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MEETING DOCUMENT

From:	ERAC Secretariat
To:	ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)
Subject:	ERAC videoconference on 10 September 2020 - Item 3.3 - The Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships and the role of the "Forum for R&I Partnerships"

Dear ERAC delegates,

Please find enclosed the document from the European Commission The Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships and the role of the "Forum for R&I Partnerships", with a view to the ERAC videoconference on Thursday 10 September (agenda item 3.3).

Best regards,

ERAC Secretariat

The Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships and the role of the „Forum for R&I Partnerships”

(For submission to ERAC and presentation at the ERAC Plenary on 10/9/2020)

1 The context for the strategic coordinating process

The Horizon Europe legal base¹ sets out a new governance framework for the EU research and innovation partnerships, linking them with the Strategic Planning of Horizon Europe:

“The strategic planning process shall be complemented by a strategic coordinating process for European Partnerships, with participation of Member States and the Commission on equal footing. It shall function as an entry point for foresight analysis, analysis and advice on the portfolio development, possible setup, implementation, monitoring and phasing out of R&I partnerships and be guided by a comprehensive criteria framework, based on Annex III of the Horizon Europe Regulation.”

In this paper, the Commission puts forward a proposal to operationalise the strategic coordinating process starting from 2021. It has been developed with the close involvement of Member States in the context of the Transitional Forum for R&I Partnerships that have been given the task to provide advice on the matter. It builds on the work carried out by the ERAC ad-hoc WG for partnerships² and a Commission discussion paper presented to ERAC³. Based on these discussions it became clear that the strategic process for Partnerships:

- Encompasses in contrast to many other ERA issues a very substantial Horizon Europe funding element (up to 50% of pillar II, in addition in Pillar 1 and III, including EIT-KICs) that requires a strong role of the Commission in its set-up and implementation (while the link to the Comitology is ensured via the Programme Committee of Horizon Europe);
- Requires the strong Member States involvement, from defining the policy approach to the identification of priorities for partnerships and their commitment and contributions to achieving the objectives;
- Should entail a number of well-coordinated elements that ensure that the objectives of the strategic coordinating process can be achieved in an efficient and effective manner.

It was also discussed that the initial concept of a ‘Forum’ could not cover all necessary elements, and should as such rather be considered an event allowing dynamic exchanges between the Member States, the Commission and the representatives of Partnerships. The Strategic Coordinating Process should position itself independently from the Horizon Europe Programme Committee and ERAC configurations (e.g. following the example of ESFRI).

2 Key challenges that the strategic coordinating process aims to address

European Partnerships are a unique approach in the EU to develop programme-level R&I collaboration with the Member States and the private sector. They will be key tools for enabling the transitions towards greener and digitally-enabled society and economy by mobilising key players across Europe around a common vision and acting as experimental platforms for developing systemic R&I solutions. However, the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 showed

¹ Partial General Approach on the proposal for a DECISION OF THE COUNCIL on establishing the specific programme implementing Horizon Europe - the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

² ERAC 1215/18, Final report. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1215-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

³ WK 14467/2018 INIT

that a systematic process for identifying, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of partnerships is needed to capture their full potential. **The strategic coordinating process aims to address the following challenges:**

- Lack of systematic evidence on the impacts and added value of the Partnership approach;
- Lack of visibility and transparency of the Partnership landscape;
- Lock-ins of the system (no room for new priorities);
- Little cross-learnings across Partnerships on common design elements and implementation issues⁴.

3 The objectives of the strategic coordinating process⁵

Based on the identified challenges, the overall goal of the strategic coordinating process is to **support an evidence-based policy for partnerships** and a **strategic vision of the landscape**. It should allow a **consolidated view on the progress made by partnerships**.

Concretely, the strategic process aims to address the following five objectives:

1. Support Community Building and mutual learning across partnerships

Community building among all partnerships (Member State and industry-led) and with policy-makers and key stakeholders is key in building trust and ensuring coherence and collaboration, mutual learning and exchange of good practice for making partnerships more effective approaches in delivering common objectives.

2. Raise Visibility and strengthen stakeholder communication and consultation

Clear and regular communication on the overall portfolio of partnerships, their activities and achievements will be crucial in providing equal visibility and political support to all partnerships, independent of their implementation or size. In addition, stakeholders must be better involved and consulted in the further evolution of the partnership landscape, both at national and EU-level.

