

ERAC 1207/18

NOTE

From: ERAC Secretariat
To: ERAC delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 38th ERAC plenary meeting, 17 May 2018 in Brussels

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the summary conclusions of the 38th ERAC plenary meeting on 17 May 2018 in Brussels, as adopted by written procedure.

Summary conclusions

38th ERAC plenary meeting, 17 May 2018 in Brussels

Co-Chairs: Jean-Eric Paquet/Christian Naczinsky

Secretariat: General Secretariat of the Council

Present¹: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, European Commission, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom (37)

Absent: Albania, Armenia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine (7)

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The agenda was adopted with two AOB items, one requested by the BE delegation concerning the delays in the circulation of documents prior to the ERAC plenary meetings and one requested by the Commission concerning the Commission Communication on "A renewed European agenda for Research and Innovation - Europe's chance to shape its future".

The new Commission co-Chair (COM co-Chair), Director-General Jean-Eric Paquet, introduced himself. The co-Chairs welcomed the new ERAC delegates.

¹ The list of delegations present or absent at the meeting is based on the List of Participants that was circulated during the meeting for completion by delegates.

2. Summary conclusions of the 37th meeting of ERAC

The Member State co-Chair (MS co-Chair) indicated that the summary conclusions of the 37th meeting of ERAC, held in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, on 15-16 March 2018, had been approved by written procedure on 8 May 2018.

3. Information from the co-Chairs and Presidency

The MS co-Chair referred to the last ERAC Steering Board (SB) meeting on 24 April 2018, and to the summary sent to ERAC following the ERAC SB meeting. In particular he mentioned the link between strategic reports like the Science, Research and Innovation Performance of the EU-2018 Report and the 2017 ERAC Annual report. He indicated that the 2017 ERAC Annual report would be adopted by written procedure before the Salzburg ERAC Plenary in September and that it would be used to provide key messages for the Ministers in the Council Conclusions on ERA, together with elements from the strategic evidence. A note in this respect would be circulated prior to the September ERAC Plenary.

The representative of the Bulgarian Presidency, Yanita Zherkova, gave a brief update on the state of play of the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency. The Council conclusions on the reformed ITER project had been adopted, and the discussions on the Council conclusions on the European Open Science Cloud and on Accelerating knowledge transfer would be adopted at the Council (Competitiveness) on 29 May. A general approach on the Euratom extension would be submitted to the same Council meeting, as well as a progress report on the state of play of the discussions on the proposal for a EuroHPC Joint Undertaking. Ms Zherkova also mentioned the conference that was organized in Bulgaria on 22-23 March on Research infrastructures and Food 2030 Sustainable food systems and food security that would be organized on 14-15 June 2018.

The representative of the incoming Austrian Presidency, Ms Julia Prikoszovits, made a presentation on its Presidency priorities (the presentation has been issued as document WK 6038/18). The proposals for the new Multiannual Financial Framework, the next Framework Programme (FP) for R&I, the budget restraints (including the issue of Brexit) and the approaching EU elections are setting a very challenging context for the incoming Austrian Presidency. The general themes of the Austrian Presidency will be "A Europe that Protects", "Reinforcing the Subsidiarity Principle" and "Building Bridges". In the field of R&I, the general theme will be "Together we advance Europe". Austria will start the negotiations on the proposal for Horizon Europe. In this context, Ms Prikoszovits mentioned the replies received from the Member States to the letter sent by Minister Faßmann, according to which most Member States prefer "quality before speed" in the negotiations on the Horizon Europe proposal. The goal of the Austrian Presidency is therefore to make as much progress as possible, with an intensive meeting schedule for the Research Working Party. The idea is to have a thematic package approach.

The Austrian Presidency will also aim to adopt a set of Council conclusions on ERA, building on the review of the ERA advisory structure and other relevant ERA developments.

