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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	ERAC draft Opinion on the next ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027

European Research and Innovation Area Committee (ERAC) delegations will find attached a background note on the Draft Opinion on the next ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027), prepared by the Commission, with a view to the ERAC meeting on 11-12 April 2024.

The next ERA Policy Agenda (2025-2027)

Why this topic in ERAC?

As stated in Art. 2(b) and 2(c) of the **ERAC mandate** (st14239/21), ERAC is tasked (inter alia) to *initiate updates of the ERA Policy Agenda by providing early-stage advice as well as to reflect and provide advice on new policy demands which fulfil the ERA Policy Agenda criteria.*

ERAC is therefore informed about the state-of-play of the discussions in the ERA Forum on a regular basis; reports from the co-chairs of the ERA Forum are standing information points at plenary meetings. Furthermore, ERAC was consulted early in the process of developing the next ERA Policy Agenda at its meeting in June 2023 in Lund (st11108.en23). At this meeting, ERAC called for an ERA Policy Agenda, which is **concise and focused**. It was stated that there should be less, simpler and impactful actions, which also take into account the need for stakeholder involvement. ERAC welcomed the variable geometry approach as “one size does *not* fit all”.

At its informal meeting in October 2023 in Malaga, ERAC discussed an outline for a **policy narrative** to accompany the next ERA Policy Agenda. In terms of timing, ERAC agreed with the intention of the Commission to table its **proposal as early as possible in 2025**. The future Hungarian and Polish Council Presidencies confirmed that they would contribute to the preparations of the next ERA Policy Agenda, including with the adoption of Council Conclusions, to take stock of the implementation of the first ERA Policy Agenda under the Hungarian Presidency.

What guidance is needed from ERAC?

ERAC is invited to express its views (1) at the **strategic debate** on 11-12 April in Namur/BE, and (2) by adopting an **ERAC opinion** on the next ERA Policy Agenda (envisaged adoption on 26 June 2024). Following a request for expression of interest, three delegations volunteered as **rapporteurs** for this ERAC opinion: **Belgium, Germany and Spain**. Representatives from Belgium and Spain will moderate the discussion in Namur, which will be held in **two breakout groups**. Both groups are invited to address the following questions with the aim to steer the drafting of the ERAC opinion and to give guidance for the next steps in the ERA Forum:

- *Does the list of proposals (Annex II) meet your expectations in terms of ambition for the next ERA Policy Agenda and does it address the objectives, agreed at the Lund and Malaga meetings, for a relevant, impactful, simpler and clearer ERA Policy Agenda?*
- *With a view of delivering an impactful and streamlined future ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027:*
 - *Which of the proposed topics do you consider of major political importance at your national as well as at the European level?*
 - *Which actions would you be ready to drop?*

- *Do you support the distinction made by the ERA Forum between ‘structural policies’ and ‘ERA actions’ (see annex for definition) and that under both categories specific actions should be implemented?*
- *How can Member States, associated countries and stakeholders, in cooperation with the European Commission, ensure that sufficient resources, along with the necessary reforms, are made available for the implementation of the next ERA Policy Agenda?*

Next steps

Following the discussion in ERAC, the rapporteurs, in cooperation with the European Commission, will prepare a draft “ERAC opinion on the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027”. The draft opinion will be circulated to all ERAC members in due time before the plenary meeting on 26 June.

Annex I: State-of-play of the discussions about the next ERA Policy Agenda

The **ERA Forum** started its deliberations about the design of the next ERA Policy Agenda at a meeting in The Hague in May 2023, based on the outcomes of a gap analysis that identified ERA priority areas which were not sufficiently addressed with the first ERA Policy Agenda. At this occasion a call for new and updated actions was launched, thus starting the co-creation process between ERA Forum representatives and the European Commission on the possible new ERA actions for the years 2025-2027. Since May 2023, the ERA Forum continued its discussions about the next ERA Policy Agenda in seven meetings (07 July 2023; 07 September 2023; 26 October 2023; 16 November 2023; 13-14 December 2023; 02 February 2024; 08 March 2024).

