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**ERAC 32
RECH 431**

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: ERAC Work Programme 2025-2026

European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) delegations will find attached a background note on “ERAC Work Programme 2025- 2026,” prepared by the Co-chairs after contributions by delegations, with a view to the ERAC meeting on 24- 25 October 2024.

ERAC Plenary on 24-25 October 2024, Budapest, item 8

Background note

ERAC Work Programme 2025- 2026

INTRODUCTION

ERAC, in its renewed form, was established by the Council Conclusions of 26 November 2021 on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA) and the subsequent Council Decision of 13 December 2021 on the composition and the mandate of ERAC¹. On 13 April 2022, ERAC adopted its procedural arrangements².

On 24 January 2022, ERAC elected Ms Barbara Weitgruber (Austria) as its Member States co-Chair for a period of three years.

On 16 February 2023, Mr Marc Lemaitre was appointed Director-General of DG Research & Innovation and subsequently took over the function of the Commission co-Chair of ERAC, co-chairing for the first time at the ERAC Meeting in Lund on 21/22 June 2023.

The first ERAC Work Programme under the “new” ERA governance for the years 2022 and 2023 was adopted on 31 May 2022³. Revised Work Programmes were adopted in February 2023⁴ and January 2024.

This new ERAC Work Programme 2025-2026 shall provide the basis and initial planning for the work of ERAC for the next 18 months (2025 and first semester 2026).

STRUCTURE AND PROCEDURE OF THE PROGRAMMING OF ERAC’S WORK

The update of the ERAC Work Programme is a regular agenda item in the ERAC plenary meetings. The Work Programme covers the oncoming three semesters (not counting the current one) and, when relevant, also addresses longer-term projects and work streams beyond the three-semester period.

¹ [Official Journal of the EU L 450 of 16.12.2021.](#)

² Doc. 8227/22 of 19 April 2022

³ Doc. 10192/22 of 31 May 2022

⁴ Doc. 6625/23 of 20 February 2023

Thus, ERAC plans ahead the meetings, topics, strategic discussions and work streams for the next three semesters. The incoming EU presidencies of these three semesters will have the possibility to propose topics in connection with their provisional presidency agendas. To this end, presidencies are encouraged to share their planning with ERAC at an early stage. The Commission Work Programme and other foreseeable developments are taken into account. Furthermore, ERAC members have the possibility to propose topics, including taking the lead in the preparation of those topics.

For the preparation of strategic discussions, the following is foreseen:

- One or more volunteers (a Rapporteur, an ad-hoc Task Force) prepare a draft for a background document in collaboration with the Commission
- The document is put forward to the ERAC Steering Board for discussion/amendment/green light
- The document is then sent to the ERAC members at least two weeks before the ERAC meeting
- In the background document, the objective(s) and the concrete follow-up of the discussion must be clearly described. Each ERAC discussion should have a clear outcome, which could be an ERAC Opinion, supporting Presidencies with analysis for possible preparation of Council Conclusions, an initiative taken by the Commission, the setting up of an ERAC Task Force for further elaboration of the subject, etc.

In addition to the planning for the next 18 months, ERAC will briefly discuss the indicative agenda of the next ERAC meeting on the basis of a proposal from the ERAC Steering Board. The ERAC Steering Board will then further prepare the meeting taking into account the input from the ERAC members.

ERAC's work programmes will take a flexible and proactive approach to ensure that ERAC can contribute in a speedy and timely manner, as appropriate, to emerging and evolving issues.

It is important that ERAC considers carefully what outcomes and effects it aims to achieve. Every topic discussed in ERAC shall have a clear perspective on the pursued impact and the concrete follow-up.

ERAC'S TASKS

The ERAC mandate describes the tasks of ERAC as follows:

1. to advise on strategic policy orientation 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
2. to initiate updates of the ERA Policy Agenda, by providing early strategic advice informed, among other things, by consideration of the progress made in ongoing ERA actions
3. to reflect and provide advice on new policy demands which fulfil the ERA Policy Agenda criteria, throughout the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda
4. to interact with governance and coordination structures at a similar level in other relevant policy areas, such as higher education and industry.

These four points determine on one side a few mandatory tasks for ERAC and leave, on the other side, enough leeway and flexibility for ERAC to select topics that appear the most pertinent and topical.

