

ERAC 1208/19

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 41st ERAC plenary meeting on 21-22 March 2019 in Bucharest (Romania)

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the summary conclusions of the 41st ERAC plenary meeting on 21-22 March 2019 in Bucharest (Romania), as adopted by written procedure.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

41st ERAC plenary meeting, 21-22 March 2019 in Bucharest, Romania

Co-Chairs: Wolfgang Burtscher / Christian Naczinsky

Secretariat: General Secretariat of the Council

Present¹: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (36)

Absent: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Luxembourg, Republic of North Macedonia, Ukraine (8)

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes as set out in document CM 1640/19.

The co-Chairs welcomed new ERAC delegates from Croatia, Finland and the Republic of Moldova.

2. Summary conclusions of the 40th meeting of ERAC on 6 December 2018

The summary conclusions of the 40th ERAC plenary meeting held on 6 December 2018 in Brussels were approved by written procedure on 7 March 2019, as set out in document ERAC 1202/19.

¹ The list of delegations present or absent at the meeting is based on the List of Participants that was circulated during the meeting for completion by delegates.

3. Information from the co-Chairs and Presidency

- The Member State co-Chair (MS co-Chair) provided information on the main issues discussed at the latest ERAC Steering Board meeting held on 29 January 2019, which included: the state of play of the draft Action Plan for the ERA review, a proposal to set up an ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on the future of the ERA, the state of play in the monitoring process for Priority 1 of the ERA National Action Plans; the organisation of upcoming strategic debates in ERAC and a possible contribution on the future of R&I to the informal summit to take place on 9 May 2019 in Sibiu, Romania; preparatory work on the draft criteria and the strategic coordinating process for Partnerships, including the future role of the High Level Group for Joint Programming (GPC); coordination of ERA-related groups and preparations for the 2018 ERAC Annual Report.
- The Romanian Presidency made a presentation on Research and Innovation (R&I) policy in Romania, as well as the progress made in taking forward the Presidency priorities in R&I (doc. WK 4202/2019).
- The incoming Finnish Presidency made a presentation on its Presidency priorities in R&I for the second semester of 2019 (doc. WK 4199/2019), which included details of preparations for the Joint Conference ERAC / Directors-General for Higher Education planned on 1 October in Helsinki, back-to-back with the ERAC plenary session of 2 October.

4. ERA Governance

4.1 The follow-up on the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 on the ERA and on the Review of the ERA advisory structure

Draft Action Plan on the ERA review

The coordinators of the draft Action Plan to implement the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 and the ERAC recommendations on the ERA review, Fulvio Esposito and Lisa Müller, made a presentation of the latest version of the draft Action Plan (doc. WK 3182/2019). This version is the result of two rounds of consultations which consolidates comments provided by ERAC delegations, all ERA-related groups, the Commission, the MS Co-Chair and the ERAC Secretariat.

All ERAC delegations that took the floor were supportive of the draft Action Plan.

Some delegations stressed the need to pay particular attention to the measures contained in the Horizon Europe programme as well as priorities in the field of education, which should be taking into account in the elaboration of upcoming lines of action for ERAC.

In relation to the work of the ERA-related groups, a number of participants requested to:

- streamline and improve the coordination of their activities, including through the identification of priorities, the setting of guidelines and the review of their mandates when necessary;
- explore ways to increase organisational resources; and
- enhance visibility in order to multiply the impact of their outputs, including through the use of websites and social media channels.

Several delegations also supported suggestions requesting for better integration of gender equality issues across R&I activities to be implemented in the Action Plan.

The Commission reiterated the importance to consider the Council Conclusions on the governance of the ERA (doc. 14989/18) as the main reference source for the implementation of the Action Plan. It also recommended to refrain from anticipating measures that could pre-empt future priorities to be considered by the next Commission. Moreover, it recalled the character of ERAC as an advisory body.

On more particular points, the Commission considered that:

- a proposed task to identify resources for improving the functioning of the ERA-related groups by the Horizon Europe Programme Committee may not pre-empt decision-making under the Horizon Europe comitology rules, and
- an ERAC opinion on interlinkages between Horizon Europe and the ERA priorities might not be necessary as it could be redundant with the work of programme committees.