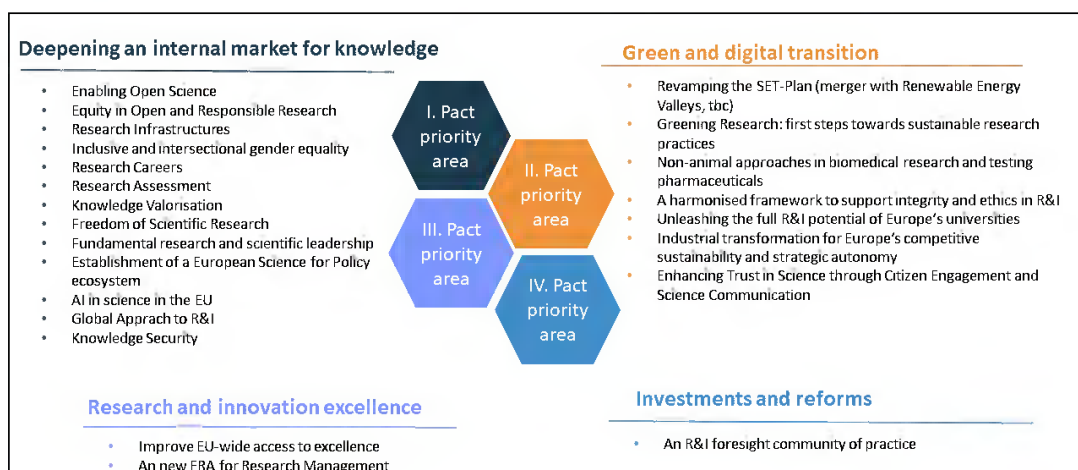
Following a bottom-up, co-creation process, **31 proposals** were pitched – covering the range from **completely new ideas** to the **continuation of existing actions** with updated outcomes. Furthermore, explanatory documents on all proposals delivered clarifications for the necessary filtering and refinement of possible new ERA actions along two of the three criteria agreed in the Pact for R&I – relevance and viability.

In early 2024, ERA Forum representatives were invited to participate in a **survey** to express their views as to the relevance of the 31 proposals. Overall, 23 Member States, 2 associated countries and 13 stakeholder groups participated. The outcome of the survey showed clear **support for 20 proposals**.

Support for three proposals was below 50%, but they were still considered as viable proposals. These are: *Non-animal approaches in biomedical research and testing pharmaceuticals*, *An R&I foresight community of practice* and *Fundamental research and scientific leadership*. Online workshops were organised by the action owners to further clarify these proposals and at the meeting of the ERA Forum on 8 March 2024 additional support was already expressed for these three topics.

The remaining proposals received only minor support or were suggested as possible topics for “mergers” (several citizen science proposals were indeed merged into a single action on enhancing trust in science). The Forum thus arrived at 23 proposals as listed in table 1.

Table 1: List of 23 proposals according to Pact priorities (shortened titles)



During the discussions, ERA Forum representatives suggested to introduce **two categories** within the future ERA Policy Agenda: (1) *ERA actions* = new actions which start and finish within the 3-year ERA Policy Agenda; (2) *Structural policies* = long-term ERA policies, not confined to individual policy agendas and already embedded in MS and European ERA policy, but which should still present a 3-year work plan.

ERA Forum representatives expressed that there is a need to distinguish between these two categories and agreed on a set of features as reflected in table 2.

Table 2: Possible distinction of ERA Structural policies and ERA actions

Category	ERA structural policy	ERA action
Rationale / aim	Policy topics structural to ERA, forming the system in which R&I actors operate.	Filling a specific gap on new or emerging issues with concrete outcomes, e.g. new legislation, policies, strategies, frameworks, funding mechanisms They can also be of exploratory nature or new actions which are “testing grounds”.
Engagement at national level	On structural policies, consistent engagement at national level through long-term investments and reforms is expected.	Implementation at national level varies according to the action.
Time horizon	Implementation of specific objectives setting up a policy framework as part of a longer-term plan and vision that goes beyond the ERA Policy Agenda time frame.	Implementation of a short, time-bound objective, emerging policy issue or piloting initiatives (e.g. under citizen engagement activities) with a clear beginning and end.
Follow up	Evolving objectives, but clear on activities to be carried out within each 3-year ERA Policy Agenda. At completion, possibility to propose new activities.	At completion, ERA Forum can propose a follow-up action or not.
Monitoring	No matter how the future ERA Policy Agenda will be structured, the ERA Monitoring Mechanism will continue to quantitatively assess – through the ERA indicators in the Scoreboard and Dashboard – progress made on the four ERA priorities and the 16 priority areas for joint action as defined in the Pact for R&I. The implementation of ERA actions is monitored qualitatively at EU- and national levels and assessed on the basis of the pre-defined outcomes and milestones. In case “structural policies” will have implementation plans with pre-defined outcomes and milestones they can be monitored/assessed in the same way as “ERA actions”.	

