY AREA 1: DEEPENING A TRULY FUNCTIONING INTERNAL MARKET FOR KNOWLEDGE

An efficient, effective and well functioning internal market for knowledge, built on free movement of researchers, knowledge and data, as well as brain circulation, are essential to build a more efficient and inclusive European R&I system. It ensures that efforts and investments are used efficiently and creates the critical mass needed to be effective. To strengthen the EU's competitiveness, it is essential to boost the EU's international position and scientific leadership by carrying out pioneering R&I along the whole R&I chain, including fundamental and applied science, and by boosting EU's attractiveness for global talent, **retaining talents within the EU**, and overcoming the fragmentation of the ERA.

The Commission and the Member States, in coordination, where appropriate, with the associated countries and stakeholder organisations, will continue to work on this priority through the following ERA structural policies:

- Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC);
- Strengthening sustainability, accessibility and resilience of research infrastructures in the ERA;
- Strengthening ~~inclusive~~ gender equality **and inclusiveness in the ERA**, notably with an intersectional approach, ~~in the ERA~~;
- Making research careers more attractive and sustainable, and support mobility;
- Reforming research assessment — ~~Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities and activities~~;

- **Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities and activities;**
- Implementing the Global Approach to R&I.

The following ERA actions are proposed for the next three years:

- Applying equity in open science;
- Advancing the European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem;
- Facilitating and accelerating the responsible use of AI in science in the EU;
- Enhancing research security.

PRIORITY AREA 2: TAKING UP TOGETHER THE GREEN TRANSITION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND OTHER CHALLENGES WITH IMPACT ON SOCIETY, AND INCREASING SOCIETY'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ERA

For the ERA to play its part in boosting competitiveness, improve the quality of life for people in the EU and tackle societal challenges such as the green and digital transitions, it should create synergies with other policies to develop holistic approaches. R&I investment should deliver valuable outcomes that are used and deployed by the market, and should enhance scientific progress and impact when addressing societal needs.

The following ERA structural policies have been identified as the core approaches to address this priority area:

- Making the strategic energy technology (SET) plan a key thematic component of the ERA;
- Improving the articulation between R&I and higher education within the ERA, and unleashing the full potential of European R&I ecosystems;
- Enhancing trust in science through citizen participation, engagement and science communication.

The following ERA actions are proposed for the next three years:

- Accelerating R&I investments for Europe's industrial transformation and competitive sustainability;
- Accelerating new approach methodologies (NAMs) to advance biomedical research and testing of medicinal products and medical devices;
- Developing a coherent and coordinated framework for a European approach to integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges.

PRIORITY AREA 3: ENHANCING ACCESS TO RESEARCH AND INNOVATION EXCELLENCE
ACROSS THE UNION AND ENHANCING INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN INNOVATION
ECOSYSTEMS ACROSS THE UNION

Research excellence spans all of Europe, across ages, disciplines and sectors. Its full potential has yet to be tapped due to significant disparities in opportunities for researchers and innovators in the ERA.

The following ERA structural policy has been identified as a core approach to address this priority area:

- Improve EU access to excellence.

The following ERA action is proposed for the next three years:

- Empowering R&I: A new era in research management.

PRIORITY AREA 4: ADVANCING CONCERTED RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INVESTMENTS AND REFORMS

As the EU focuses on key areas for future competitiveness, sustainability and well-being, it would be counterproductive to duplicate, substitute or fragment R&I investment and initiatives. Transnational cooperation boosts efficiency by pooling resources to achieve critical mass and increase the knowledge spillover effects to boost R&I. Ensuring that these investments are efficient and impactful will also require in some instances designing, implementing and monitoring structural reforms in national research and development (R&D) systems. The aim of these reforms is to increase scientific excellence, embed a culture of valorising research results, enhance science-business links and better target policies to support business innovation.

There is no specific ERA structural policy or action proposed under this objective. The European Commission and the Member States remain, however, committed to work closely together using a set of existing instruments. More precisely, implementing the R&I measures under the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility is expected to boost national R&I capacity, especially in countries that continue to lag behind.

Through the European Semester of economic policy coordination, the European Commission carries out an in-depth analysis of the national R&I systems and issues country-specific recommendations on how to boost each country's innovation potential. The Commission then monitors policy responses by the Member States to assess progress in bridging the R&I gaps identified. To support their efforts to improve their R&I systems through reforms, Member States and, where appropriate, associated countries can receive expert support under the Horizon Policy Support Facility, an instrument that has proved highly beneficial in improving policymaking and identifying reform pathways, and the bilateral Enhanced Policy Dialogue with Member States and, where appropriate, associated countries on commonly agreed topics of R&I.

4. The established collaborative framework within ERAC, giving clear R&I strategic advice and orientations, and the ERA Forum, **responsible for enhancing coordination towards the effective implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda** ~~providing outlines and content for the proposed actions~~, should be maintained as a central mechanism of ERA governance. Implementation of the next ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 should remain an inclusive and transparent endeavour across all levels of governance to foster co-creation and ownership of the agenda. The ERA Forum should continue to identify emerging challenges, outside the activities of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027, that require cross-country collaboration and are covered by the Pact for R&I, such as a follow-up on the freedom of scientific research and strengthening scientific leadership of Europe.
5. ERA structural policies and actions should be implemented by the Member States voluntarily and on the basis of the variable geometry principle, in line with paragraph 2 of this recommendation. Member States are recommended to involve their regions and national stakeholders to support the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027. Coordinated implementation should ensure the active and broad involvement of EU-level stakeholders across the entire spectrum, from research to innovation and market deployment. The categories of stakeholders in the ERA Forum should be reviewed to explore the optimal representation of the different interests, in particular the private sector and the civil society.
6. Member States and the European Commission should remain supportive of the full involvement of countries associated to the Horizon Europe programme and EU-level umbrella stakeholder organisations in implementing the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027.

7. R&I investment in the EU falls short of aspirations and remains below the level of investment in many of the EU's global competitors. Currently, the EU spends some 2.3% of its GDP on R&D, far below the 3% R&D target set in 2002 in the Barcelona Declaration. To meet the multifaceted challenge of reaching the 3% GDP target, renewed political commitment is needed to boost public and private R&D investment within the framework of available means. Further reforms are also needed to improve national R&I ecosystems and maximise the impact of an increase in investment in R&I. In addition to the Pact for R&I priority area 'Advancing concerted R&I investments and reforms', Member States and the Commission should continue their efforts in this direction.
8. The European Commission should continue to implement the ERA monitoring mechanism outlined in the Pact for R&I in Europe and detailed in the 'Framework for the future ERA monitoring mechanism' presented by the Commission to the Council on 10 June 2022⁷. The ERA monitoring mechanism will assess progress towards the ERA priorities, as defined in the Pact for R&I. The ERA monitoring mechanism should consist of:
- (1) an ERA Scoreboard to monitor progress towards the ERA objectives both at EU and national levels, updated regularly;
 - (2) a triennial ERA monitoring report from the Commission to the Council to review implementation of the ERA policy agenda,
 - (3) ~~regular~~ **triennial** ERA country reports to review countries' progress in implementing the ERA Policy Agenda ensuring no additional burden for Member States.

⁷ 9578/22.

Member States should continue to exchange information on the ERA, in particular by providing data and information via the ERA Policy Platform. Member States should also promote implementation of the ERA structural policies and actions and results relevant in their countries, drawing on the support available.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council
The President