The Commission also announced a possible upcoming meeting with the stakeholders' platform on, among other things, higher education.

The MS Co-Chair made the following clarifications:

- Paragraph 16 of the Council conclusions of 30 November 2018 called on ERAC to implement the ERAC recommendations through an Action Plan in 2019.
- A possible opinion on the relation of Horizon Europe and the ERA priorities would need a clear focus in order to avoid duplications. This should be reformulated in the draft Action Plan.
- The establishment of a helpdesk to help steering the implementation of the Action Plan would also be useful to keep momentum.
- Given that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue, contributions by all ERA-related groups to promote gender mainstreaming should be sought in a pragmatic way and respecting the ERA-related groups' autonomy. The ERAC Steering Board can always provide guidance when needed.
- Visibility of the ERA-related groups is also a cross-cutting issue and the next ERAC Steering Board should be invited to exchange ideas on how to enhance their visibility while avoiding that every group elaborates different patterns.

At the end of the debate, ERAC agreed that changes to the draft Action Plan should be incorporated in the light of the comments made during the ERAC session.

A final version of the draft Action Plan will be forwarded to the ERAC members for adoption by written procedure. After the adoption of the Action Plan, ERAC will establish a helpdesk to facilitate its implementation.

– *Ad-hoc Working Group on the Future of the ERA*

The MS Co-Chair made an introduction related to paragraphs 22 to 26 of the Council Conclusions on the governance of the ERA.

A room document was distributed to ERAC delegations with a draft mandate for establishing a new ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on the Future of the ERA.

Several delegations and the Commission made preliminary comments on the draft mandate highlighting the need to avoid duplication of tasks and requesting a close coordination with upcoming EU presidencies in order to shape the future ERA priorities.

The Commission Co-Chair explained that the design of future priorities is a common endeavour and that a fresh vision was required in order to consolidate a powerful and performant ERA with an attractive external dimension. In this perspective, the new Ad-hoc Working Group should start its work from a clean slate for a revamped discussion on the ERA.

At the end of the debate, ERAC decided to set up an ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on the Future of the ERA.

It instructed the ERAC Secretariat to circulate a revised draft mandate in order to collect comments by ERAC delegations.

4.2 Highlights from the ERA-related groups

ERAC took note of written updates by the ERA-related groups (doc. WK 3656/2019 REV1) and held an exchange of view on the following items:

1) Recommendations on Open Science and Innovation

The acting Chair of the Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation (SWG OSI), Marc Vanholsbeeck, made a presentation of the main messages contained in the document “[Recommendations on Open Science and Innovation](#)” approved in December 2018.

These recommendations are complementary to the SWG OSI [Opinion on Open Innovation](#). This opinion also contains a set of recommendations which deepen the reflexions of the December 2018 document.

Some delegations and the Commission welcomed the recommendations. The Commission explained that the definition of open innovation used by the SWG OSI has a broader scope than the one currently being used by the Commission services.

ERAC endorsed the Recommendations on Open Science and Innovation.

2) Future of the High-level Group on Joint Programming (GPC)

The Chair of the GPC, Emmanuel Pasco-Viel, presented a report on the future of the GPC and its updated work programme 2019-2020 (doc. WK 3556/2019).

ERAC endorsed the report by the GPC and instructed the ERAC Secretariat to forward its updated work programme to the ERAC Steering Board.

5. ERA and Innovation Policy

5.1 ERA Progress Report 2018 and monitoring ERA National Action Plans

– *ERA Progress Report 2018*

The Commission (Arie Van der Zwan) made a presentation on the main findings and policy messages of the 2018 ERA Progress Report (doc. 6588/19).

He notably highlighted the “alerts” per ERA priority contained in the report.

