

Informal Videoconference of ERAC

10 September 2020

Main results¹

- 1. Welcome by the ERAC co-Chairs: Jean-Eric Paquet**, Director-General DG R&I and **Christian Naczinsky**, Head of Department for EU and OECD Research Policy, Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Austria.

Delegations were informed that, given the informal setting of the videoconference, no formal minutes will be issued after the meeting.

2. Information from the co-Chairs and the Presidency

- The German Presidency informed on the progress made on its main priorities, including on the outcome of the informal ministerial Council on Research that took place on 21 July 2020. It also debriefed on ongoing preparations for:
 - the Competitiveness Council (Research) on 29 September;
 - the ERA ministerial conference on 20 October in Bonn and in hybrid format, which could include a debate on the upcoming "Commission communication on the future of R&I and the ERA" as well as a declaration on "Freedom of scientific research", and
 - the Council conclusions for a New ERA to be presented for adoption at the Competitiveness Council on 27 November.

Moreover, the German Presidency stressed the need to identify the key topics of the next ERAC plenary planned on 16 December 2020, and to decide on the organisation of a workshop that would help preparing the plenary debates.

- The Portuguese delegation anticipated possible key topics for the next year, such as a focus on the implementation of Horizon Europe and other R&I-related files, including negotiations on Partnerships. Special attention will be devoted to researchers' careers by reinforcing the human resources dimension in the ERA. On the latter topic, the Chair of the SWG HRM expressed the availability of this group to contribute to improving the working conditions for researchers and their careers. Preliminary dates: Informal Competitiveness Council 2-3 Feb. 2021, formal Competitiveness Council: 26 Feb. and 28 May 2021. An ERAC plenary could take place in early June 2021 in Porto.

¹ This unofficial synopsis has been produced under the sole responsibility of the ERAC Secretariat for information purposes. It is intended to present the main practical operational points of the ERAC informal videoconference of 10 September for follow-up. Under no circumstances can it be considered as being official summary conclusions.

- The Slovenian delegation listed a number of subjects that could be part of the Presidency programme, such as: a new ERA governance system, the contribution of R&I to the SDGs (smart directionality), synergies between the ERA and the EHEA and the ethical dimension of the ERA. The Slovenian delegation also mentioned the possible organisation of an ERA conference prior to the Competitiveness Council in December 2021, as well as a possible back-to-back meeting of ERAC and DGs for Higher Education. A number of conferences will be organised, including on research infrastructures and on gender issues, in cooperation with ESFRI and the SGW GRI respectively. The preliminary date for the informal meeting of Council Competitiveness is 20-21 July 2021, the ERAC meeting in Slovenia is planned for late September.
- The French delegation informed the ERAC plenary that the organisational and budgetary preparations for its Presidency have been launched at national level, and that content-related work will follow.

3. ERA and Innovation Policy

3.1 Synergies between the ERA and the EHEA

The Committee took note of information from the Commission on the ongoing work and activities related to building synergies between the ERA and the EHEA. The Commission outlined that cooperation in both areas has to be developed in very concrete areas, including investments. Important reference points for the upcoming work in this field are: the Action Plan on digital education, the Skills agenda and the Industrial strategy. This topic will be part of this year's edition of the European R&I Days (22 to 24 September).

The German Presidency explained that building synergies between ERA and EHEA is at the core of the member states' interests and decisions on the way forward must be taken jointly with the Commission and all relevant players.

The ERAC COM co-Chair concluded that this subject will be added in the draft agenda of the next ERAC Steering Board with a view to discussions at the December ERAC plenary.

3.2 Monitoring ERA National Action Plans

The ERAC rapporteur on Monitoring National Action Plans, Cecilia Cabello, presented the final consolidated report on the monitoring of the ERA roadmap (NAPs) on all the ERA priorities, after having included the input and revision by all the Chairs of the ERA-related groups as well as by the members of the ERAC Steering Board.

In the ensuing debate, ERAC was of the view that this report constitutes a useful contribution to the assessment of the ERA priorities, and that the lessons learned from the monitoring exercise should feed into upcoming reflections and debates on the ERA and its future governance.

The COM co-Chair pointed out that this report will be, in particular, a useful input for the study that the Commission is launching to cover several aspects of the current ERA framework, including on evaluation and real impact on policy changes. The work for the study will last from November 2020 until May 2021.

The "Final Report on Monitoring ERA Priorities with ERA Roadmap National Action Plans" was provisionally endorsed by ERAC pending the confirmation through a written procedure (WK 9405/2020).

3.3 Strategic Coordinating Process for R&I Partnerships

ERAC exchanged views on the basis of a Commission presentation on the document "The Strategic Coordinating Process for Partnerships and the role of the Forum for R&I Partnerships" (WK 8928/2020) and the related document "Opinion of the MS representatives in the Transitional Forum for Partnerships on the Commission proposal concerning the strategic coordinating process (Deliverable 5)" (WK 8917/2020).

The Commission document, which has been elaborated in the context of the Transitional Forum for R&I Partnerships, puts forward a proposal to operationalise the strategic coordinating process starting from 2021. It builds on the work carried out by the ERAC ad-hoc WG for partnerships² and a Commission discussion paper presented to ERAC³.