Furthermore, it will support sectoral policies (defence research, HPC, EOSC, international STI-Fora etc.) as appropriate. There will be two Council (Competitiveness) meetings with a research part on 27-28 September and 30 November, with the Austrian Presidency aiming to adopt a partial general approach on the draft Horizon Europe Regulation, progress reports on the other proposals in the Horizon Europe "package" and the Council conclusions on ERA in the latter. An informal meeting of the Ministers responsible for research will take place in Vienna on 16-17 July, and the ERAC plenary at Directors-General level will be organised on 17-18 September in Salzburg. Moreover, numerous RDI Presidency events will take place during the 6 months of its chair, including events relating to the ERA priorities.

ERAC delegations underlined the need for coordination of the work on Horizon Europe with the other MFF-related files and inquired about the timeline for the thematic packages. The Chair of the Research Working Party during the Austrian Presidency, Ms Marlene Schroder-Kienbeck, recognised the need for proper coordination. She also indicated that the discussions on the packages were still on-going and couldn't be finalised before the publication of the proposal for Horizon Europe, but that the Research Working Party would always be informed about the timeline one month ahead.

4. ERA Governance

4.1 Review of the ERA advisory structure foreseen in 2018

The Rapporteur for the 2018 review of the ERA advisory structure, Mr Philipp Langer (CH), presented the state of play of the exercise together with Lisa Müller (CH) and Kari Balke Øiseth (NO) (the presentation has been issued as document WK 6042/18). He indicated that the assessment of the documents provided by the ERA-related groups had been done, as well as the analysis of those self-assessment reports that had been submitted by the time of the Plenary (two ERA-related groups had yet to submit their self-assessment report). On the basis of this work, it seemed that not all aspects of the ERA Priorities were equally covered by the ERA-related groups. The preliminary results could be divided into two groups, general issues and issues specific to individual ERA-related groups. The general issues concerned the coverage of ERA Priority in mandates, the need to clarify the advisory role in the mandates of all groups, the level of representation as well as the expertise and commitment of country delegates in the groups, the monitoring of the work of the groups, the collaboration with other groups and the transparency and visibility of the ERA Advisory Structure. The group-specific findings covered the superordinate role of ERAC and its responsibility for ERA Priority 1; the coverage of the GPC mandate (JPIs vs. joint programming process);

the implications of the revised working procedures of ESFRI; the working dynamics of the Standing Working Group on Human Resources and Mobility (SWG HRM); the impact of the transfer for the ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in R&I (SWG GRI) from a Commission expert group into ERAC Standing Working Group and the role of the Commission in its current work; the gaps recognised between the mandate of the ERAC Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation (SWG OSI), ERA Priority 5 and the activities of the group so far; and the unclear link between ERA Priority 2b and the ESFRI mandate, as well as the relationship between ESFRI and the Commission.

At this stage, the Rapporteur team was preparing the questions for the survey that would be circulated to ERAC on 4 June. These preparations included exchanges of views with ERAC, the ERA stakeholders and the Commission representatives. The survey itself would be addressed also to the ERA-related groups and the Presidencies of the Council during the review period (2016-2018). Only one reply would be possible per addressee, meaning that ERAC delegations, the ERA-related groups and the other addressees to the survey should coordinate their replies. The survey would have a specific part for the ERA-related groups (part A), with a general part and group-specific part, as well as a part with general questions on the ERA governance (part B). The team asked for feedback from ERAC relating to the basic outline of the questionnaire and the length of the survey. The team also wanted to hear whether some elements were considered missing in the questionnaire, and whether there were any "no-go's". Moreover, the team wanted to know whether the timeline for the adoption of the draft final report on the review was convenient for ERAC delegations and gave two options: option A with deadline for written feedback on the draft report 24 August and the distribution of the draft report to ERAC on 3 September, and option B with deadline for written feedback on the draft report 5 September and the distribution of the draft report to ERAC on 13 September.