In reply to questions and comments made by ERAC delegations, the Commission provided the following clarifications:

- For the elaboration of the 2018 report, which is the 4th edition, the Commission is still bound by the 2015 Council Conclusions. However, the next ERA progress report should be a “transition” report. It should also have a more qualitative content.
- The Commission also took on board contributions by the ERA-related groups to this end.
- Data from some Associated Countries are also available within Eurostat and in that case they are taken into account to the extent that there are enough available indicators.

For the MS Co-Chair, the next edition of the report would only have real added value under the condition that its assessment of the performance under the current set of ERA priorities feeds into the reflections on the future ERA priorities, has a more qualitative nature and is released in early 2020.

– ***Monitoring ERA National Action Plans***

ERAC delegations took note of the state of play on the monitoring process for ERA Priority 1 of the National Action Plans (NAPs), following a presentation made by the rapporteur Cecilia Cabello.

Delegations were also requested to submit their contributions for monitoring Priority 1 by 8 April 2019.

All ERA-related groups were invited to briefly report on the state of play in monitoring their respective ERA priorities at the next meeting of the ERAC Steering Board on 7 May 2019, prior to the final presentation at the ERAC plenary on 6 June 2019.

For the Commission Co-Chair, the NAPs are key contributors to the genuine completion of the ERA. He stressed that it has to be considered, for the future monitoring process, how to build the bridge until the publication of the new ERA Commission communication in 2020.

The MS Co-Chair drew attention to paragraph 25 of the Conclusions of 30 November 2018 where the Council suggests that the Commission undertakes an evaluation of the 2015-2020 ERA roadmap as a policy-making tool.

5.2 Strengthening the strategic capacity of ERAC

The Commission (Román Arjona) made a presentation on the “Role of Research and Innovation for the Future of Europe” (doc. WK 3657/2019) with the purpose to collect preliminary comments in view of a possible input to the informal summit of Heads of State or Government on 9 May in Sibiu, Romania.

Opening the debate, the Commission Co-Chair stressed the importance to ensure coherence between competitiveness, inclusiveness and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aspects if a political message was to be addressed to the Sibiu summit.

The MS Co-Chair was also of the view that the SDGs could be the right angle to present a political message on R&I in the run-up to the Sibiu summit.

Some delegations acknowledged that a background on how R&I can contribute to the accomplishment of the SDGs was a good starting point. They pointed out however to the risk that it might not be compelling enough for the purpose to convey a strong political message, which would require a clear focus.

Other delegations referred to the question of how to engage and communicate with citizens on the potential of R&I to solve societal challenges.

The need to put forward innovation policy as a driver to promote collaboration and integration with other EU policies was also mentioned.

The Commission Co-Chair concluded that the Commission would prepare a contribution to the Sibiu summit taking into account the comments made by delegations.

ERAC confirmed that the topic of the role of R&I for the future of Europe will be at the core of the next strategic debate to be held at the June ERAC plenary at DG level.

5.3 European R&I Partnerships: status report

ERAC exchanged views on the structured consultation process for future European Partnerships (doc. WK 3344/2019) and on the draft mandate for the transitional Forum for R&I Partnerships 2019-2020 (doc. WK 3343/2019) based on a presentation by the Commission (Joerg Niehoff) on the state of play of preparations, and pending political agreement on related parts of the Horizon Europe programme.

Delegations were generally satisfied with the course of the process and complimented the Commission for the work done.

The Commission acknowledged that several questions remain still open, such as the maximum number of representatives in the transitional Forum, and requested written comments from ERAC delegations.

6. Standing Information Point

– ERAC Workshop on 5 June 2019

ERAC took note of information by the Romanian Presidency (Viorel Vulturescu) on preparations for the ERAC Workshop that will take place on 5 June 2019 in Brussels.

The Workshop will have a format of parallel sessions for discussion on relevant topics.

– Outcome of the Closing Event of the RISE Tour d'Europe

ERAC took note of information on the Outcome of the Closing Event of the RISE Tour d'Europe (doc. WK 3652/2019).

7. Any Other Business

7.1 42nd ERAC meeting (6 June 2019, Brussels)

The Steering Board will draw up the provisional annotated agenda of the next meeting on the basis of the updated Work Programme 2018-2019.