ERAC's role in the design, adaptation and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda

In the current ERA governance and policy coordination approach, the ERA Policy Agenda is a central document for the advancement of the ERA. It is therefore a very important subject for the work of ERAC. Based on the Pact for R&I in Europe and the Council Conclusions on the future governance of the ERA of 26 November 2021, the following can be determined for the work of ERAC in the context of the ERA Policy Agenda:

1. The Council adopts an ERA Policy Agenda every three years with the possibility to amend it if this seems necessary.
2. ERAC considers the progress made in the implementation of the ERA actions. To this end, the co-Chairs of the ERA Forum inform ERAC regularly.

3. With a view to giving early strategic advice on the next ERA policy agenda, ERAC initiates a discussion process no later than 18 months ahead of the end of the 3-year policy cycle.
4. ERAC reflects on new policy demands that fulfil the criteria for the ERA Policy Agenda. To that end, all ERAC members can propose relevant topics to be discussed by ERAC in view of providing advice for possible new ERA Actions.
5. ERAC may provide advice on any relevant matter in the context of the ERA Policy Agenda in accordance with its mandate.

R&I related measures in the context of the recovery of Ukraine

In the ERAC meeting on 14 February 2023 ERAC decided to have a standing agenda item in the future on R&I related measures in the context of the recovery of Ukraine. This decision is still valid. The Commission offered to give updates on the state of play and discussions will be held, if necessary.

Interaction with other policy areas

Research policy is closely connected to education and industrial policies. R&I policy meets education policy especially when addressing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Since HEIs play such an important role for our knowledge societies, it is of great importance to have an integrated policy addressing HEIs and their four missions. Close interconnection between R&I and education policy is therefore a necessity. On the other side of the R&I spectrum, close interaction and creating synergies with industrial policy is also an obligation in order to maximise the impact of R&I on the EU's competitiveness. Equally important is close collaboration with sectoral policies in the context of challenge- and mission-oriented R&I.

Due to its nature at the interface between European and national R&I policy, ERAC can play an important role in enabling and enhancing the interaction with other policies. It can do this through its strategic advice, the consideration of stakeholders' views, designating members of ERAC in charge of covering relevant sectoral policies or holding informal joint meetings with other fora.

Other issues of strategic relevance

ERAC is mandated to give advice on strategic policy orientation and future trends. In essence, ERAC can select for discussion any other topic that appears pertinent and topical. Topics may be proposed by the ERAC members. Strategic topics can be addressed by ERAC via strategic debates or other oral or written formats.

ERAC STRATEGIC TOPICS FOR 2025-2026

Proposed topics for the ERAC meeting in the first Semester 2025:

- Capitalising on Excellence and overcoming the innovation divide – Challenges and opportunities for the next MFF cycle (Belgian proposal for debating the next MFF cycle and Hungarian proposal on tackling the innovation divide)
 - *Strategic debate on the basis of the annex to the “ERAC opinion on FP10”*

- Talents, Skills, Research Careers – How to move forward (German proposal on research careers, French proposal on how to further bridge the ERA and EHEA, and Portuguese proposal for debating the preconditions of a fifth freedom)
 - *Strategic debate on possible steps towards a fifth freedom taking into account stronger links between ERA and EHEA*

- Towards an ERAC opinion on Research and Technology Infrastructures in Europe (following the discussions on the ERAC Plenary Meetings of June and October 2024)
 - *Strategic discussion*

Proposed topics for the ERAC meeting in the second semester of 2025:

- From Agenda to Action – The implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027
 - *Strategic Debate*

- Trust in Science (German proposal)
 - *Strategic Debate*

- Orientation and advice on current and future **R&D investments** (Commission proposal)
 - *Strategic debate*

Further proposed topics:

- The role of **research and science in and for society** as a whole (Dutch proposal)
 - How to support a **diverse and inclusive** research and science community (Dutch proposal)
 - The role of R&I ecosystems and synergies between regional, national and European levels (French proposal)
 - AI in Science (German Proposal)
 - European Partnerships and Missions (German Proposal)
 - High-level discussion about the **defense (dual use) component of the next FP**, in articulation with the current debate on Research Security and International Cooperation (Portuguese proposal)
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Major events and milestones

January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025
					ERAC (Gdansk)
July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025
			ERAC (Copenhagen)		
January 2026	February 2026	March 2026	April 2026	May 2026	June 2026
July 2026	August 2026	September 2026	October 2026	November 2026	December 2026