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THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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To: Delegations

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Subject: Council conclusions on the progress report from the Commission on European Research Area (ERA) 2013

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Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on the progress report from the Commission on European Research Area (ERA) 2013 as adopted by the Council ("Competitiveness") at its meeting on 21 February 2014.

**Council Conclusions on European Research Area Progress**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

- Its Conclusions of 29 May 2008 on the "Ljubljana Process - Towards realisation of ERA"<sup>1</sup> in which it sets out general orientations on ERA and of 2 December 2008 on the definition of a 2020 vision for ERA<sup>2</sup>;
- Its Conclusions of 26 November 2010 on the "Europe 2020 flagship initiative Innovation Union: Accelerating the transformation of Europe through innovation in a fast changing world"<sup>3</sup> confirming that a well-functioning and coherent ERA is an integral part of the Innovation Union to strengthen the knowledge base in Europe;
- Its Conclusions of 11 December 2012<sup>4</sup>, endorsing the Commission Communication on 'A reinforced European research area partnership for excellence and growth'<sup>5</sup>, including the setting-up by the Commission of a robust ERA Monitoring Mechanism, followed by a first Commission ERA Progress Report 2013<sup>6</sup>, acknowledging the state-of-play of ERA implementation at both national and European level;

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<sup>1</sup> Doc. 10231/08

<sup>2</sup> Official Journal C 25, 31.1.2009, p.1-4

<sup>3</sup> Doc. 17165/10

<sup>4</sup> Doc. 17649/12

<sup>5</sup> Doc. 12848/12

<sup>6</sup> Doc. 13812/13

- The Conclusions of the European Council of 3-4 February 2011<sup>7</sup> which confirmed that Europe needs a unified research area to attract talent and investment and called for the completion of the ERA by 2014, including by addressing any remaining gaps in order to create a genuine single market for knowledge, research and innovation, as confirmed by the European Council of 2 March 2012<sup>8</sup>, and recalled in its Conclusions of 29 June 2012<sup>9</sup> and of 18-19 October 2012<sup>10</sup>;
  - The Conclusions of the European Council of 24-25 October 2013<sup>11</sup> which note the need to accelerate structural reforms of national systems and to strengthen progress monitoring based on robust data provided by Member States in view of obtaining a full European Research Area by the end of 2014;
  - The need for close cooperation with Associated Countries in the development of ERA, and NOTING their contributions to the ERA Progress Report;
1. ACKNOWLEDGES that 2014 is an important year for the reinforced ERA partnership for excellence and growth between Member States, stakeholder organizations and the European Commission. A solid ERA foundation has been built and Horizon 2020 as a central element of ERA provides fresh momentum – it is now the time to step up efforts to promote the further development of ERA to reinforce excellence across the whole of Europe, thereby increasing Europe’s global competitiveness and capability to successfully tackle grand societal challenges.

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<sup>7</sup> Doc. EUCO 2/11  
<sup>8</sup> Doc. EUCO 4/3/12 REV 3  
<sup>9</sup> Doc. EUCO 76/12  
<sup>10</sup> Doc. EUCO 156/12  
<sup>11</sup> Doc. EUCO 169/13

2. WELCOMES the ERAC Opinion on the first ERA Progress Report 2013<sup>12</sup> and ERAC's key messages, in particular the emphasis on taking into account the diversity of national research systems between the different Member States and also within the different countries as an asset for Europe, which should be built upon for the future implementation of the ERA. UNDERLINES, in this context, ERAC's finding that the use of legislation at the European level to address obstacles to the ERA is not widely supported by the Member States and should occur only where a clear and significant need is agreed, i.e. only as a last resort.
3. ACKNOWLEDGES that the ERA Progress Report 2013 provides a good initial analysis of the state-of-play of the implementation of the ERA priorities in the Member States and at European level. The report shows that much has already been achieved towards the construction of ERA, and also gives a first indication of possible areas for future action.
4. REAFFIRMS that the further development of the ERA in the context of the Innovation Union is a necessary component of the Europe 2020 strategy to create growth and jobs.
5. EMPHASIZES the crucial role of the Member States in further strengthening the ERA and therefore ENCOURAGES them to take an even stronger ownership of building ERA through taking stock of their national systems and identifying actions, including in cooperation with stakeholder organisations, e.g. through national and, where applicable, regional research and innovation strategies and relevant smart specialisation strategies, to be implemented, where appropriate, as part of the National Reform Programmes in the context of the European Semester. In this context NOTES that ERA ministerial conferences would provide important political input.
6. UNDERLINES that reforms of research and innovation systems are at the heart of ERA and that the Member States should accelerate national reforms, where necessary, to boost the EU's potential in research, development and innovation.