During the debate, some ERAC delegations drew attention to the Opinion delivered by the MS representatives in the Transitional Forum for Partnerships on the Commission proposal, by highlighting a number of elements of the strategic coordinating process as important prerequisites for achieving the policy objectives linked to the new policy approach on partnerships, including the need for an adequate role and proper involvement of the MS along the process.

4. ERA Governance

4.1 Implementation of the ERAC Action Plan 2019-2021

The Helpdesk in support of the implementation of the ERAC Action Plan presented the state of play of the implementation of the Action Plan contained in document WK 8945/2020, following the completion of the latest round of consultations. The overall assessment is that ERAC has accomplished its mission according to the 2018 Council Conclusions. The full text of the final report will circulate in October and be presented to the Steering Board in November and to ERAC for final approval in December.

The Helpdesk also presented a proposal aimed at reusing the content of the "Executive summary" of document WK 8945/2020, as a basis for a draft ERAC Opinion on the future ERA advisory structure with a view to providing input to the German Presidency for the preparations of the draft conclusions on the future of the ERA that will be submitted to the Council for adoption at its meeting on 27 November.

ERAC delegations agreed to take forward the proposed approach.

The text of the draft ERAC Opinion will be submitted to ERAC for comments and adoption by written procedure with a deadline closing on 25 September. After adoption, the ERAC Opinion will be forwarded to the German Presidency.

² ERAC 1215/18, [Final report](#).

³ WK 14467/2018.

4.2 Highlights from the ERA-related Groups

ERAC took note of written updates on the activities carried out by the ERA-related Groups (WK 8884/2020).

4.3 ERAC Annual Report 2019

The ERAC Secretariat provided updated information on the last stages of the draft ERAC Annual Report 2019.

Following the endorsement of the content of the draft Report by the ERAC Steering Board on 1 July 2020, the text underwent a linguistic review by the English editing service of the Council during the summer.

The edited version of the draft (WK 9051/2020) was forwarded to ERAC for adoption by written procedure with a deadline ending on 17 September, with a view to its official publication.

4.4 Update of the ERAC Work Programme 2019-2020

The ERAC Work Programme 2019-2020 (second update) was approved by ERAC by written procedure on 24 July 2020 ([1207/20](#)).

5. Standing information points

- The Commission made a presentation of the "[Innovation Scoreboard 2020](#)", which was published on 23 June 2020 (WK 8942/2020).
- The Commission briefed ERAC on preparations for the "[European R&I Days](#)" to take place from 22 to 24 September 2020 (WK 8943/2020), in digital format.

6. State of play for the election of a new Member States' co-Chair of ERAC

This was the last ERAC plenary under the co-chairmanship of Christian Naczinsky (AT) who has been the ERAC MS co-Chair for the last three years and will step down from this position at the end of this official term on 22 September. He has decided not to seek renewal of his mandate.

In preparation for the replacement, the ERAC Secretariat had launched a call for candidates from the MS on 15 June. However, no applications from the MS were received to take over the post at the end of the extended deadline on 4 September.

ERAC discussed this novel situation to try to understand the reasons why MS had refrained from proposing candidates. The current COM co-Chair Jean-Eric Paquet, Director-General DG R&I, committed to analysing the case together with the two MS representatives of the ERAC Steering Board with a view to finding a solution for the next ERAC plenary planned on 16 December.

The two MS representatives in the Steering Board (DE and IT) expressed readiness to take on the day-to-day business in the interim period until a new official co-Chair from the MS is in place, including support for preparations of the next ERAC Steering Board meeting planned on 10

November. The co-Chairs expressed their hope that suitable candidates will apply and that it will be possible to elect a new MS co-Chair at the next ERAC Plenary meeting in December.

7. Any other business

- Commission communication on the Future of R&I and the ERA

The Commission could not confirm that the Commission communication on the Future of R&I and the ERA would be released on 30 September, as it was indicated in a recent draft planning of the Commission college.

- European data for R&I Policy

The Commission made a presentation on "European data for R&I policy" explaining that there are a number of projects in this field in the member states that are progressing towards similar goals. The Commission also announced the organisation of a workshop on this topic before end of 2020 with the three-fold objective of: reflecting on the policy value of this initiative, sharing experience and best practices, and reflecting on the way forward to allow countries to contribute and to benefit from this initiative.

- Farewell speech by the MS co-Chair

In his farewell speech, the outgoing ERAC MS co-Chair Dr. Naczinsky thanked all ERAC delegates, the Commission, the ERAC COM co-Chair, the Chairs of the other ERA-related groups and of the ERAC Ad-hoc working parties, the series of Presidencies, the ERAC Secretariat and all the experts, assistants and contributors that helped with their work to accomplish the mission of ERAC during his term in office as co-Chair.

ERAC paid a vibrant tribute to the outgoing ERAC MS co-Chair for the achievements made during his co-chairmanship and his commitment to improving the ERA and making it a tangible reality for researchers, institutions and citizens.
