

## **Informal meeting of the members of ERAC**

**30 September and 1 October 2021 (in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and by videoconference)**

### **Main results**<sup>1</sup>

#### **1. Welcome and adoption of the provisional agenda**

The COM co-Chair Jean-Eric Paquet congratulated, on behalf of the Committee, the new MS co-Chair, Barbara Weitgruber (AT), on her appointment as new ERAC co-Chair that took place on 21 September 2021.

The new MS co-Chair committed to closely work with the Member States, the Commission, Associated Countries and all other relevant players in order to reinforce the role and the impact of ERAC with a view to contributing to the objective of making the European Research Area a tangible reality.

Both co-Chairs welcomed the new members in ERAC and thanked the Slovenian Presidency for hosting the hybrid informal ERAC meeting in Ljubljana.

#### **2. Information from the co-Chairs and from the Presidency**

- The COM co-Chair debriefed on the latest ERAC Steering Board meeting of 2 July.
- The Slovenian Presidency made a presentation on the Research and Innovation System in Slovenia (WK 11665/2021), and updated ERAC on the progress made in the Presidency priorities, including the draft Council Conclusions on the future governance of the ERA and the draft Pact for R&I in Europe that will be submitted to the Competitiveness Council on 26 November 2021 for approval. Among the upcoming Presidency flagship events, there will be the Conference on the Future of ERA scheduled on 26 and 27 October in Ljubljana.
- Pending official confirmation, the incoming French Presidency anticipated the following orientations for R&I under the overarching motto "recovery, power, belonging": (1) implementation of the "knowledge square" combining higher education, research, innovation and services to society, with a particular focus on the European strategy for universities, citizen involvement in missions and a European initiative on innovation ecosystems; (2) preparation of the next steps for the roll out of the European universities, with a particular focus on the research component of the alliances, and to pave the way towards European degrees and possible dedicated statutes, striving to make it possible to jointly recruit researchers and teachers or to set up joint laboratories, and (3) follow-up on the new international strategy for cooperation in higher education and R&I with a view to launching a new multilateral dialogue for cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> This unofficial synopsis has been produced for information purposes. It is intended to present the main practical operational points of the ERAC informal meeting for follow-up. Under no circumstances can it be considered as being official summary conclusions.

- The Czech Presidency will include, among its priorities in R&I in the second semester of 2022, Research infrastructures (RIs) and synergies between RIs and investment sources, with possible proposal of Council conclusions, and the organisation of a number of international flagship conferences dealing with these subjects (e.g. ICRI, ESFRI).
- The Swedish Presidency provided preliminary indications on priority topics in R&I for the first half of 2023, which might include synergies between national and EU investments for RIs, as well as the promotion of international collaboration on RIs, gender equality and academic freedom.

### **3. ERA and Innovation Policy**

#### **3.1. Strategic debate: Reform of the research assessment system**

ERAC held a strategic debate on possible ways to improve the research assessment system.

Following a presentation by the Commission (WK 11781/2021), the exchange of views took place on the basis of a Commission background note with the questions on:

- the measures that national and regional authorities could take to support and incentivise a reform of research assessment by research funding and research performing organisations;
- how to encourage national/regional funding agencies to join a future Memorandum of Understanding committing to reform the current research assessment system, and
- possible future actions that the Commission could take to further support a reform of the assessment system.

The Commission background note also includes a number of Draft principles and actions to reform research assessment.

ERAC delegations welcomed the timely debate to reform the research assessment system and the need to modernise it, and broadly agreed with the Commission analysis and the general lines presented to take the work forward while stressing the European added value of the initiative.

In their interventions, delegations also outlined a number of key elements towards the reform of the current system, including the following ones:

- identification of the scope and the aspects that should be part of the reform to improve the system, and of the possible available supporting tools
- consider open science practises as a default principle, while taking into account other criteria such as social and gender aspects and the international dimension
- duly take into account and closely work with the relevant researchers' associations and funding entities
- ensure an adequate and transparent use of data and promote interoperability
- possible launch of a pilot action in the area.

Delegations expressed their interest to be involved in the process of the Commission to prepare a draft Memorandum of Understanding that could be signed by individual RFOs, RPOs and national assessment agencies, as well as by their associations, willing to reform the current research assessment system due to the national authorities responsibilities for the framework conditions.

Some delegations also explained the measures taken at national level to modernise the system.

Finally, the upcoming French Presidency announced the intention to take the work forward under its Presidency term, including in the context of the organisation of a Presidency event on Open Science planned in Paris on 4-5 February 2022.

### **3.2 Update on the state of play of the Recovery and Resilience plans and the analysis of the inclusion of R&I and its impact on the R&I policies in general**

The Commission provided an overview of the R&I component in the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) and the policy impact this might have (WK 11781/2021).

The estimated total R&I investments in the 27 RRP's could amount to the tune of €37 bn.

The Commission highlighted the quality of the bilateral dialogues held up to now with the Member States and committed to continue assisting the Member States for the effective implementation of the plans.

### **3.3 Update on the study 'Evaluation of the ERA policy framework'**

The Commission provided an update on the state of play of the "Study to evaluate the ERA policy framework/ERA monitoring mechanism" (WK 11781/2021), with a focus on the recommendations for the new ERA related to its governance, co-design, national implementation and monitoring.

## **4. ERA Governance**

### **4.1 Updates from the Commission Expert Group on the 'ERA Forum for Transition'**

ERAC heard an update from the Commission about the ongoing work in the Expert Group "ERA Forum for Transition", with a focus on aspects of the future ERA governance and the ERA policy agenda (WK 11781/2021).

In particular, the ERA Forum for Transition is intensively working on the elaboration of a draft ERA policy agenda to be submitted to the Presidency with a view to its insertion as an annex to the draft Council conclusions on the future governance of the ERA that are planned for adoption at the Competitiveness Council on 26 November.

