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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)
Subject:	Informal videoconference of ERAC (13/12) - Item 3. Strategic debate: First ERA Policy Agenda and the future role of ERAC

Dear ERAC delegates,

Please find enclosed the document on above mentioned subject, with a view to the ERAC videoconference on Monday 13 December (agenda item 3).

Best regards,

ERAC Secretariat

Strategic debate: "Implementation of the 1st ERA Policy Agenda and the future role and work of ERAC"

Background

The Council Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA), and the Council Recommendation on a Pact for R&I, both adopted on 26 November, established the foundations of the new ERA. With these acts, the Council established a new ERA governance, defined the main features of a new policy coordination and monitoring mechanism and identified the main actors entrusted with the design and implementation of R&I policies.

According to these Council acts, and in view of the future ERA policy process, the main actors are:

- The Council, as the decision-maker, approving the Pact, the ERA policy agenda and any other initiatives that the Presidency and Member States could hold;
- the Commission, in its institutional role, providing impulse, monitoring, reporting and formal legal proposals if necessary;
- ERAC, advising on the strategic direction of European and national R&I policy; and
- the ERA Forum, coordinating the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda, and supporting the Commission and the Member States in the delivery of the ERA Actions, in cooperation with associated countries, stakeholders and relevant third countries where applicable.

ERAC, in particular, is entrusted with (paragraph 15 of the Council Conclusions):

- advising on strategic policy orientations and future trends that require the refinement of Union and national, including regional, R&I policies, including on the current and the next Union R&I Framework Programme and other relevant R&I-driven Union initiatives;
- initiating updates of the ERA Policy Agenda, by providing early strategic advice informed also by consideration of the progress made in the ongoing ERA Actions;
- reflecting and providing advice on new policy demands, which fulfil the ERA Policy Agenda criteria, throughout the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda;
- interacting with governance and coordination structures at similar level in other relevant policy areas, such as higher education and industry.

Considering ERAC's renewed responsibilities, it is necessary to decide how best to exercise them. From today's perspective we can identify three main areas for the work of ERAC:

1. ERAC's contribution to the design and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda in general, complemented by the ERA Forum's responsibilities;

2. ERAC's work in view of facilitating the uptake by Member States of the first ERA Policy Agenda, under discussion in the ERA Forum.

3. The work of ERAC beyond the ERA policy process

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1. ERAC and the ERA Policy Agenda in general

ERAC has two important responsibilities in relation to the ERA Policy Agenda: initiating updates of the Policy Agenda and providing advice on new policy demands.

ERAC **initiates updates** of the ERA Policy Agenda, by providing early strategic advice informed also by consideration of the progress made in the ongoing ERA Actions. In order to do this, ERAC needs to be able to assess the progress in the implementation of actions. Initiating an update of the Policy Agenda is understood to mean providing advice on the scope and content of the updated Policy Agenda, in preparation of the next 3-year cycle.

The process for establishing updates of the Policy Agenda should, in principle, follow the sequence established in the Council Conclusions:

- ERAC: provides early strategic advice on the updated Policy Agenda (para. 15);
- ERA Forum: co-designs and coordinates the update of Policy Agenda among the Commission and the Member States (para. 16);
- Commission: prepares an initiative on the basis of this work (para. 16);
- Council: adopts the Policy Agenda (para. 13).

ERAC is also to reflect and provide advice on **new policy demands**, which fulfil the ERA Policy Agenda criteria, throughout its implementation. This means assessing whether possible candidate actions should be added to the ongoing Policy Agenda. Indeed, the Council Conclusions state that the Policy Agenda is a dynamic document that may be subject to adjustments by the Council throughout its duration (para. 11).

In this case, ERAC's advice should be followed by discussions among the Commission and the Member States in the ERA Forum, which might then result in further initiatives being transmitted by the Commission to the Council.

In order for ERAC to fulfil its role in initiating updates and providing advice on new policy demands, ERAC could have a fixed point on its agenda for discussion on progress in the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda, on the basis of an information note provided by the Commission. It could invite the ERA Forum co-chairs for this discussion.

Furthermore, ERAC members could be encouraged to bring forward ideas and proposals for new policy demands, including in consultation with external experts.

Following the 18-month report on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda (para. 10 of the Pact for R&I), the subsequent ERAC meeting should focus on the preparation of the early strategic advice on the new Policy Agenda (in this case, during the second semester of 2023).

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2. ERAC and the first ERA Policy Agenda

As this first ERA Policy Agenda was adopted as part of the Council Conclusions on the new ERA governance, and at the same time as the Pact for R&I, it has followed a sui generis procedure (paragraph 12 of the Council Conclusions).

Member States, and where applicable associated countries, are to **identify the ERA Actions** in which they wish to participate within the first semester of 2022.

In order for this to happen, two prior steps need to be followed.

First, the Commission will provide **explanatory documents** for each ERA Action set out in the ERA Policy Agenda. These documents will clarify the implementation of each action, by setting out milestones, identifying actors, possible funding sources and expected impact. They will provide the

basis for in-depth **discussions in the ERA Forum** between Member States, associated countries and stakeholders, regarding the implementation of each action.

Second, **ERAC is to provide its views** on the ERA Policy Agenda by April 2022, in order to facilitate Member States, and where applicable associated countries, to identify the ERA actions in which they wish to participate. This should cover aspects such as the urgency of the different actions (for example, taking into account the priorities of the Presidency Trios), the maturity of their definition (for example, taking into account the discussions in the Forum) and whether there is a sufficient number of Member States ready to take them up. Where relevant, ERAC will flag the need for further examination of certain actions by the Commission and the ERA Forum.