3. Provide policy makers and partnerships with the Evidence Base

The main vehicle here is the biennial partnership monitoring. Eventually, the quality of policy decisions concerning the evolution of the partnership portfolio will depend to a large extent on the quality of the underlying evidence, so the elaboration and quality control of the report deserves particular attention. As many information and data will be ‘property’ of the partnerships and of beneficiaries and are usually stored at national level (as far as public funding is involved), clear interfaces between the Commission as main ‘author’ of the report and the information provider at national level should be ensured. A first monitoring is planned for Q4/2021 (baseline report).

A second element will be the foresight activities supporting the identification of priorities for possible R&I Partnership candidates of European relevance (in particular those between Member States). This would start in late 2021, and deliver results by mid-2023. A second exercise might be considered as input to the preparation of the tenth Framework Programme;

4. Prepare Strategic Discussions on key policy issues

⁴ For P2Ps this has been done by ERA-LEARN and for JUs by the Commission’s Common Implementation Centre.

⁵ Proposal is to stick at this stage to the strategic coordinating process that is put forward in the legal base (instead of Forum)

It is important to allow for a regular strategic debate with Member States (policy level) to ensure strategic steering and political guidance on the partnership policy approach and collective progress of R&I Partnerships. It will be instrumental in identifying critical issues and providing recommendations to Member States, the partnerships and the Commission. The debates (at least once a year) will be prepared using the input resulting from the monitoring and the foresight activities, as well as e.g. the results of the interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe. It should involve research and other sectorial ministries. This policy debate could take place within the future ERA governance;

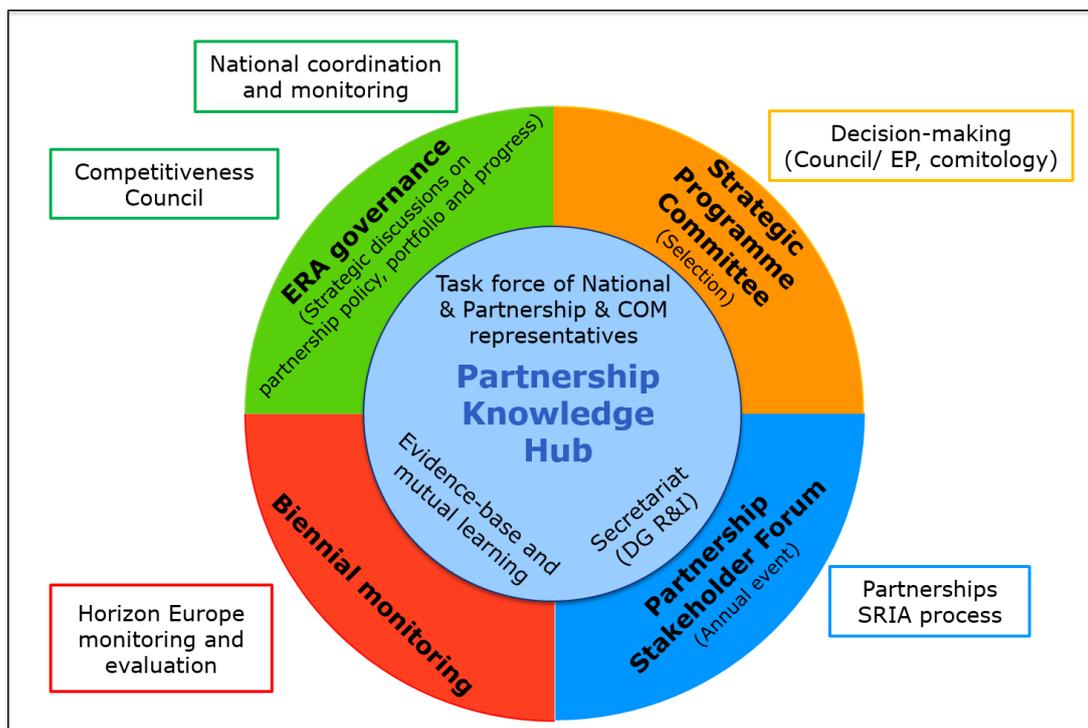
5. Ensure a Feedback Loop from Member States and Partnerships on the portfolio evolution, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

The revised policy approach for partnerships will result in many changes for the implementation of partnerships, and will require an overarching framework for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of partnerships, including a coordinated input to the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, with a single exercise (study) covering all European Partnerships independent of their form of implementation. It must be ensured that the evaluation is visibly contributing to partnership related policy decisions. Furthermore will provide input on strengths and weaknesses of the implementation, and provide input to the aspects related to evaluations.

