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From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)

Subject: ERAC Plenary 5 December 2017 - agenda item 4.1
Review of the ERA governance foreseen in 2018

In view of the discussions under item 4.1 of the agenda of the ERAC plenary on 5 December 2017, delegations will find attached a paper from the ERAC Steering Board.

Background

In its Conclusions of 1 December 2015¹, the Council (Competitiveness) agreed that the mandates of the ERA-related groups should be reviewed at least every three years, starting no later than 2018. The review should be organised in line with the mechanism outlined in the ERAC Opinion on the review of the European Research Area advisory structure². According to this mechanism, ERAC should hold a discussion at DG level a year before the triennial review on the strategic landscape for research and innovation in Europe to identify the key strategic priorities that will require attention by the research and innovation community.

ERAC started its discussions on the preparations of the review in March 2017. Based on the exchanges of views at the ERAC plenaries in March, June and September 2017 and the preparatory work done by seven ERAC delegations (Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Italy and Sweden), the ERAC Steering Board has prepared the discussion at Directors-General level. It proposes that the ERA review in 2018 should seek a light, evolutionary approach and that the review should acknowledge the on-going implementation of the 2015 European ERA roadmap and of the 2016 national ERA roadmaps, since all these roadmaps will take some years to deliver results. The ERAC Steering Board therefore proposes that the focus of the debate of the Directors-General at the ERAC plenary of 5 December should be on two aspects: (a) short-term consolidation of the ERA process, and (b) mid-term review of key strategic priorities of ERA and their implementation by the ERA Groups. The Directors-General are expected to give guidance to ERAC for shaping the scope of the review.

To facilitate the discussion of the Directors-General on 5 December 2017, the ERAC Steering Board has prepared the guiding questions in Annex 1 to this note. These questions cover the short- and medium-term issues that the Directors-General are invited to discuss and consider. As a preliminary step, the participants to the informal meeting of the Research Policy Group on 26-27 October 2017 in Oslo had an exchange of views on the broader strategic landscape for research and innovation in Europe. A summary of these discussions, provided by the MS co-Chair Christian Naczinsky, can be found in Annex 2 to this note.

¹ Council Conclusions of 1 December 2015 on the Review of the ERA advisory structure (doc. 14875/15).

² ERAC 1212/15, Annex D.

Guiding questions for the Directors-General

1) Fundamental question

- Do you consider the mandates of ERAC or any of the other ERA-related groups to be at the core of next year's review?

2) Short-term consolidation of the ERA process

- What works well, what does not work well today?
- What are the changes you would like to propose in order to optimise the governance of ERA? Is the system of ERA-related groups flexible enough to adapt to new challenges?
- Are there any short-term needs for adjustment of the governance?
- How well does the governance of the ERAC work? Including:
 - The interaction between the ERAC plenary and the ERA-related groups work?
 - The interaction within the ERAC Steering Board between the Co-Chairs, the ERAC Secretariat of the Council, the services of the European Commission, the EU Presidencies, the elected Member States' representatives, and the chairs of the ERA-related groups work?
 - The interaction of the ERAC Steering Board with the ERAC plenary and individual ERAC delegations work?
- Is the current ERA monitoring and reporting system fit for purpose? If not, are there any ideas for improvement?
- How do you think the logistics of ERA-related activities should be adapted to the new situation?

3) Mid-term review of key ERA priorities

- How do you assess the progress of the ERA-priorities?
- Are the current ERA priorities still relevant or are they "outdated"?
- How useful have the national ERA roadmaps been in promoting the ERA at national level and bringing forward the ERA as a whole?
- To what extent is ERAC committed to continuing/updating the national ERA Roadmaps after 2020, in the light of the new prospective key strategic issues?

Christian NACZINSKY
ERAC co-chair

6th meeting of the Research Policy Group (RPG)
26/27 October 2017 in Oslo

ERA GOVERNANCE REVIEW / Strategic Landscape of STI in Europe

Summary of the exchange of views among Directors-General

Following the debate at ERAC on 22 September 2017 and in response to the Council Conclusions of 1 December 2015 on the Review of the ERA advisory structure, directors general responsible for research discussed the strategic landscape of STI in Europe during their RPG meeting on 27 October 2017 in Oslo.

The main messages from this debate are the following:

- (1) There is broad consensus concerning the growing dynamics of the changes that affect the production and management of new knowledge in Europe. It is due to this changing landscape for STI that the European Research Area (ERA) needs to adapt to shifting needs for structural reforms in the Member States and Associated Countries as well as within the European Commission.
- (2) While the completion of ERA has been a political objective during an early phase of ERA policy-making, directors general left no doubt about the fact that national and European framework conditions for STI require regular revision in order to adapt to the changing landscape for STI in Europe. ERA cannot be completed once and for all, and therefore, in this context, the ERA governance review has been welcomed as an opportunity to take a fresh look at the ERA content and structure.
- (3) Directors general agreed to the recommendation of ERAC to proceed with a light, evolutionary review of the ERA governance in 2018. However, the current set of ERA-related groups as well as their mandates should be scrutinised on the basis of the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness. A light approach towards the review should not be taken as an excuse for simply continuing with the status-quo.
- (4) Potential areas for ERA to seek synergies with other closely interrelated policy fields are higher education and innovation. In the course of the ERA governance review, new ways of linking ERA reforms with relevant initiatives in higher education or innovation should be explored.

- (5) ERA does not capture the imagination either of policy-makers at the Council or researchers who benefit most from structural reforms and the “fifth freedom of the internal market”. Better communication of the impact and the added value of ERA reforms should be foreseen in the future.
- (6) Based on the principle “form follows function”, a more fundamental revision of the ERA governance should be based on a new Communication of the European Commission that would replace the 2012 Communication on “A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth”. Such a new Communication from the European Commission could only be expected after the election of the European Parliament and the appointment of the next members of the European Commission in 2019.
- (7) The current ERA governance review provides an opportunity to better link relevant actions under the future FP9 with the ERA priorities. Jointly, they should underpin ERA reforms in the Member States and Associated Countries, and increase leverage of otherwise purely national activities by smart incentives (e.g. through the Policy Support Facility) under FP9. Possibly, an annex to the FP9 specific programme(s) could visualise the mutual benefits between FP9 and ERA.

Directors general would like to see ERA play an important role in the implementation of activities that contribute to better framework conditions for research (and in the future perhaps also higher education and, more than at present, also innovation). Some of these activities are unavoidably technical, with only a small amount of progress to be expected in the short term. Nonetheless, ERA should also address the more technical bottle-necks in developing the “fifth freedom of the internal market”. ERA should be neither over-simplified nor too technocratic in nature.
