



Council of the European Union  
General Secretariat

**Brussels, 23 November 2018**

**WK 14358/2018 INIT**

**LIMITE**

**RECH**

**WORKING PAPER**

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**MEETING DOCUMENT**

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From:	ERAC Secretariat
To:	ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)
Subject:	ERAC Plenary in Brussels on 6 December 2018 - Item 5.1 - Discussion note of the ERAC Member States' co-Chair: How shall ERAC institutionalise Strategic Policy debates on a regular basis?

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Delegations will find attached the "discussion note of the ERAC Member States' co-Chair: How shall ERAC institutionalise Strategic Policy debates on a regular basis?" in view of item 5.1 of the agenda of the ERAC plenary in Brussels on 6 December.

## ERAC Plenary Meeting on 6 December 2018

### Agenda item 5.1 Monitoring ERA National Action Plans and strengthening the strategic capacity of ERAC

#### Discussion note of the ERAC Member States' co-Chair: How shall ERAC institutionalise Strategic Policy debates on a regular basis?

#### Context

Recommendation 25 of the "Review of the ERA Advisory Structure" states that ERAC should *"increase the focus on substantial discussions around ERA Priority 1. The ERAC Steering Board should make sure to draft balanced plenary agendas in terms of strategic discussions and information items. In this sense, it should also make the interactions with the other ERA-related groups more strategic."*

With the (Draft) Council Conclusions on the "Governance of the European Research Area", to be adopted at the Competitiveness Council on 30 November 2018, the Council *"welcomes the new approach of ERAC to hold strategic policy debates on a regular basis to further develop the policy-mix for research and innovation for ERA; recognises the important role these strategic debates can play in providing a forum for Member States to better understand how effective the policies and tools at their disposal are at national and European level, to implement the ERA priorities and deliver on Europe's wider economic and social objectives; invites the Commission to collect evidence on the design and impact of R&D policies, including by continuing its cooperation with the OECD, that could inform national policy making."*

At its meeting on 17/18 September 2018 in Salzburg, ERAC conducted a first strategic debate on performance based funding of public research and on R&D tax incentives. The background note for this debate was provided by the European Commission, based on work in the context of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility and other reports and studies, and including both qualitative and quantitative policy oriented material.

Due to the evolving nature of science and innovation, policy-makers tend to be more interested in policy tools for which there is usually poorer evidence, where it is often hard to make international comparisons and for which it is not common to have readily available measures and indicators to capture impacts. Reinforcing the hands-on exchange of policy practice at ERAC by means of strategic debates can help to overcome these obstacles.

## Paving the way forward

In recent weeks, several delegations have already suggested topics that could serve as inspiration for strategic debates in 2019/2020. Annex 1 gives an overview of the proposed topics.

At its latest meeting, the ERAC Steering Board agreed to limit strategic debates of ERAC to one per semester, and to hold the next strategic debate at the ERAC meeting on 6 June 2019. This approach ensures that the broad set of tasks of ERAC can still be dealt with during the ERAC plenary meetings while also allowing for strategic debates on a regular basis.

The Belgian delegation proposed the following approach for organising the strategic debates: *"As we said before, we appreciate that questions about the subject to be debated are sent in advance to delegations. In our case, that way of working allows us to prepare our interventions with different Belgian players. The interventions of the different delegations, which are usually written in advance, could be sent prior to the meeting to the co-chairs who would make a synthesis of the received opinions highlighting the controversial issues. That synthesis would be briefly presented at the meeting and the meeting discussion would focus on the points where diversity of answers is higher. This could, in our opinion, stimulate a real strategic debate (and also avoid interventions that highlight the same thing several times)."*

The Swedish delegation contributed to the discussion note in the following way: *"We believe that it is not difficult to find interesting topics, on the contrary the challenge is to make priorities. However, an even bigger challenge is to create a real debate! There is always a risk that the 'debate' ends up with delegations reading ready statements (as in Council) stating e.g. only what we do at national level. The problem is how to get to the next stage, i.e. from reading the statements to a debate and some useful conclusions. Conclusions should/need not be agreed conclusion but rather outcome of the debate which could be useful for delegations, e.g. at national level."*

*Ideally, with a good planning delegations could be asked to send in, say, ½- 1 page in advance (with main points) which could serve as a planning for the debate. Maybe 3-4 questions could be selected. These questions could be discussed preferably in break-out sessions which we have done before in order to engage all delegations. In SFIC and also in Eureka we have done World café type of meetings with very good concrete outcome. Another challenge is of course to find suitable venues for such meetings. Hopefully the Commission could 'contribute'!"*

The input from the European Commission is crucial for preparing strategic debates, notably by drawing on input directly stemming from the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility, and in particular from Mutual Learning Exercises, but also through its other analytical work strands. Therefore, topics of potential interest for strategic debates could become PSF-related issues in the first place. When ERAC decides on a new cycle of PSF activities, it should do this by taking into account the potential benefit of these activities for strategic debates at a later stage, notably as PSF activities need a minimum of 6-8 months in order to deliver solid outputs.

A complementary way forward could be to involve experts in the strategic debates themselves. ERAC could invite specialists on selected topics to contribute both in writing and in the discussions to stimulate the debate through the distinct perspective of an expert in the field. These experts could come from the PSF panels or beyond. In a similar way, ERAC could collaborate with think tanks or other platforms of experts, such as RISE.