In the above-mentioned survey, ERA Forum representatives were invited to tentatively assign the individual proposals to one of the categories, if they deemed the proposal fit for the ERA Policy Agenda in general.

Table 3 **simulates the distribution** of proposals among the two categories, based on the responses to the survey (keeping in mind that overall, 23 Member States participated in the survey, and that not all of them provided feedback on the categorisation of all proposals). As discussions will continue and the proposals will be further refined, the ERA Forum will come back to this draft categorisation.

Table 3: Simulation of categorisation, taking the survey as a basis

ERA structural policy	ERA action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) • Strengthen Sustainability, Accessibility and Resilience of Research Infrastructures in ERA • Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the European Research Area • Attractive and sustainable research careers • Research Assessment • Knowledge Valorisation • Strengthening Freedom of Scientific Research in the EU • Global Approach to R&I • Improve EU-wide access to excellence • Revamping the SET-Plan (merger with Renewable Energy Valleys, tbc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity in Open and Responsible Research and Innovation • Fundamental research and scientific leadership • Supporting the uptake of science into policymaking through the establishment of a European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem • Facilitating and accelerating the use of AI in science and research in the EU • Knowledge Security • Greening Research: First steps towards sustainable research practices • Non-animal approaches in biomedical research and testing of pharmaceuticals • A harmonised framework to support integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges • Unleashing the full R&I potential of Europe’s universities • Accelerating industrial transformation for Europe’s competitive sustainability and strategic autonomy • Enhancing Trust in Science through Citizen Engagement and Science Communication (merged and re-named) • Empowering Research and Innovation: A New Era in Research Management • An R&I foresight community of practice for the ERA

Annex II: List of ERA Policy Agenda proposals for 2025-27 (actions linked to the first ERA Policy Agenda, with revised/updated outcomes, are highlighted in grey)

Pact priority area for joint action	Action title	Action owner	Outcomes for 2025-27
Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge			
(a) Open Science	Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a high-value federation of EOSC nodes and increase its uptake by research communities • Increase the amount and productivity of FAIR research data in Europe • Propose an EU copyright and data legislative and regulatory framework fit for research • Assess the impact of open science policies and practices based on an open science policy intelligence platform
	Equity in Open and Responsible Research and Innovation	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify open science (OS) equity barriers and challenges in ERA countries (attention also paid to divergence in capacities among countries). • Expansion of not-for-profit open access (OA) scholarly publishing platforms and models in Europe. • Capacity building for equitable access to OS infrastructures, skills for researchers to apply OS practices. Training on open and responsible publishing practices for researchers at all career stages (avoiding predatory publishing). • Recommendations and support for HEIs, RPOs, and RFOs to identify concrete pathways for greater equity in OS practices and infrastructures.
(b) Research infrastructures	Strengthen Sustainability, Accessibility and Resilience of Research Infrastructures in ERA	European Commission (together with ESFRI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic approach for EU support to research infrastructures • Next ESFRI Roadmap and elements for next Landscape Analysis • Results of monitoring ESFRI Landmarks • Reports on resilience and greening of European research infrastructures • Stakeholder engagement (with EOSC, industry, technology infrastructures etc.) events • Report on financing, incl. synergies with national & regional funding, EU and others • Report on international cooperation

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact assessment of ESFRI • Report on further strengthening of ERICs and other excellent European RIs
(c) Gender equality, equal opportunities for all and inclusiveness	Strengthening inclusive gender equality in the European Research Area	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a monitoring and evaluation approach for the effective implementation of (inclusive) Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). • Develop guidelines for implementing intersectionality in R&I policy, including recommended indicators • Design a monitoring and evaluation approach for an increased uptake of the integration of the gender dimension in R&I content • Enhanced gender mainstreaming mechanism for synergies with other ERA actions at the EU and national level. • Implement the Code of Conduct on gender-based violence in R&I developed by Action 5 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024. • Develop principles for gender budgeting in R&I
(d) Researchers' careers and mobility and research assessment and reward systems	Attractive and sustainable research careers	PT and Coimbra (support by the European Commission)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-created guidelines for the implementation of the Council Recommendation on research careers based on the exchange of good practices and lessons learnt, for better quality jobs and a better functioning research labour market • Community of Practices to share experiences in order to advance implementation at European, national, regional, organisational levels on strengthening research careers and improving mobility • Consolidated Research and Innovation Careers Observatory fulfilling the needs of policy makers and stakeholders with the involvement of relevant actors beyond the R&I community, and jointly eliminating gaps • Recommendations for better career development and European tenure-track like models, and related funding mechanisms • Co-created investment pathways, joining and coordinating forces to reduce precarity and to facilitate paths for non-academic research careers
	Research Assessment	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness on reforms of research assessment raised by CoARA, research organisations and national authorities; • Mapping and analysis of the changes introduced in national frameworks and in individual research institutions; • Identification of remaining gaps in reforms and of measures still needed at all levels (institutional, national, European).

