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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: ERAC (European Research Area and Innovation Committee)

Subject: Post Meeting Flash

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA AND
INNOVATION COMMITTEE
(ERAC)

ERAC co-Chairs

ERAC meeting of 13 and 14 September 2022 (agenda CM 3954/1/21)

Post-meeting flash

The meeting of ERAC on 13 and 14 September 2022 took place in Prague, Czech Republic, and the agenda included four strategic debates on:

1. A New European Innovation Agenda
2. European Research Infrastructures: Digital Transition
3. Horizon Europe interim evaluation
4. Follow-up on the commitments of Member States to actions in the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

The outcome of the meeting and the next steps can be summarised as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda

ERAC delegates congratulated the new Commission co-Chair of ERAC, acting Director-General Signe Ratso, who replaced Jean-Eric Paquet on 1 September 2022.

On behalf of the Committee, the ERAC co-Chairs thanked the Czech Presidency for hosting the meeting.

2. Updates from the co-Chairs and the current and upcoming Presidencies

- The Commission provided updated information on the process of “**Enhanced dialogues with Member States**”, which is aimed at supporting the design and implementation of the R&I policy agendas and investments in the Member States. CZ, EL, HR and LT shared their recent fruitful experiences of their Enhanced dialogue processes while highlighting the usefulness of the targeted support offered. LV indicated its interest in organizing an enhanced dialogue.
- The **Czech Presidency** presented the main priorities of its Presidency mandate, which include the preparation of Council conclusions on Research Infrastructures and on the New European Innovation Agenda (to be submitted for adoption at the December 2022 Competitiveness Council). In addition, the CZ Presidency will take forward the work on the Council Recommendation on knowledge valorisation. ERAC took also note of the outcome of a Conference on synergies between the European Structural Funds, Horizon Europe and European- and national-based R&D funding held on 7-8 July 2022 which resulted in the [Prague Declaration](#).
- During the first semester of 2023, the **incoming Swedish Presidency** will focus, among other issues and pending finalisation of the planning process, on the implementation of open science policies and access to research and academic publications, and on how to bolster synergies and

maximize the use of Research Infrastructures, including collaboration at international level and with industry. An ERAC meeting is tentatively foreseen between 20 and 22 June 2023 in Lund.

- The draft programme of the **future Spanish Presidency** for the second half of 2023 includes priority work on the impact of the Recovery and Resilience Fund at European level on R&I systems and related sectorial policies; a renewed Partnership in the Mediterranean Area (“PRIMA-2”), and the benefits of “Science for policy”.

3. Measures in R&I in the context of the invasion of Ukraine - Updates

The Commission provided an update on the follow-up measures in R&I to support Ukraine, in the wake of the informal lunch debate held at the Competitiveness Council in July 2022. The Commission noted that a lot has been done already for displaced researchers of Ukraine and that the focus now shifts to offering support to those who remain in the country in order to avoid extensive brain drain.

It was reminded that Ukraine’s association agreement to Horizon Europe and Euratom Research and Training Programmes entered into force on 9 June 2022, thus enabling Ukrainian R&I players to fully participate in these programmes on equal terms with entities from the EU Members States, without having to contribute financially for the years 2021 and 2022.

The Commission, which is currently providing advice on the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, is also considering opening up a Horizon Europe Office in Ukraine that could provide targeted support to Ukrainian researchers in terms of preparing applications and finding partners and which could also be used as a contact point for the Member States.

It finally encouraged ERAC members to provide further suggestions with a view to strengthening the support for Ukrainian researchers, innovators and students.

4. A New European Innovation Agenda

ERAC exchanged views, in breakout room sessions, on the communication “A New European Innovation Agenda” (NEIA), issued by the Commission on 5 July 2022 (WK 10718/2022 and WK 11958/2022).

The FI and PT representatives conducted the two sessions and highlighted the main messages of the sessions.

The ERAC co-Chairs stressed the valuable contribution of the outcome of the debates for the work of the current and upcoming Presidencies, and summarized it as follows:

Following a presentation and based on a background note of the Commission on its Communication on the NEIA, ERAC delegations discussed whether they agreed with the analysis and actions provided in the Communication, where they see most potential for action at national level to improve the EU’s innovation performance and what should be the framework for monitoring the implementation.

