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NOTE

From: Presidency

To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: *Preparation of the Competitiveness Council on 27-28 May 2021*
Renewing the European Research Area - how to prepare to the roll out of
an ambitious ERA fit for the next decade?
- *Policy debate*

Delegations will find attached a Presidency note on "*Renewing the European Research Area - how to prepare the roll out of an ambitious ERA fit for the next decade?*" with a view to the policy debate at the Competitiveness Council on 28 May 2021.

Renewing the European Research Area - how to prepare the roll out of an ambitious ERA fit for the next decade?

Introduction and background information

Setting the scene

1. In the year 2000 the Council set the goal to realize the European Research Area (ERA) and in 2008, it defined a **vision for 2020**¹. This vision comprised the dimension of the internal market for research, including cross-border mobility of researchers and the opening of the labour market for European researchers, while providing them with better career structures which would be family friendly. On the dimension of knowledge circulation and exploitation, the vision promoted an optimal use of intellectual property combined with open access to knowledge and innovation. Regarding the structure of the research systems, it envisaged to foster further scientific excellence and the provision of world-class research facilities.
2. **Part of this vision has been successfully fulfilled** with increasing interlinkages and collaborative links between researchers and research communities across Europe, promoted through the EU Framework Programmes (FP) for Research and Innovation (R&I) and other transnational collaborative actions such as the Research Infrastructures and the Joint Programming Initiatives. The networks established are enduring, although with an uneven distribution across Europe, and have led to an increased level of “systemness” of the national research systems at European level, as it has been observed in scientific literature, and made evident with the Brexit when the impact of the disentanglement of the UK system from the European System was measured.

¹ Council of the European Union 7652/1/08/REV1

3. The **national and regional policies**, which do matter, are interlinked and interdependent into a **European supra-national layer**, as a kind of “system of systems” and an integral part of the European shared policies for R&I.
4. **Shared European values and principles** already exist and create our common ethos, resulting from the intense collaboration and competition among our scientific and technological communities. That comprises quite well harmonised and aligned set of norms and procedures at multiples levels, from the programming to the performance and evaluation of research. Distant are the times of the first Framework Programmes in the 1980s where culture, languages and other national idiosyncrasies really mattered and were hindering collaboration, even in the daily work routines of working together. We have already gone a long way towards the Europeanization of research.

Time for a new vision?

5. More than a decade had passed since the vision for 2020 was defined for the European R&I policies and the ambition set by the European Council to achieve the ERA by 2014², when the Trio-Presidencies of DE-PT-SI decided to take a step forward and include **the Renewing of the ERA** as their **overarching objective in research and innovation**.
6. From that moment, intense work has taken place between the Council, the Member States and the Commission. To name a few: the seminal work of the ERAC Opinion on *the future of ERA*³, the European Commission communication of September 2020 on a “*New ERA for Research and Innovation*”⁴ followed by the Council Conclusions on “*the New European Research Area*”⁵ and the current work of the expert group “*ERA Forum for Transition*”, which has been tasked to deliver an opinion on the content of a future PACT for R&I, including principles and values and possible targets to be achieved. Within this Forum, preliminary steps are being taken to co-develop, at programming level, an agenda of thematic and structural ERA priorities and actions.

2 EUCO 2/11
3 ERAC 1201/20
4 11400/20+ADD1
5 13567/20

7. **The goals** for the New ERA, as set out in the December 2020 Council conclusions, were defined as researchers-centred, value and excellence-based and driven by impact. Shared responsibilities between the Member States and the Commission were set as an important dimension, including a greater involvement of citizens and stakeholders, likewise for the diversity of the ecosystems and directionality towards the contribution of research to the global societal challenges and other public policies.
8. Nowadays, in the aftermath of the pandemic crises and when the Future of Europe is starting to be discussed, the **identification of how science and technology can contribute for the Future of Europe** is more relevant than ever and the need for a revised **vision for the ERA is fundamental**. The lessons learned during the crisis and its impact in R&I national and European ecosystems have been of extreme importance at all levels and made evident to all the overriding importance of the knowledge base to overcome crises and the fundamental relevance of open collaboration and results and data sharing across Europe and beyond.
9. To face the challenges, while at the same time maintain and expand the solid knowledge base at European level, encompassing the knowledge cycle from fundamental research until the exploitation in the market, we need to set a vision and clear policy orientation for the future of ERA for the next decade. It seems relevant and timely that Ministers of Research consider this, including the overarching objectives and the rationales for prioritisation in programming and funding.