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<sup>12</sup> Doc. 1201/14

7. CONSIDERS that fiscal consolidation at the expense of the R&D will endanger future growth and job creation and EMPHASISES the need to pay attention to the quality, efficiency and composition of research and innovation spending in order to make the most of its impact on the new phase of growth in the European Union and to derive maximum value from public money invested in research and innovation.
8. RECOGNISES that while the EU funding programmes foster transnational cooperation of research among the Member States, it is primarily for the Member States to define shared strategies and unlock national resources to achieve higher impact of research in a context of limited public research funding available.

In view of the way forward, the Council:

9. INVITES the Member States in close cooperation with the Commission, considering the ERAC opinion and working through ERAC, to develop by mid-2015 an ERA roadmap at European level -which should serve the purpose of facilitating and reinforcing the efforts undertaken by the Member States by providing: a shared understanding of the strategic objectives over the next few years and a set of tools and best practices to support the Member States in developing and implementing their national policies in ways which correspond with their respective specificities and priorities. Accordingly, CALLS ON the Member States to take fully into account the ERA implementation when developing national strategies. This may include the development of national ERA initiatives.

Based on the ERA progress report, the Council CONSIDERS that, inter alia, the specific issues listed below should be taken into account in developing the ERA roadmap:

- the use, where appropriate, of open calls for proposals evaluated based on international peer review;
- the progress made by ESFRI to fulfil its new mandate and its continuing efforts in order to prioritise the projects of the ESFRI roadmap;

- aligning, where possible, national strategies and research programmes with the strategic research agendas developed within the Joint Programming Initiatives to cope with major societal challenges and improving the interoperability between national programmes to facilitate transnational cooperation and sharing of information about activities in priority areas;
- promoting a wider uptake of the innovative doctoral training principles, including, where appropriate, through use of the European Structural and Investment Funds;
- using open, transparent and merit-based recruitment practices with regard to research positions;
- fostering mobility of researchers across different sectors, in particular between academia and industry;
- stepping up the efforts to systematically mainstream gender equality and the gender dimension in R&I policies and programmes;
- supporting open access to scientific publications as well as developing an effective approach for research data which takes into account all relevant interests;
- promoting and implementing e-Infrastructures as an enabler of digital Science in the ERA;
- fostering effective knowledge transfer in research and innovation between public and private sectors.

10. Given that the external dimension is an integral part of the ERA, ASKS the Commission to adequately address this important aspect in the ERA Progress Report 2014 and beyond, both at EU and Member State level, notably by moving towards the integration of an international cooperation dimension into the ERA Monitoring Mechanism.

11. CONSIDERS that the foundations of the ERA should be reinforced and broadened particularly through making full use of the opportunities offered by Structural and Investment Funds to strengthen Member States' research and innovation capacities, thereby fostering the inclusiveness of the ERA.
  12. EMPHASIZES the importance of monitoring ERA progress, taking into account innovation related reforms in the context of the Innovation Union, also in close connection with the European Semester and CALLS ON the Commission to further improve the ERA Monitoring Mechanism in close cooperation with the Member States and in consultation with research stakeholder organisations as well as to undertake the necessary measures to reduce administrative burdens for national administrations and stakeholders such as gradual alignment, where appropriate, with relevant existing processes of statistical nature and CONSIDERS that the principle of reporting on a two-year cycle after 2014 should be pursued.
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