The (Draft) Council Conclusions on the "Governance of the European Research Area" call for *"an increased coordination between the Council Presidency priorities and the agendas of the ERA-related groups, in particular by involvement of future Council Presidencies in the ERAC Steering Board starting 18 months prior to their term."* In early 2019, the ERAC co-Chairs shall contact the future Croatian and German ERAC

delegations in view of their Presidencies in 2020 to discuss if and how strategic debates in 2019 could serve the purpose of their agendas.

Strategic debates of ERAC could be a means in themselves to help ERAC delegations to draw their own conclusions from the debates, share experiences and learn from success stories and failures of other countries. A potential outcome of the debate could be a policy-brief summarising the main issues, arguments and recommendations from the strategic debate. Ideally the strategic debates should lead to actionable policy goals, which ERAC could then commit to discuss and somehow monitor over a given period of time.

The Commission could be another beneficiary of such debates, benefitting from them as a testbed for new policy ideas, to deepen the understanding of national policy challenges, and to translate the main findings of strategic debates into new and concrete initiatives at European level.

Last but not least, ERAC and the other ERA-related groups should use the strategic debates for their mutual benefit. On the one hand, the other ERA-related groups should be encouraged to propose topics where a strategic debate of ERAC promises to help implementing the agendas of these groups; on the other hand, strategic debates at ERAC could sometimes result in requests from ERAC to the other ERA-related groups to look deeper into certain issues.

Annex 2 shows a graph on the possible way forward on strategic debates.

## **Questions to delegations**

The following questions should be addressed at the next ERAC plenary meeting on 6 December 2018:

- (1) Which topics in Annex 1 attract most attention from delegations with a view to strategic debates, taking into account the focus on ERA Priority 1 (Effective national research systems)?
- (2) How should ERAC organise strategic debates, also bearing in mind that a good balance is kept between these debates and other items on the agenda of ERAC?
- (3) What is the way forward to make interactions with the other ERA-related groups more strategic? In more general terms, what can be done to ensure adequate impact of strategic debates?

**Annex 1:** Proposed topics for strategic debates of ERAC, also based on the work of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility:

- (1) A very timely topic for strategic ERAC discussions would be the **goal of a share of 3 % of GDP for R&D** that Europe has set itself. How to get there, how do national policies support achieving this goal, what is there to learn from peers etc.? We (in FI) have set ourselves a 4 % of GDP goal for R&D by 2030, with the help of our Research and Innovation Council (headed by the Prime Minister). This ambitious goal is supported by all parliamentary groups, the Federation of Industries, Universities – i.e. very widely. The first decisions in the budgetary framework have already been made, but we still have a long way to go – as we are not counting on a GDP decline. *(proposed by Finland)*
- (2) Regarding future strategic debates, I would like to suggest the **issue of research integrity**. The topic was on the table in 2015 under the LU presidency. We now have a MLE that has been setup and dedicated to it, but it is a topic which is not addressed by any ERA-related group and is directly linked to the issue of well-performing national systems. This debate could be an opportunity to take stock of what was agreed in the Council Conclusions in 2015, and also promote the work performed by the MLE (if the next strategic debate is planned in June 2019, the MLE on research integrity will be almost finished). *(proposed by France)*
- (3) **Innovation diffusion and knowledge transfer** *(proposed by European Commission)*
- (4) **Organisation of the public research system**, with a focus on issues such as fragmentation, governance and internationalisation *(proposed by European Commission, and a topic that is recurrently addressed through many PSF activities)*
- (5) Policies to support the creation and development of **start-up ecosystems** *(proposed by European Commission, given PSF activities in SK or RO)*
- (6) Development of a common EU approach to improve the **framework conditions that underpin international cooperation** between the EU and its Member States and third countries. This could provide the inspiration needed for a political initiative with potentially enhanced European added value. Such a common EU approach would result in the EU speaking more strongly with one voice and achieving more leverage in international dialogues. Starting at existing national framework conditions, ERAC could deliberate on how to include and jointly address a series of issues stemming from these national conditions such as: reciprocal access to R&I national funding programmes, access to research data and infrastructures of third countries, sharing and enforcement of intellectual property rights, cooperation in pre-normative research and access to standardisation committees in third countries, gender, and ethics codes including for artificial intelligence. Note that, as a result of the recent PSF expression of interest addressed to ERAC, the Committee will implement a Mutual Learning Exercise, MLE, on “National strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I”, which would be complementary to the debate suggested above. This MLE will examine current / planned policies and best practices at Member State level and will share experience among policy-makers and national authorities on the formulation and implementation of strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I. A set of recommendations would be drafted at the end of the exercise, taking up the main findings of the MLE and providing insights for Member States which want to launch their own national frameworks, and could also stimulate a dedicated Opinion of the Strategic Forum for International Cooperation. *(proposed by European Commission)*
- (7) In the medium term (i.e. in the course of 2020), we could also envisage a discussion on **balances in public funding** (direct versus indirect, targeted versus untargeted etc.), but we are not ready for that yet. *(proposed by European Commission)*

Annex 2: Graph on the possible way forward on strategic debates