How to prepare the roll-out for an ambitious ERA fit for the next decade

10. Although there is consensus on the Renew of ERA, on the need to attract and retain the best talent for research and on the need to further promote research institutions and intensify funding, the completion of the internal market for Research is still a pending goal to be fulfilled despite the major steps already taken. These steps involved mechanisms and means (soft law) that remain largely valid but need to be expanded and strengthened, including to promote equal opportunities for all, notably in gender, to continuously develop, and diffuse open science principles and the necessary infrastructures to support them, or to develop the network of European infrastructures (ESFRI) that is coordinating the European strategy for infrastructures included via roadmaps.

11. Yet a fully-fledge internal market for researchers still needs to be developed and completed, including its framework conditions. One fundamental element being the **research careers** and **research assessment**. A step forward in this direction has been taken with the expected approval of the Council Conclusions on the "Deepening the ERA: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality", as for the first time, we adopt a holistic researchers-centred systemic approach, combining the different policies and instruments that contribute directly to it, while respecting the multi-level competences and autonomy of research performing organisations and higher education institutions. As stated in the Council Conclusions to be approved, the development of a European framework to research careers is key as well as transforming brain circulation into a reality, as the drivers for the uneven flows of researchers are identified and addressed, and an observation and monitoring system for research careers and brain circulation is supported.

12. This new approach recognises that researchers are highly qualified and mobile professionals that should be provided with opportunities and framework conditions for adequate, sustainable, and interoperable research careers. Although the Council Conclusions provide a framework and policy orientation that largely contributes towards the single market aim, a number of tools and methodologies still need to be developed, in order to complete the conceptual and methodological framework to achieve a fully functional market covering the EU, the Member States and regions.

13. On the **production of knowledge**, the Union approach has its foundations on collaborative research, consubstantiated in European distributed networks of excellence in science and technology, allowing at the same time critical mass creation and reducing duplication of efforts. In the knowledge production, fundamental research is a basic foundation and should be kept and strengthened across Europe, as much as possible in interaction and articulation with entrepreneurial initiatives. In addition, collaborative networks still need to acquire a stronger identity in Europe and a better visibility globally. We need to ensure that our inclusive approach to building excellence offers the highest level of recognition to European researchers and innovators, so that no European region is left behind. This might be achieved through a range of supportive measures keeping the necessary flexibility and academic freedom. Such networks of researchers and institutions should be the first beneficiaries of an efficient and inclusive fully functioning single market for research, as their resources and talent pool work in a seamless fashion.
14. On the translation of the vision, goals and objectives into the **implementing/ programming processes**, it is important to understand the possible scenarios regarding the modes of collaboration and the way forward which have been applied in different phases of the European process. One way is to reinforce our **partnership** in strategic or structural areas whereby Member States would further coordinate their programmes and priorities with EU-level initiatives (European partnerships and missions, ESFRI roadmaps) applying the open method of coordination. Another, complementary way would be to **advance our integration** beyond the current common tools supported by the Framework Programme (ERC and EIC) and extend this integrated approach to other structures or platforms that the Union could put in place to allow the European actors to access common opportunities and connect and join up their efforts seamlessly, moving towards a more integrated and inclusive single market of research.

Questions

1. How do Ministers view the contribution of the Research and Innovation Policies to the future of Europe and which would be their vision for 2030, including the Renewing of the European Research Area?
 2. Should the achievement by 2030 of the single market for researchers and knowledge - with the adequate framework conditions and norms - be one of the objectives of the new vision, covering researchers, research organisations, the funders and the regulatory mechanism and bodies?
 3. Considering that there are multiple options to achieve that vision, how do the ministers envisage the best modalities, processes and mechanisms to prepare the roll-out of ERA?
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