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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)
Subject:	Informal videoconference of ERAC (16/12) - Item 3.1 - Background note "Co-designing a new ERA governance framework"

Dear ERAC Delegations,

Please find enclosed the background note "Co-designing a new ERA governance framework" jointly drafted by the Commission and the Presidency-Trio (DE-PT-SI) with a view to discussion at the next informal videoconference of ERAC to take place on 16 December 2020 (agenda item 3.1).

Kind regards,

ERAC Secretariat

Co-designing a new ERA governance framework

Context

In 2019, the ERAC Opinion on the future of the European Research Area (ERA) focused on strategic policy objectives and a broader and bolder policy vision, while emphasizing that relevant governance aspects should be addressed at a later stage. It also emphasized that the challenges of ERA can only be overcome by a stronger emphasis on joint, coordinated ERA actions at national, including regional, and European levels and a reinforced partnership between the Commission and Member States in the implementation of the new ERA. In addition, it stressed that the implementation of the new ERA paradigm should be accompanied from the start by a monitoring mechanism to assess progress, gaps, impacts and successes.

Following the publication of the ERAC's Opinion, the Commission's communication, adopted on 30 September 2020, "A New ERA for Research and Innovation", proposed new priorities for the European Research Area and outlined an implementation Roadmap. It also put forward proposals for new possible elements of a future ERA Governance model: a 'Pact for Research and Innovation', an 'ERA Forum for Transition' and an 'ERA Scoreboard'.

On 1 December 2020, the Council adopted conclusions on "The New European Research Area" in which the Member States not only decided upon 4 ERA Pilot Actions and highlighted distinctive areas in which future ERA Actions should be developed. It also provided additional elements to the reflection on the future ERA priorities and governance. The latter is to be developed jointly by the Commission and the Member States in 2021. This process is supposed to take into consideration the governance-related elements in the ERA communication, namely the 'Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe' and the 'ERA Forum for Transition'. The Council conclusions also outlined the principles that should drive the design of the new ERA Governance model.

Proposed pathway towards the new governance model

a) Basis

In order to put in place the new governance for the ERA a thorough reflection and discussion between the European Commission and the Member States is necessary. The success of the new ERA will require the mobilisation, ownership and commitment of the Member States, the Commission and the stakeholders.

A new ERA governance framework should encompass all phases of the policy cycle, from policy design/priority setting to implementation and monitoring/evaluation while ensuring a robust element of strategic advice throughout all elements. The inherent goal is to transform the priorities into concrete action both on the EU and national levels (namely the implementation of the above mentioned 4 ERA Pilot Actions and the development and implementation of additional ERA Actions such as those indicated in the ERA Roadmap) while respecting the 6 principles put forward by the Council.

The communication of the Commission includes several proposals for new governance elements, notably the 'Pact for Research and Innovation', the 'ERA Forum for Transition' and the 'ERA Scoreboard'. While the concrete mandate and positioning of these new governance elements within an overall governance framework require further discussion and reflection, it seems that in particular

the ERA Forum for Transition constitutes a new governance element that will at least entail the implementation phase of the policy cycle. As all governance elements reflecting the full policy cycle require a future-proof clarification that meets the requirements of the “New ERA”, a full analysis of the different elements is needed, in particular around the new element of the ERA Forum for Transition, its positioning and its interlinkages with the other elements of the policy cycle.

b) Expert Group

In this context, it is proposed to establish an expert group of the Commission on the ‘ERA Forum for Transition’.

This group will serve as a platform for the above mentioned reflections and structured discussions. This group will have a clear and time-bound mandate. The structure and procedures of this group will ensure that the new governance for ERA is being developed and set up in the spirit of true partnership between the Commission and Member States, as indicated in the ERA communication and requested by the Council conclusions.

In addition, to feed into the process of designing a new effective governance in order to ensure a smooth transition from the current one and to kick-start the work on the new ERA priorities, it will already coordinate work in a limited number of areas, such as those identified as “ERA Pilot actions” by the Council in its conclusions. The work of this group will at the same time contribute to the preparation of the ERA Pact for R&I that may also constitute a new approach for the policy design/priority setting phase. ERAC may also use the work of the group to elaborate its advice on the question whether and to which extent legislative action and Council recommendations might be needed to deliver on the “New ERA”.

Upon completion of its work, the group will submit a report in view of the adoption and implementation of the new ERA governance framework by the appropriate bodies, including the new ‘ERA Forum for Transition’ in its permanent forum.

Main features of the group

It is proposed that the group is set-up by the Commission as an expert group, with the following characteristics:

- **Objective:** the mandate of the group should entail deliverables along the following four dimensions representing the main phases of the policy cycle:
 - POLICY DESIGN: Guidance concerning a potential future Commission proposal for the ‘Pact on Research and Innovation’ and elaboration of an ERA policy agenda that builds also upon the ERA Roadmap proposed in the ERA communication and meets the ambitions of the “New ERA” in particular with respect to the need to ensure a higher degree of political ownership;
 - POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: Steering of the 4 ‘ERA Pilot Actions’ as test cases for testing the governance elements on implementation;
 - POLICY MONITORING: Guidance concerning the elaboration of an ‘ERA Scoreboard’, encompassing qualitative and quantitative elements, including on the proposed new R&I investment targets;
 - POLICY ADVICE: Guidance on the set-up and implementation of the new ERA governance framework that includes a revised policy advice approach in line with the requirements of the emerging new ERA policy agenda and more effective

implementation of 'ERA Actions', taking account of the EC proposals in the ERA communication and the 6 principles agreed in the Council conclusions on the ERA. Here, a close coordination with ERAC and the ERA related groups as well as ESFRI and the Strategic Coordinating Process for partnerships (SCP) in particular with respect to their work programmes in 2021 shall be ensured.

- **Membership:** the members of the group should be representatives of the Member States as well as of the European Commission. The group can also hear experts or invite stakeholders and other entities (such as the Committee of the Regions and ERA related groups) to exchange views.
- **Agility:** the 4 dimensions will require very different expertise and competences, so it will be necessary to organise it in work streams (creating appropriate sub-groups), as well as to take into account work being carried out in other fora (such as the upcoming study on the "ERA Policy Framework/ERA monitoring system").
- **Co-design:** as called for in the Council conclusions, the work will be carried out through a co-design approach and in the spirit of trust and partnership; whereas the expert group will be chaired by the Commission, subgroups will be created in order to deal with the separate work streams (such as monitoring, 'ERA Pilot Actions', the new ERA governance framework and the 'Pact for Research and Innovation'), which will be co-chaired by representatives of Member States; in order to ensure overall consistency between the different work streams of the group, the Member States constituting the current and next trio of Council presidencies (DE-PT-SI and FR-CZ-SE) and the Commission shall form a steering committee that prepares the meetings or eventually assures the chairing of the groups. The Commission –supported by the members of the Steering Group– will regularly inform and discuss with ERAC the progress of the group.

Next steps

The expert group should be operational from January 2021 for a period of approximately 12 months.

The group should deliver advice on ERA governance (including the features of the permanent 'ERA Forum for Transition') and on the 'Pact on Research and Innovation' during the first semester of 2021. It should deliver advice on the new 'ERA Scoreboard' during the second semester of 2021.

Taking account of the advice of the expert group, the 'Pact for Research and Innovation' is to be submitted by the Commission before summer 2021, for discussion and approval in the second half of the year.

Question to ERAC

- Do you agree with the proposed approach for preparing the ground for a new ERA governance framework?