Several delegations considered that it would be better to reverse parts A and B of the survey in order to have first the general questions and to simplify the survey, possibly by reducing the number of questions. There should also be the possibility to add free text. Some delegations, as well as the Chairs of SFIC and the SWG GRI and the GPC vice-Chair, asked about the possibility to have interviews with the Rapporteur team to provide comments and feedback that they could not or did not want to include in the survey replies or the self-assessment reports by the ERA-related groups. The representatives of the ERA-related groups also considered that the general part for the ERA-related groups looked a lot like the self-assessment report that they had already filled in and were wondering how the replies by the groups can reflect the views of all the members. There were also specific questions on the linkage of the ERA Priorities that are valid until 2020 with the continuation of the ERA-related groups and the possibility to add emerging issues (DE, DK), on how the survey will cover the way the ERA-related groups are monitoring the ERA Priorities (FR) and on how the structure of Horizon Europe will influence the mandates of the groups (SE).

The Rapporteur indicated that reversing parts A and B would not be a problem. Due to the very tight timetable for the review, he hesitated on the possibility to have interviews. He however indicated that each ERAC delegate could contact the Rapporteur team if they wished to convey specific messages that they did not want or could not convey with the survey. He also underlined the importance for each ERAC delegation and each ERA-related group to have only one, collective reply. ERAC delegates should consult their colleagues in the specific groups and the Chairs of the ERA-related groups should do the same with the members of their respective groups to be able to reflect the collective reply in the survey.

As for the timeline for the adoption of the draft final report on the review, delegations were divided between those who considered that it would be important to circulate the draft final report to ERAC in time before the September Plenary, and those who preferred to have time until 5 September to examine the draft final report. The MS co-Chair stressed that it was essential to circulate the draft report to ERAC early enough so that it can be adopted at the Salzburg plenary in September. He therefore proposed that the deadline for written feedback on the draft report could be 31 August and the distribution of the draft report to ERAC on 10 September. Such a timeline should cater for the concerns of all ERAC delegations. ERAC agreed with this proposal.

4.2 Updates from the ERAC Standing Working Groups and from the ERA-related Groups

Following the practice that had been initiated at the ERAC Plenary meeting in December, updates by the ERAC Standing Working Groups and the ERA-related groups had been provided in writing to Delegations prior to the meeting. These updates were for the first time accompanied by a cover note highlighting the key issues that would be brought up at the Plenary and that ERAC delegates should focus on during the discussion. This time, the key issues were a) the monitoring tool created by GPC for analysing the parts relating to Priority 2a in the National ERA Action Plans; b) the priority setting process on open innovation (Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation); and c) stakeholder initiative concerning gender in Horizon Europe (Standing Working Group for Gender in R&I). The following information relating to these key issues was given at the Plenary:

- The representative of the GPC, Ms Petra Zagar, presented the monitoring tool created by GPC for analysing the parts relating to Priority 2a in the National ERA Action Plans (this presentation has been issued as document WK 6037/18).

- The Chair of SWG OSI indicated that the group had agreed on three priorities in the field of open innovation: preparation of an Opinion on the innovation policy across Horizon Europe, the need for an update of the IPR Communication by the Commission and the importance to find a place for a proper open science and open innovation policy in the EU. In the field of open science, the group will continue to collaborate with the Commission on the European Open Science Cloud.
- The Chair of SWG GRI spoke about the petition concerning Gender equality in EU's next research funding programme that was launched in April 2018 and calls on stakeholders including the Commission, Member States, ERAC and SWG GRI to ensure that gender equality and gender mainstreaming is a self-standing objective in the next FP and to maintain the current three priorities (gender balance in decision making, gender balance in research teams, gender dimension in research and innovation). It also calls on preserving funding for cultural and institutional changes as an important instrument for advancing gender equality as well as European values more generally, and cautions about the current backlash against gender equality. The initiative has so far gathered the support of more than 1,700 signatories from over 45 countries. The Chair also indicated that SWG GRI holds that gender equality must continue to play an important role in the next FP in order to advance further toward the objectives of the European Research Area as well as Responsible Research and Innovation.