ERAC delegates broadly supported the spirit of the Communication, shared the Commission’s analysis and interpretation of strengths and challenges in Europe and agreed with the identified flagship areas where action is required. They agreed that innovation, and particularly deep-tech innovation, is a key to Europe’s competitiveness and would provide a response to the societal

challenges. They noted that the Communication has come at the right time as new challenges have emerged in Europe, including the war in Ukraine and energy and climate crises.

While many delegations supported the deep-tech focus of the Agenda, several of them highlighted limitations of the deep tech approach and suggested to consider activities and cooperation that go beyond deep-tech to all types of innovation, including incremental and social innovation and to address also innovation in traditional industries. A few delegates also noted the need to ensure consideration of social inclusion and diversity aspects.

Some delegations underlined that SMEs and mid-caps should not be ignored when it comes to boosting innovation performance of enterprises. The ERAC members underlined the need for speed and flexibility in implementation of the actions, by using existing instruments, including the EIC that needs to reach its full potential and also the EIT and building on the synergies of different instruments. They cautioned for avoiding duplication in use of existing schemes and instruments and also to ensure their complementarity.

Furthermore, ERAC delegations pointed to different local conditions that make the implementation of the Agenda much needed but a difficult task, particularly in “tackling the scale-up gap” flagship.

ERAC members also underlined that the intellectual property rights (IPRs) are crucial for successful scale-up companies in the EU and the work on the IPRs that should go hand in hand with the work on knowledge valorisation, including ERA actions. They noted that there is a need to further develop innovation friendly regulations like the state-aid rules and liberation of regulatory conditions. Some concrete ideas for the state-aid amendments like opening research infrastructures to enterprises as non-economic activity to facilitate transfer of knowledge were provided.

Many ERAC members emphasized the need to close the innovation divide and enhance capacity building in less innovative regions. It was mentioned that stronger innovation ecosystems should cater to all types of innovators, not only deep-tech innovators. The need to involve widening countries in all flagships, not only flagship 3, was underlined.

On the national level, synergies with national and regional instruments as well as with ERDF should be exploited, especially for investments in partnerships.

The Member States supported a flagship on fostering, attracting and retaining deep tech talents, and in particular supporting women entrepreneurs, promoting the diversity in the innovation ecosystem in start-up and scale-ups as well as among investors.

The retention of talents, while permitting its mobility, could be a solution for bridging the innovation divide. The European Institute of Technology (EIT) could be a key partner in implementing this flagship. To achieve the objectives of this flagship, however, will not be possible without national reforms.

Regarding the monitoring, ERAC members insisted on the best-possible use of existing instruments, such as the European Innovation Scoreboard, which could be enhanced by specific indicators to account for the changing environment, terminology and methodology for data related to innovation ecosystems.

ERAC members agreed that no new governance structures should be created for the monitoring of the Agenda implementation.

5. European Research Infrastructures: Digital Transition

ERAC held a debate on the digital transition of European Research Infrastructures. The debate was based on a discussion paper prepared by the Commission services with the ERAC Steering Board (WK 10715/2022).

The ERAC co-Chairs stressed the valuable contribution of the outcome of the debate for the work of the current and upcoming Presidencies, and summarized it as follows:

Europe can be proud of a well-established physical and digital infrastructure landscape at European and national levels based on major investments.

A well-functioning European ecosystem of Research Infrastructures (RIs), integrating European large-scale research infrastructures and complementary national, mid- and small-sized research infrastructures allows to ensure scientific excellence, address major scientific, environmental and societal challenges, underpin competitiveness including industrial value chains thus ensuring important socio-economic impact.

While RIs are one of the main pillars enabling a well-functioning European R&I system, RIs also constitute significant investments into competitiveness fostering, among others, regional development.

The digital transition of RIs fosters their access and impact. RIs are amongst the most advanced in digital transition and are both users of and data providers to the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), already delivering solutions for FAIR data¹. In particular, they can also be considered to be co-developers of EOSC. They already provide high quality data according to EOSC standards which is crucial, in spreading scientific use, attracting users and fostering value creation.

At the same time, RIs can still greatly benefit from a systemic approach at EU level, in practical way and with full respect of national competence, to ensure economies of scale, avoid duplication of efforts, strengthen interoperability building on investments both on physical and digital infrastructures.

The interconnection between physical and digital infrastructures is necessary. It can start with coordination and interconnection between existing digital and research infrastructures, including through the EOSC ecosystem improving quality and relevance of available services and avoiding duplication.