> **The Commission, in close coordination with the ERA Forum co-chairs and its Steering Group, could prepare a report to inform ERAC on the progress made in the ERA Forum regarding the Policy Agenda, which would provide the basis for the exchanges in ERAC.**
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> **ERAC's Steering Board, comprising the incumbent and subsequent Presidency Trios, would further prepare the discussion.**
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> **Finally, the General Secretariat of the Council would prepare, under the responsibility of the ERAC co-Chairs, a post meeting flash, with the purpose of assisting Member States to identify the ERA Actions in which they wish to participate.**

3. The work of ERAC beyond the ERA policy process

The Council Conclusions assign to ERAC tasks beyond the ERA policy process.

On the one hand, ERAC is mandated to "advising on strategic policy orientations and future trends that require the refinement of Union and national, including regional, R&I policies, including on the current and the next Union R&I Framework Programme and other relevant R&I-driven Union initiatives".

Especially in relation to the proposals for the next Framework Programme, ERAC should be involved at an early stage of the development of the next Framework Programme, also in relation to national R&I priorities and programmes.

On the other hand, a fourth task for ERAC, mentioned in the Council Conclusions, is "interacting with governance and coordination structures at similar level in other relevant policy areas, such as higher education and industry." This is also very important. R&I is highly relevant for many other horizontal and sectoral policies. It is therefore necessary for ERAC, as a strategic advisory body, to actively reach out to these other policies. This could work in the form of some ERAC members being entrusted to monitor certain other policies, following relevant policy processes and reporting relevant developments and initiatives to the committee. Joint meetings or joint Task Forces could be considered if necessary.

> **ERAC, as the high-level strategic policy joint advisory committee for R&I policies, provides early advice in relation to the Framework Programmes for R&I and other major R&I driven EU initiatives. ERAC's mandate should be carried out in line with the roles of the EU institutions for the planning of the preparations for such initiatives.**
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> **ERAC should also actively reach out to other horizontal and sectoral policies and could therefore entrust some of their members to specifically follow other policy fields and report back to ERAC.**

4. With regard to ERAC's future working methods

The new ERAC mandate, which has been prepared on the basis of the Council Conclusions, is expected to be adopted by the Council on 13th December 2021, the day of the ERAC meeting in question. The new ERA governance, the new coordination and monitoring approach, the new tasks given to ERAC and the new mandate, not least with regard to the required hierarchical level of Member State's representatives in ERAC, require an adaptation of ERAC's working methods.

A first step after the adoption of the new mandate will be the nomination of the (new) Member States representatives for ERAC. According to the new mandate, Member States are invited to nominate up to two Representatives at high executive level for R&I policies. Since every MS will have only one vote in the committee, it will be no disadvantage for a MS to nominate only one representative. On the other hand, some national systems are organised in such a way that two representatives will make the organisation of the participation of these MS in ERAC easier.

For ERAC to be able to exercise its strategic role in the ERA governance, it will be very important that the work of ERAC in practice is continuously carried by Member States officials at high executive level. For many Member States this will be the level of Directors General. For some others, it will be officials of a corresponding level.

The next step will then be the adoption of "Procedural Arrangements" for ERAC. A proposal will be prepared by the co-Chairs and the GSC in early 2022. The deliberations will be carried out by written procedure. The "Procedural Arrangements" will define the working methods of ERAC.

The main changes with regard to the working methods will be that ERAC meetings will only in exceptional cases include presentations that will not be followed by a dedicated discussion. The fact that the time of high-level executives is a highly valuable and scarce resource requires the meetings to focus on exchanging views and developing opinions. The strategic debates should also be thoroughly prepared in advance. Discussion papers should be delivered at least two weeks before the meetings. ERAC should not issue opinions that have not been subject of a strategic debate and/or a thorough written procedure.

As has been the case in the past, the future ERAC Steering Board will play an important role. According to the new ERAC mandate, in addition to the co-Chairs, the GSC and the Commission, representatives of the current and the incumbent Council Presidency Trios will be members of the Steering Board. The detailed tasks of the Steering Board will be set out in the Procedural Arrangements. The mandate only mentions the preparations of the strategic debates as a task for the Steering Board.

With regard to the involvement of Associated Countries ERAC has always followed an inclusive approach. Associated Countries have been very active in the past in the committee and have contributed considerable work. This was especially the case for Norway and Switzerland. ERAC could therefore request to invite representatives of the countries associated to Horizon Europe to participate in the work of ERAC, where appropriate, for specific agenda items in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, and taking into account the Associated Countries' respective roles in the implementation of the ERA. Furthermore, other relevant third countries could be involved, as appropriate.

> **In order be able to fulfil its role as a strategic advisory body, the work of ERAC in practice should be continuously carried by representatives at high executive level both in ERAC meetings as well as with regard to the work carried out by written procedure.**

> **The ERAC meetings will be well prepared. Topics of the strategic discussion must be highly relevant and with a clear perspective of their impact.**

Questions for discussion:

- Do you agree with ERAC's role in the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda, both in general and in relation to the first Policy Agenda, as described above?
- What are your considerations on how ERAC could best perform the tasks entrusted to it in this regard and what are your considerations with regard to the future working methods of ERAC?