Moreover, the SFIC Chair informed ERAC that SFIC had agreed on the establishment of a working group on international research and innovation strategies and that it will propose to the Commission a MLE that would support the work of this working group.

During the discussion that followed, the DE and SE delegations supported the idea of an opinion on the innovation policy. The DE, IE, MT, NO and SE delegations also underlined the importance of gender as a crosscutting issue. The COM co-Chair stressed that implementation of the policies, also at national level, is equally important.

5. ERA and Innovation Policy

5.1 Interim Evaluation of Horizon 2020 and preparations for the next Framework programme for Research and Innovation - Partnerships

The Chair of the Ad-hoc Working Group, Maria Reinfeldt, indicated that following the presentation of the draft reports by the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group (WG) on "Criteria for selecting, implementing, monitoring and phasing out EU R&I partnership initiatives" and on "Strategic coordinating process for EU R&I partnerships" at the March ERAC Plenary, the Ad-hoc WG had revised both documents on the basis of the comments received from ERAC Delegations and had adopted them at WG level. The final reports had been circulated to Delegations prior to the meeting in view of their adoption at the Plenary. They were adopted by ERAC by unanimity.

The Commission (Joerg Niehoff) then presented the next steps on the criteria framework, the coordination process and the transition period (this presentation has been issued as document WK 6039/18). He stressed that in this context, apart from the reports from the ERAC Ad-hoc WG, it was important to take into account the provisions on partnerships and monitoring and evaluation that would be included in the proposal for Horizon Europe, as well as the existing decision-making, advisory and governance mechanisms, including comitology. Furthermore, the framework for the strategic programming process for Horizon Europe, starting in June 2018, was important to ensure compatibility between the priority setting within the strategic programming process and the subsequent identification of partnerships.

The criteria framework and process will cover all partnership initiatives funded by Horizon Europe and will follow a life-cycle approach. The work will start once the Commission presents its proposal on Horizon Europe in June with the aim to present to the ERAC Plenary in December the further elaborated criteria framework and the proposal for the strategic coordinating process.

The transitional period will start once the Inception Impact Assessments for the candidate Article 185/187 initiatives will be approved by the Commission. The Member States and Associated Countries will then have the opportunity to comment on these documents, thus enabling them to give input before the Commission prepares the drafts of the proposals for the initiatives.

Delegations welcomed that the Ad-hoc WG will be involved in the work until December 2018, as it has worked well and has demonstrated impact. As for ERAC, it should reflect how the delegations can organise themselves for the transitional period to ensure qualified feedback on any candidate initiative. At the ERAC Workshop on 5 December, Delegations might be invited to share information on their national governance for the transition period and their initial reflections on the national governance of partnerships in a longer perspective.

Ms Reinfeldt then briefly presented the main findings and conclusions in the draft reports by the Ad-hoc WG on "Rationalising the EU R&I partnership landscape" and on "Increasing the efficiency of implementation" that had also been circulated to ERAC prior to the meeting. She invited delegations to send their comments in writing by 28 May at the latest.

There was wide agreement among ERAC Delegations that the Ad-hoc WG had again done very good work, like with the previous two reports, and Delegates who took the floor thanked the Chair and the members of the Ad-hoc WG warmly for their efforts. Delegations were of the opinion that all four reports by the Ad-hoc WG are interlinked. As for the draft recommendation to explore options for a more centralised and coordinated implementation of the activities of the Public-Public Partnerships, most delegations that took the floor considered that a flexible approach would be needed and that both a centralised and a de-centralised approach would be necessary.

The DE delegation also wanted to see a stronger role for the Coordination Support Actions (CSAs) supporting partnerships on priorities of the participating states, independent of the FP priorities.

The SK delegation pointed out that most Member States have limited resources to join partnerships and that it should therefore be possible to use structural funds. This would require coordination between DG REGIO and DG RTD. The COM co-Chair assured that such coordination already existed. As far as the appropriate budget share for partnerships is concerned, he indicated that this would be challenging as the budget for Horizon Europe would not be "earmarked" for specific initiatives.