The EU Framework Programme can support this initiative while synergies with European and national funding should also be analysed to avoid duplication of investments and reduce the costs of digital transition. Prioritisation may be needed given possible resource constraints.

Coordination between ESFRI and EOSC is necessary. However, this should by no means lead to any new body and should focus rather on setting up a light and flexible process, such as a joint Task Force.

Coordination with other European initiatives, such as GEANT and EuroHPC, is also necessary.

¹ In the EOSC context, FAIR data stands for ensuring Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable digital assets.

6. Horizon Europe interim evaluation

ERAC exchanged views, in breakout rooms, on the Horizon Europe interim evaluation based on a discussion document prepared by the Commission and the ERAC Steering Board (WK 10717/2022).

The two breakout room sessions were moderated by the PL and NL ERAC representatives and had a focus on:

- synergies and complementarities between the Research Framework programmes and other EU and national R&I programmes, and
- added value resulting from the Research Framework programmes as compared to expectations by Member States and Associated Countries when acting at national and/or regional levels.

The ERAC co-Chairs stressed the valuable outcome of the debates with a view to preparing an ERAC Opinion on the subject, and summarized it as follows:

- a) synergies and complementarities between the H2020 programme and/or Horizon Europe programme and other EU and national R&I programmes;

The need for synergies between EU programmes and national programmes was highlighted as a prerequisite for a successful R&I policy, for enabling a coherent planning of investments, for instance in developing Teaming projects, partnerships or missions. The difficulties are well known, both legal and administrative – as well as the measures needed to overcome those difficulties, such as the alignment of timelines, reporting obligations and so on.

- b) the additional value resulting from the Framework Programmes, compared to what could reasonably have been expected from Member States and Associated Countries acting at national and/or regional levels;

Member States agreed that the Framework Programme has a strong added-value, mentioning examples such as international cooperation in the projects, or broadly accepted and trusted evaluation standards. Institutions that succeed in Horizon Europe are acknowledged as excellent institutions.

It was suggested that the interim evaluation should look at issues such as oversubscription, the impact of missions and the functioning of partnerships.

- c) how to organise ERAC's work towards a comprehensive ERAC opinion on the next Framework Programme

ERAC discussed the possibility of preparing an ERAC opinion on the future Framework Programme (FP 10). It was suggested that an ad hoc temporary task force could be set up to discuss the topic and work on an ERAC opinion in the near future.

The two chairs of the breakout sessions (Dutch and Polish ERAC members) volunteered to take a leading role in developing such an opinion.

7. Strategic debate: ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 – Follow-up on commitments

ERAC held a strategic debate on the follow-up on the commitments by Member States to actions in the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024.

The debate was steered by means of a discussion document with a questionnaire and a factual analysis made by the Commission on the commitments to ERA actions notified by the Member States (WK 10716/2022 + ADD1 REV1).

Regarding the Commission's analysis on the commitments, it was determined that, by the date of the meeting, 16 actions passed the threshold of at least 14 Member States. The only actions that did not reach the threshold were actions 17 (public research performing organisations) and 20 (support to the prioritisation, coordination and direction of R&I investments and reforms). The actions that are currently below the threshold will be reconsidered at a later point during the implementation of the current ERA Policy Agenda or in the context of the next ERA Policy Agenda.

Hopping-on an action, that is, Member States, associated countries or stakeholders joining it at a later stage, should always be possible, as this is an inclusive process. However, hopping-off an action, particularly when that results in less than 14 Member States involved, should be carefully considered.

The Member States, associated countries and stakeholders are encouraged to proceed with the implementation of the 16 ERA actions that have passed the threshold of 14 Member States.

The ERA Forum should develop processes to take stock of the implementation of ERA actions, as well as for the development of ideas for actions in the next ERA Policy Agenda, and inform ERAC accordingly.

8. Any Other Businesses

- The Commission provided a sneak preview of the 2022 edition of the [European Innovation Scoreboard](#). Compared to 2021, innovation performance in 2022 has improved for 19 Member States and declined for eight, according to the report.
- ERAC decided to update its **Work Programme 2022-2023**.
- The **next ERAC meeting is scheduled on 13 February 2023²** (full-day) in Brussels.

² This meeting could be moved to 14 February 2023 depending on availability of meeting rooms.