(e) Knowledge Valorisation	Knowledge Valorisation	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better recognition of the role of intermediaries and capacity building of knowledge valorisation services including internal KTO/TTOs. • Novel tools and approaches for intellectual assets management for improved access and use including by industry in the international and geopolitical context. • Improved skills and technologies, including AI, for fostering knowledge valorisation. • Increased uptake of non-technological research results from social sciences and humanities for addressing complex societal challenges. • Metrics, indicators and new approaches for better capturing the value created.
(f) Scientific Leadership	Strengthening Freedom of Scientific Research in the EU	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear policy guidelines on how to strengthen freedom of Scientific Research and enhanced international cooperation. • Raise awareness and create a Europe-wide culture of protecting this freedom • Protection of scientists from threats. • Monitoring the state of freedom for scientific research in the EU. • A coordinated EU approach in line with knowledge security developments.
	Fundamental research and scientific leadership	Stakeholder group 4 (individual researchers), The Guild, NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops on the creation of optimal conditions for supporting innovative research of highest scientific quality, and on the direct and indirect impact of fundamental research and its links to global challenges and innovation capacity • A mutual learning exercise to exchange on the investment models of Member States and analysing experiences and evidence for strengthening them (core funding vs. competitive funding, bottom-up vs. challenge-based funding, procedures and requirements that support excellent research, and schemes to reward and attract leading research talent). • Achieve a shared understanding of what is needed for Europe to strengthen its scientific performance and an improved understanding of how to nurture excellent fundamental research in all parts of Europe, both nationally and transnationally
	Supporting the uptake of science into policymaking through the establishment of a European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setup a network of S4P coordinators across Europe to steer the co-creation of the European S4P ecosystem • Exchange and promote best practices through an MLE • Develop a S4P Code of Practice and operational Guidelines for the S4P actors

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish synergies with ERA Actions 3, 4 and 7
	Facilitating and accelerating the use of AI in science in the EU	NL, European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> coordinated plan for AI in Science, comprising additional concrete deliverables like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates of the guidelines on the use of generative AI in research recommendations on specific issues identified by the MS
(g) Global engagement	Global Approach to R&I	European Commission	<p><u>Priorities to be continued:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Science diplomacy Multilateral Dialogue Team Europe Africa and China <p><u>New priorities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research security Other regions
	Knowledge Security	NL, European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up an EU-centre of expertise on knowledge security Set up a permanent structure for EU-cooperation on the policy level Tools to assist the knowledge institutions in developing policy on knowledge security within their organizations Further strengthen the cooperation with international like-minded partners on knowledge security measures
Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation and other challenges with impact on society, and increasing society's participation in the ERA			
(h) Challenge-based ERA actions	Revamping the SET-Plan (<i>poss. merger with Renewable Energy Valleys, TBC</i>)	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed establishment of the ERA Forum subgroup Launch of the tender in support of the SET Plan Launch of the task forces on cross-cutting issues <p><i>Renewable Energy Valleys:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the security and autonomy of energy supply in Europe. Increase the reliability, performance, and affordability of local and regional energy systems, including acceptance of innovative energy solutions. Help territories expected to be the most negatively impacted by the transition towards climate-neutrality. Accelerate the dissemination of knowledge about renewable energy Widen the participation of SSH researchers