Ms Reinfeldt underlined that the content of the partnerships should not suffer due to centralisation but that some degree of centralisation would be important for smaller Member States. It was however indeed important to stay flexible. She took good note of the wish to strengthen the role of the CSAs. The Commission/Joerg Niehoff pointed out that delegations had to distinguish between the centralisation of data on proposals and funded projects and the centralisation of activities and management of projects.

5.2 Update on ERA National Action Plans and strategies

A note by the Commission with a revised proposal on how to best follow up on the results of the ERA workshops had been circulated to Delegations prior to the meeting. The Commission (Anette Bjornsson) explained that this revised proposal had been made on the basis of the result of the written procedure launched after the ERAC Plenary in March: during this written procedure, one proposal from Belgium for following the progress in the implementation of the ERA National Action Plans (NAPs) had been received.

According to this proposal, progress under Priority 1 would be monitored along the process already used by the GPC to monitor the implementation of Priority 2a. The monitoring would look at whether a specific action stated in the National Action Plan has taken place and whether it has been completed, is on track or delayed. If no action has taken place, the monitoring would report whether the relevant action was cancelled or should be considered as delayed. Indication should be given on the prospective date for completion or whether the action is scheduled for a later point in time, as presented in the model in the Annex to the note.

The MS co-Chair invited Delegations to indicate how they considered that ERAC could do such monitoring and whether Delegations would object using the tool developed by the GPC. He also asked whether all ERA-related groups should use the tool.

Several delegations took the floor. The BE delegation indicated that the ERAC Standing Working Group on Human Resources and Mobility was already monitoring the actions in their respective ERA Priority and wanted to know how it did it. The CY delegation considered that the NAPs could indeed be monitored but that more discussion was needed on appropriate tools, also at national level. The DE delegation stressed that it was the Member States' responsibility to monitor the NAPs. In any case the NAPs don't follow the same structure so it would be difficult to compare them. As for the ERA-related groups, they should be able to work with a tool that suits them. The EE delegation considered that more discussion on the technical implementation of the proposed tool was needed, as well as different options for the tool. It underlined that reporting burden should be avoided and that there should be a link between the monitoring of Priority 1 and the ERA Progress Reports. The FR delegation wanted first to see how the other ERA-related groups monitor and to have a workshop to discuss how ERAC should do it. The IT delegation was not against monitoring Priority 1 but proposed first a pilot application. The MT delegation considered that the ERA-related groups should themselves decide how to monitor the ERA Priorities and agreed with EE that there should be complementarity with the ERA Progress Reports. As a response to the DE delegation, the SI delegation pointed out that there is a predefined structure for the NAPs. The UK delegation clarified that the ERA Progress Report monitors impact, whereas the ERAC exercise would be about monitoring output.

Furthermore, the IT delegation underlined that there was no proposal on the table for the follow-up of the workshops and that this should be done as well. The BE delegation proposed that future emerging topics could be discussed at the workshops.

The COM co-Chair reminded ERAC that the impact of collective monitoring should not be ignored. The MS co-Chair proposed that ERAC would continue to reflect on the follow-up for the workshops. He agreed that the ERA Progress Report should not be duplicated. Furthermore, he considered that it was not up to ERAC to impose any tools on the ERA-related groups. He suggested that the ERAC Steering Board would discuss the follow-up at its next meeting.

5.3 Promotion of Horizon Europe

The Commission/Ms Minna Wilkki made a presentation relating to the promotion of Horizon Europe proposal in the Member States and in countries associated to Horizon 2020 (the presentation has been issued as document WK 6026/18).

Ms Wilkki explained that after 7 June when the proposal for Horizon Europe will be published, there would be a series of key events to promote it, among others national events. National R&I Ministries may on a voluntary basis organise such national events and invite the Commission at high-level to present the proposal at these events. The format of the events is for the Member States and Associated Countries to decide, although it would be expected that key stakeholders are invited.