4 How will the strategic coordinating process be implemented and resourced?

It is proposed to have **a number of well-coordinated activities and elements that constitute in their sum the strategic coordinating process**. While some elements/activities will support all objectives mentioned above, other elements will specifically deal with one of them.

Figure 1: Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships - Schematic illustration of main elements and activities



4.1 Partnership Knowledge Hub

At the core is a **Partnership Knowledge Hub** that supports the implementation of the strategic coordinating process and takes responsibility for driving the work along the overall goal and five objectives described above. It comprises of a network of the Commission services, national and partnership representatives, thus establishing a clear communication channel that allows tapping into the deep experience of key actors. It has three components:

- **A Task team composed of national, Commission and Partnership representatives.** It allows regular working level interactions and meetings to discuss the different work streams of the strategic coordinating process. It is responsible, supported by the secretariat for the preparation of strategic discussions, the Partnership Stakeholder Forum, the monitoring, foresight and mutual learning activities. It will adopt its rules of procedures and meet in different configurations, depending on the topic under discussion.
- **Intelligence and mutual learning activities** to improve evidence-base and knowledge management, and to support partnerships and policy makers in addressing common policy/operational challenges. Support would be provided largely through three streams: a) foresight and monitoring, including the possibility to use external expertise; b) mutual learning activities on cross-cutting issues, e.g. through the Policy Support Facility; c) an online platform that acts as a gateway for information on analysis, monitoring and good practices that could be taken up by MS and/or Partnerships⁶.
- **The Secretariat** to coordinate and support the different work streams of the strategic coordinating process. It is located with the partnership sector of DG R&I, and supported with a rotating system of seconded national experts from Member States and Associated Countries (responsible e.g. for coordinating the biennial monitoring, the foresight activities, preparation of the other activities).

4.2 Strategic discussion

The strategic discussion would become a distinct component of the future **ERA governance**. It should cover issues related to partnership R&I policy (structural objectives, such as investments in transnational collaboration, public-private cooperation, knowledge transfer and broader ERA objectives), as well as progress in achieving thematic objectives. It should also envisage an appropriate mechanism that allows escalating certain topics to the Council level.

4.3 Partnership Stakeholder Forum

The Partnership Stakeholder Forum is a regular (annual) event bringing together the whole community, e.g. as part of the R&I days. It provides a venue for networking, broadening engagement, sharing of experiences and discussing policy and practical dimensions related to Partnerships. It will notably promote a debate on how partnerships can more effectively contribute to addressing common challenges, irrespective their form thus aiming to break the current silos between public-public and public-private. It can include thematic configuration, e.g. based on clusters, or around topics of overarching interest (Green Deal). This EU-level approach should be mirrored at national level as part of the national partnership coordination process;

4.4 Consultation of Member States on the selection

The consultation of Member States is fully integrated in the Strategic Planning of Horizon Europe, with the (Shadow) **Strategic configuration of the Horizon Europe Programme**

⁶ Building also on the assistance provided by ERA-LEARN.

Committee as the single entry point for the structured and early consultation of Member States (and Associated Countries).

5 Contributions needed from participants

The Commission is responsible for organising and coordinating the overall process, including assembling and publishing of the biennial monitoring reports. It will finance the expert group(s), and the annual event. It will provide the further support, including the IT/ e-tools for the online platform. It will optimise and coordinate the monitoring and evaluation efforts and provide aggregated project level information for European Partnerships.

The Member States establish their national governance and coordination mechanisms related to EU R&I Partnerships to prioritise participation, ensure resources, relevance and commitment for the life-time of the initiatives, including national consultation activities. They ensure the monitoring and evaluation of their national participation, notably qualitative information and assessments to better understand impacts at national and local level. They should advocate broader stakeholder engagement in their countries.

The Partnerships ensure access to data, and establish a monitoring system that can track progress towards objectives, impacts and key performance indicators. They should also ensure proper consultation and engagement during the agenda setting to foster alignment and synergies.

6 The immediate next steps

- The concept will be discussed at the ERAC Plenary in September 2020.
- A first expert group will be set up for the monitoring report methodology and structure. Close collaboration will be developed also with MS/AC to ensure coordinated inputs.
- Commission services will take the necessary procedural steps to set up the Partnership Knowledge Hub, with Member States being closely involved in co-designing the process and the development of the rules of procedures.
- Follow closely discussion on the ERA Communication / governance to align where necessary.