	Greening Research: First steps towards sustainable research practices	NL and Science Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common guidelines for assessing the ecological impact of research, promoting comparison and discussion within the ERA. • This process will lead to identify best practices and create a cross-border network of research institutes, fostering knowledge sharing on sustainable research activities.
	Non-animal approaches in biomedical research and testing of pharmaceuticals	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WG1: Development of non-animal approaches and common EU infrastructures • WG2: Validation, acceptance and implementation of NAMs • WG3: Education and Training • WG4: Openness and awareness
	A harmonised framework to support integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges	Science Europe, with support by the European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up a network of national integrity and ethics coordinators. • Develop and publish the guidelines, which will take the form of a communication from the European Commission.
(i) Synergies with education and the European Skills Agenda	Unleashing the full R&I potential of Europe's universities	FR and Coimbra group with support from the European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of an open and structured dialogue between Member States, Commission, and university sector (building on but going beyond the current ERA Action 13 subgroup's focus on 'raising excellence') • Achieved consensus about the necessary European and national level measures to empower universities to develop in line with the new ERA (following-up but also going beyond recommendations of current ERA Action 13) • Enhanced coordination of European and national level R&I policies and programme instruments, taking into account all universities' missions (education, research, innovation, service to society) <p>To be achieved through a structured process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs mapping by MS (year 1), incl. following-up on the current ERA Action 13 subgroup's work and available studies • Co-creation of policy and funding recommendations (years 1-2), including remaining Action 13 gaps • Preparation of a roadmap for action at MS and EU level, and monitoring (year 2-3)

(j) Synergies with sectorial policies [...]	Accelerating industrial transformation for Europe's competitive sustainability and strategic autonomy	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerating decarbonisation of energy-intensive industries: facilitating design and implementation of national industrial technology roadmaps, bringing industrial demonstrators to the market, facilitating the transfer of decarbonisation technologies. • Advancing circular economy: MLE on circular technologies, pilots supporting circular economy, strengthening Hubs4Circularity. • Implementation of a European approach to Technology Infrastructures: setting up an EU coordination mechanism, implementation of strategic pilots. • Scaling up of Industry 5.0: follow-up of the ERA Technology Roadmap, Community of Practice, Industry 5.0 Assessment Tool. • Clarity on the European and national policy toolboxes and synergies for common priorities
	Enhancing Trust in Science through Citizen Engagement and Science Communication (merged and re-named)	European Commission; DE; SE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective mechanisms for substantial public engagement in R&I (especially for HEIs, RPOs and RFOs) enhancing trust in science and democracy. • Better support and recognition of citizen science and other engagement projects by enabling scale-up at European level, while ensuring more balanced representation of social groups and audiences. • Science communication and science engagement bolstered via commonly developed European guidelines (equally aided by indicators measuring effectiveness and impact) reflecting richness of approaches. • Strengthened science-society links at national/local level via public dialogues and interactive public initiatives aiming to showcase the integrity and reliability of R&I. • Increased scientific literacy and science capital by enhancing the links between the scientific community and young people or those not habitually interested in science.

Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union and enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems across the Union			
(l) More investments and reforms in countries and regions with lower R&I performance	----		
(m) Synergies between Union, national and regional funding programmes	Improve EU-wide access to excellence	European Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened cooperation between bodies involved in the management of ERDF and HE at national level and with the EU level, as recommended by the ECA. Facilitated exchange of practices on actions improving access to excellence across the EU, notably the implementation of ERDF-HE synergies, governance models of collaboration and shared outcomes and practices from WIDERA projects. Suggestions for enhanced facilitation of synergies in the next MFF.
(n) Increased collaborative links and the excellence-based integration of research-performing organisations	Empowering Research and Innovation: A New Era in Research Management	DE and HU (support by Aurora and European Commission)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clear and consistent appreciation of the added value of professional research management across ERA: evidence-based awareness raising campaign amongst R&I policy/decision makers, RPO leaders and scientists. Enhanced and further developed recognition of the research management profession: launch and implementation of a career and competence framework in all MS, supported by a monitoring mechanism. Established online platform to gather and generate accessible, existing and new curricula, upskilling activities and tools, including AI tools; wide and easy access, focussing esp. on early career research managers and scientific leaders. Recognised Europe-wide learning and skills development research management programme with peer-to-peer learning and mobility components. Initiated links with industrial research management for a triangle approach (RPO-RFO-industry) as a secondary step, offering potential synergy with innovation policies and Knowledge Valorisation Action

Advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms			
(o) Support to prioritise and secure long-term R&I investments and policy reforms	-----		
(p) Coordination of research and innovation investments	An R&I foresight community of practice for the ERA	BE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&I Foresight as institutionalised part of evidence-informed and future-oriented policy making • Strengthened preparedness of institutions and policies • Investment of national/regional resources in R&I foresight activities • Network remains active after the end of the CSA and the ERA action