The UK delegation indicated that it would take over the chairmanship of Eureka in the beginning of July and might be interested in a national event in that context.

6. Standing Information Point

Document concerning the update on the activities of the Horizon 2020 Policy Support Facility (PSF) (WK 5611/18) had been circulated to delegations prior to the meeting.

The Commission/Mr Román Arjona explained that in addition to the PSF activities, the Commission had proposed with the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 a new Financial tool, called Reform Support Programme. One of the instruments within this tool was the Reform Delivery Tool, which would offer financial support to Member States committing to reforms discussed in dialogue with the Commission. He indicated that the Commission would circulate a dedicated note on this Tool after the Plenary meeting.

7. Any other business

7.1 39th ERAC meeting (17-18 September 2018, Salzburg, Austria)

The MS co-Chair indicated that at its next meeting, the ERAC SB would draw up the provisional annotated agenda of the next ERAC plenary meeting on 17-18 September 2018 in Brussels on the basis of the updated ERAC Work Programme 2018-2019. He reminded ERAC Delegations that it would be a meeting at Director-General level.

7.2 Delays in the circulation of documents prior to the ERAC plenary meetings

The BE delegation indicated that it was very difficult to prepare the ERAC meetings when the required documents are sent less than 10 days before the discussions. It explained that every ERAC Plenary meeting is prepared internally with different colleagues with different backgrounds, and that if documents are not available, it is very difficult to agree on a common position, which this will be reflected in the participation of the delegation in the Plenary meeting.

The MS co-Chair was aware that documents for the Plenaries were sometimes circulated quite late due to the late receipt of the input for those documents by the ERAC Secretariat. He considered that in the case of bottle necks, the co-Chairs could intervene more actively to un-block the situation.

7.3 Commission communication "A renewed European Agenda for Research and Innovation - Europe's chance to shape its future"

The Commission/Mr Román Arjona presented the Commission communication "A renewed European Agenda for Research and Innovation - Europe's chance to shape its future" that was issued as a contribution by the Commission to the informal meeting of the Leaders on innovation in Sofia on 17 May 2018.

Delegations had a very positive reception of the Communication. The DE delegation stressed the key role of universities in the R&I ecosystem and pointed towards open science as a forward-looking relevant issue. The Greek delegation asked about the follow-up that will be given to the Communication and underlined the importance of stronger innovation diffusion across the EU. The Portuguese delegation noted that the role of the EIC was described only in very general terms in the communication, and called for ambitions to be strong on R&I in relation to the proposal for the EU's long-term budget. The Swedish delegation pointed out that the communication appears to focus on technical-driven innovation while there is also room for innovation in other areas linked to gender, education, public administrations. The Chair of SWG GRI noted that the communication does not appear to explicitly address policies for researchers, human resources or gender equality.

Mr Arjona indicated that the first step was the successful discussion of the communication by European Leaders in Sofia on 16 May 2018. He welcomed the presentation and discussion of the communication at the Research Working Party and potential dedicated discussions around its axes in ERAC or at the capitals (interested delegations can contact the Commission services). He agreed that universities remain a central element to the renewed European agenda for research and innovation, in line with the conclusions of the Gothenburg Summit of November 2017. He underlined that the communication stresses the importance of entrepreneurship, interdisciplinary and the take-up of open science practice for the modernisation of universities and public research organisations. He agreed with SE that innovation is not exclusively technically-driven and mentioned that the communication supports a broader view of innovation that encompasses aspects such as missions, public investment in research and innovation and skills. In relation to researchers and gender, he pointed out that the communication tackles the development of Europe's learning society and points to changes needed in its education and training and research system, which include reforms around both aspects. Finally, he referred to the need to support the emergence of regional eco-systems through a full deployment of smart specialisation strategies that ensures the adequate diffusion of innovation across the EU and its regions.