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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations  
Subject: ERAC Plenary Meeting, 15-16 April 2026, Nicosia (CY)  
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 15-16 April 2026 in Nicosia (CY).

## ERAC Plenary meeting, 15-16 April 2026, Nicosia

### Summary report

On 15 and 16 April 2026, the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) held a plenary meeting in Nicosia, hosted by the Cyprus 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 six countries associated to *Horizon Europe* also participated. Georgios Komodromos, Permanent Secretary of the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Presidency.

The co-Chairs gave information on the recent activities and initiatives on R&I, such as the 28<sup>th</sup> regime as a specific and unique corporate legal framework, the open and secure international cooperation in R&I, and the work of the ERA Forum. The current Cyprus Presidency of the Council updated on its R&I activities, while the upcoming Irish and Lithuanian Presidencies presented their preliminary programmes and priorities on R&I.

#### Highlights:

#### ERAC discussed four main topics:

##### 1. ERAC Work programme (01/07/2026- 31/12/2027)

The delegates discussed and adopted the ERAC work programme for the period 01/07/2026-31/12/2027, as amended following delegations' proposals aiming to include strategic discussions on the future **role of ERAC**.

The delegates agreed to keep the programme as a living document, and to continue and further develop flexible working methods. There was a consensus on the need to strengthen the ERAC role as advisory body, with transparency and inclusiveness, taking into account Member States' specificities, new developments and challenges in the context of the new MFF programme, as well as the upcoming Innovation Act and ERA Act.

It was proposed to establish contacts and synergies with the Council High Level Working Party on Competitiveness and Growth (COMP GRO). Delegations were invited to further contribute regarding working methods, if they wish so.

## **2. EU competitiveness funding: guiding principles for priority-setting – Strategic debate**

On the basis of a background note prepared by a group of delegations and the Commission, ERAC discussed the issue on how to identify the main **guiding principles for effective R&I priority-setting**, mainly in the context of the evolving EU funding architecture – notably the links between the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10). Delegates also considered how this could contribute to reducing fragmentation and improving alignment across governance levels, and between EU and national perspectives, how to identify key gaps in the current system, take stock of existing instruments and experiences, and explore whether additional mechanisms may be needed to improve alignment, coordination and long-term strategic orientation across the European R&I landscape. Several delegations also underlined the importance of maintaining a balance between short-term innovation needs and long-term research perspectives, including safeguarding scientific excellence and bottom-up research, and ensuring broad stakeholder involvement.

Regarding the priority setting in the context of the FP10-ECF nexus, the delegates agreed that the strategic programming in the current Horizon Europe programme should be improved, and convergence of views was expressed that a more effective and feasible approach should be applied, with stability and flexibility. It was considered that there was a need for establishing a priority-setting process supported by an evidence-based strategic policy orientations document. The importance of foresight, expert opinions and national stakeholder consultations was underlined in this context. This document should be the basis for establishing the Work Programmes within the comitology framework of the ECF-Horizon Europe nexus. The delegations agreed that this process, as well as the role of ERAC in it, have to be discussed.

ERAC delegates also discussed the potential impact of priority-setting in the FP10-ECF context on the alignment of regional, national and European R&I funding. The need for such alignment was underlined by many delegations in the discussion, with preference expressed on a limited number of initiatives, from research to deployment. Delegates warned against excessive administrative burden and considered that the existing as well as new instruments could be used, potentially based on a refurbished ERA governance laid down by the forthcoming ERA Act.

The role of ERAC in this regard was also mentioned as a direction for reflection and action, while respecting the respective fora's competences.

### **3. EU competitiveness funding: European Partnerships - Strategic debate**

The third strategic discussion was regarding the **approach to European Partnerships in the framework of the next Horizon Europe programme**, a subject closely related to and as a continuation of the debate on priority-setting. The delegations reiterated that European Partnerships were an important instrument for the implementation of the Framework Programme, as well as for the alignment of regional, national and European R&I funding and policy. Recognising Partnerships as a potentially powerful instrument, several delegations expressed their preference for a limited number of Partnerships, without setting a numerical limit, by strictly applying selection criteria that include strategic relevance and strong European added value. The existing R&I landscape should be taken into account to ensure complementarity and avoid duplications. Partnerships should be strategic and integrative and have effective governance structures and implementation arrangements. Combining research and deployment should be the rule, but it is important to also include Partnerships in the field of social sciences and humanities. Regarding already existing Partnerships, the view prevailed that they need to be strictly scrutinised against the selection criteria before considering their continuation. Many delegations called for simplification in terms of the portfolio, and the structure and implementation modalities.

### **4. Science diplomacy – Strategic debate with key speaker Prof. Costas N. Papanikolas**

The Commission presented the “Open and secure international cooperation in research & innovation” package, adopted on 27 February 2026, consisting of three elements: the Global Approach Implementation Report 2023-2025, the Research Security Monitor 2025, and the proposal for a Council recommendation on a European Union framework for science diplomacy, currently negotiated by the Council.

Professor Costas Papanikolas, adjunct professor at the University of Illinois and president emeritus of the Cyprus institute, presented the subject on the Regional Science Diplomacy in an era of geopolitical realignment and strategic Competition, in particular a case study on the Eastern Mediterranean-Middle East Region. He stressed that transboundary challenges create cooperative imperatives that can operate even across active conflict lines, and that the transformation of science diplomacy - from confidence-building tool to primary governance instrument - is structural, while ERA strategy has not yet caught up with it.

ERAC shared the view that science-based cooperation can foster trust and address transboundary challenges such as climate change, and that it has strong potential in general to contribute to political and societal progress.

**Next meetings:** the next ERAC plenary will take place on **12-13 October 2026 in Dublin, Ireland**, with possible online meeting before that, to be confirmed by the Steering Board.

An extraordinary plenary meeting will take place in **February 2027** in Brussels.

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