### **4.2 Highlights from the ERA-related Groups**

ERAC heard a presentation by the Acting Chair of the GPC on the report "ERA-LEARN / GPC analysis of the impact of the Joint Programming Process and the Joint Programming Initiatives at the national level" (WK 11781/2021). This report is expected to be highly valuable in the context of the future European Partnerships as it presents the challenges that the Member States/Associated Countries are facing in implementation of the JPIs at national/regional level as well as the benefits of joining such initiatives.

ERAC also took note of written and oral information delivered by the Chairs of the other ERA-related groups, including the recently adopted SFIC Opinion on the Commission communication "Global approach to research and innovation - Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world" (WK11121/2021).

## **5. Information on the outcome of the Joint Meeting of Directors-General for Higher Education and ERAC of 30 September 2021**

The Slovenian Presidency (Director-General Tomaž Boh) debriefed on the joint meeting of ERAC and Directors-General of Higher Education (DG HE), which was held on 30 September 2021 in Ljubljana and virtually, back to back with the ERAC plenary, at which participants were invited to share views on the European Strategy for Universities and measures that can enhance synergistic links between R&I and HE, as well as on the future working methods and structures that would support stronger links between R&I and HE.

At the end of the Joint Meeting, the Presidency concluded with the following observations and recommendations:

- "Largely, participants supported the Presidency proposal on future coordination, however delegates emphasised the need for form follows function governance, ensuring efficiency and simplicity.
- The Slovenian Presidency welcomes France's intention to continue focusing on the subject during its Presidency and will support these efforts.
- The Presidency calls on the Council Secretariat and the European Commission to prepare a clear overview of the existing structures in the areas of higher education and research, to enable future coordination synergies.
- The Presidency also calls for regular closer cooperation between the ERA Forum subgroup on ERA-EHEA synergies and the BFUG Task force to increase synergies between EHEA, ERA and EEA, which have been tasked to identify possible ways forward in delivering impactful synergies between research and higher education".

The Commission is currently preparing, in close cooperation with Member States and stakeholders, a European Strategy for Universities. The European Strategy for Universities will address the main challenges and propose support measures for the sector. The Strategy will aim at bringing the four missions of higher education institutions - education, research, innovation and service to society - closer to a true knowledge ecosystem approach.

The discussion in the joint meeting highlighted that it will be important to reflect on the definition of research careers versus academic career.

The Commission emphasised that the universities are important players contributing to the green and digital transitions.

The Commission supported to bridge further the different areas. It was emphasised that it will be important to establish a governance structure avoiding having several groups but focus on one integrated group.

## 6. Any Other Business

### 6.1 Gender Equality in Research and Innovation: future implementation of the Ljubljana Declaration

The Slovenian Presidency (Peter Volasko) provided information on the future implementation of the "Ljubljana Declaration", which followed the Conference on "Deepening the ERA through Gender Equality" held on 8 and 9 July, which was jointly organised by the SI Presidency and the H2020 project GENDERACTION.

The Presidency explained the context surrounding the Ljubljana Declaration for Gender Equality in R&I, which was presented at the Competitiveness Council on 28 September. At the Council meeting, the Presidency called on the Ministers to endorse the declaration by 29 October and announced that it will report on the final text and its endorsement at the next Competitiveness Council in November 2021.

The Declaration proposes the following six priority actions to mainstream gender in R&I:

<b>Priority</b>	<b>Example recommendation</b>
Ensure fair, open, inclusive gender equal career paths; consider intersectional perspectives	Deepen our understanding of intersectionality and unconscious bias
Mutual learning through form follows function governance	Dedicated forum for gender in new ERA governance (similar to SWG GRI)
Use tools such as GEPs, for systemic institutional change and remove barriers	e.g. through specialised EU training for R&I civil servants, HEIs, and RFO leaders and managers
Address and counteract gender based violence	Include data on it in practices and GEPs
Monitoring and evaluation for continuous improvement	Gender/Sex Disaggregated data and additional conditions of vulnerability or marginalisation; developing new indicators if needed
Leverage synergies	Joint actions with EHEA for inclusive career paths

The Commission voiced its support to the Ljubljana declaration and informed about its intention to launch a formal procedure of endorsement of the final Declaration. The intention is also to best integrate the recommendations of the Ljubljana Declaration into concrete actions within the ERA policy agenda, and through Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe.

The Commission informed about several actions anticipated by the Commission that support the Declaration's policy recommendations, and on which ERAC members could further help in a number of initiatives taking place to enforce the area of gender:

- A pilot "European knowledge and support facility on institutional change through Gender Equality Plans" was launched since mid-March to support Member States and Associated Countries to be ready for the enforcement of the Gender Equality Plan eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe.

- A study on intersectionality has been launched at the end of the summer to conduct a mapping of existing national-level initiatives on equality, diversity and inclusion policies and intersectionality in higher education and R&I organisations.
- Two topics opened under the ERA part of the WIDERA 2021 work programme, on to support the development of a Centre of Excellence on Inclusive Gender Equality Plans, and the second one the support the set-up of a policy coordination network of national administrations, including research funding agencies.
- An evaluation study on the impact of gender equality plans at national and institutional level should be launched, complementing the ERAC SWG GRI's report from 1 June; once the contract is in place ERAC members will be contacted to learn more on national policies / strategies and actions in support of GEPs.

## **6.2 Next ERAC meeting (13\* December, Brussels)**

The next ERAC meeting is scheduled for 13\* December 2021 in Brussels. An ERAC workshop is envisaged on 14 December.

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\* The next meeting of ERAC originally planned on 15 December 2021 has been rescheduled and will take place on 13 December 2021.