



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Conclusions on 'A reinforced European research area partnership for excellence and growth'

*3208th COMPETITIVENESS (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space)
Council meeting
Brussels, 11 December 2012*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

- Its Resolution of 15 June 2000 establishing a European Research Area (ERA)¹ following the European Council held on 23 and 24 March 2000² which agreed on the Lisbon strategy;
- Its Conclusions of 29 May 2008 on the "Ljubljana Process - Towards realisation of ERA"³, in which it set out general orientations on ERA and of 2 December 2008 on the definition of a 2020 vision for ERA⁴;
- Its Conclusions of 29 May 2009 on "first steps towards the realisation of the ERA Vision 2020"⁵, its Resolutions of 3 December 2009 on the "enhanced Governance of the ERA"⁶, of 26 May 2010 on the "developments in the Governance of the ERA"⁷, and the Council Conclusions of 31 May 2011 on the "development of the ERA through ERA-related Groups"⁸;

¹ OJ C 205, 17.7.2000, p.1.

² Doc. 100/00

³ Doc. 10231/08

⁴ Official Journal C 25, 31.1.2009, p. 1-4.

⁵ Doc. 9956/09

⁶ OJ C 323, 31.12.2009, p. 1-4.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/docs/en/council-resolution-on-era-governance_26-05-10.pdf

⁸ Doc. 10525/11

P R E S S

- Its Conclusions and Resolutions of 2 December 2008, 3 December 2009, 12 October 2010 and 30 September 2011 on "Joint Programming in Research in response to major societal challenges"⁹ and of 6 December 2011 on "Partnering in research and innovation"¹⁰ and on "Launching of five joint programming initiatives for research"¹¹;
 - Its Conclusions of 26 November 2010 on the "Europe 2020 flagship initiative Innovation Union: Accelerating the transformation of Europe through innovation in a fast changing world"¹² confirming that a well-functioning and coherent ERA is an integral part of the Innovation Union to strengthen the knowledge base in Europe;
 - The Conclusions of the European Council of 3-4 February 2011¹³ that confirmed that Europe needs a unified research area to attract talent and investment and called for the completion of the ERA by 2014, including by addressing any remaining gaps in order to create a genuine single market for knowledge, research and innovation, as confirmed by the European Council of 2 March 2012¹⁴, and recalled in its Conclusions of 29 June 2012¹⁵ and of 18-19 October 2012¹⁶;
 - The ERAC opinion on the "development of an ERA Framework" of 9 December 2011¹⁷; and the ERAC opinion on "the relationship between the ERA and Horizon 2020" of 30 August 2012, calling for good coordination in implementation and monitoring of ERA policy and Horizon 2020 at EU and national level¹⁸;
1. REAFFIRMS that the realisation of the ERA in the context of the Innovation Union is a necessary component of the EU 2020 strategy to create growth and jobs, considering the current budgetary constraints of the EU and its Member States, to increase the level of excellence of Europe's public research system and maximise the return on public R&D investments. ACKNOWLEDGES the substantial progress in achieving the ERA since its launch in 2000, noting the wide variation of the performance of national research and innovation systems, and STRESSES the importance of stepping up the progress across the Union to contribute towards strengthening the Union's scientific and technological bases.
 2. REAFFIRMS the need for Member States to improve the conditions for research and development, in particular with the aim of raising public and private investment levels in this sector, to reach the EU target of investing 3% of EU GDP in research and development by 2020.
 3. WELCOMES the Communication of the Commission "A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth" of 17 July 2012¹⁹, its key priorities and

⁹ Doc. 16775/08, doc. 17226/09, doc. 14976/10, doc. 14992/11.

¹⁰ Doc. 18349/11

¹¹ Doc. 18345/11

¹² Doc. 17165/10

¹³ EUCO 2/11

¹⁴ EUCO 4/3/12 REV 3

¹⁵ EUCO 76/12

¹⁶ EUCO 156/12

¹⁷ ERAC 1215/11

¹⁸ ERAC 1207/12

¹⁹ Doc. 12848/12

proposed actions identified on the basis of a broad stakeholder consultation and AGREES with the choice to reinforce the existing partnership to make progress on these priorities, therefore INVITES Member States, stakeholder organisations and the European Commission to cooperate in that context to realise the ERA.

4. ACKNOWLEDGES the first step towards this deepening and broadening of the ERA partnership, as expressed by a number of important European associations of research stakeholder organisations²⁰ in a Joint Statement, and subsequently signed Memoranda of Understanding and other expressions of willingness to work towards completing the ERA²¹.
5. RECALLS that the external dimension is a vital, cross-cutting and integral part of the ERA and that deepening and strengthening the partnership between the Commission and the Member States will therefore be an important element of the strategic approach towards enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation. EMPHASISES the relevance of the Communication of the Commission “Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach”²² for achieving the ERA. RECALLS the close cooperation needed with Associated Countries in the development of the ERA.
6. Recalling its ambition to realise strong synergies between innovation, research and education policies and stakeholders for a better functioning of the knowledge triangle, in order to foster excellence of science and unleash the full innovation potential of Europe, thereby also contributing to economic growth, CONSIDERS that achieving the ERA reinforces the Union's modernisation agenda for higher education²³ and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)²⁴ and EMPHASISES the need to complement and step up the ERA related actions in the context of the implementation of the Innovation Union²⁵.

²⁰ European University Association (EUA), League of Research Universities (LERU), European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (EARTO), Nordforsk and Science Europe.

²¹ Unilateral declaration Science Europe; earlier MoUs signed with CERN (2009), EMBL (2011), Statement of intent signed with EIROforum (2010).

²² Doc. 14000/12

²³ Doc. 16746/11

²⁴ Bucharest Communiqué, 26-27 April 2012.

²⁵ Doc. 16834/10 and doc. 18244/11

More effective national research systems

7. CONSIDERS that open national-level competition is crucial to deriving maximum value from public money invested in research. NOTES the existence of best-practice which all Member States should attain in order to overcome divergences in research performance across the EU, involving allocating scientific research funding through open calls for proposals, evaluated by panels of independent experts, including international experts, and assessing the quality and outputs of research-performing organisations and teams.
8. UNDERLINES the need to support Member States and regions in developing smart specialisation strategies for using Structural Funds for research and innovation.

Optimal transnational co-operation and competition

9. STRESSES the need for the EU to act rapidly and coherently to achieve the scale of impact needed to effectively address societal challenges with available research funds.
10. WELCOMES the commitments shown since 2009 by Member States to addressing societal challenges by the Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) and their efforts to develop Strategic Research Agendas and EMPHASISES the need to accelerate their implementation in a coherent manner. STRESSES that no new instruments, programmes or initiatives in equivalent areas at EU level should be launched when this could lead to fragmentation on research and innovation actors.
11. EMPHASISES that transnational research and innovation should be enabled by fostering and exploiting synergies between national programmes with international programmes, where appropriate by strategically aligning national funds and other funds at EU level, rather than cross-border funding per se.
12. WELCOMES the Communication as a basis for a strengthened partnership in the field of research infrastructures, leading to economies of scale, encouragement of scientific excellence and higher attractiveness for top researchers from all around the world.
13. CONSIDERS that excellent research depends notably upon world-class facilities and research infrastructures, including regional partner facilities, e-infrastructures that enable computer- and data-intensive collaborative research, and remote access to resources and equipment, and that research infrastructures attract talent and stimulate science, research, education, innovation and business opportunities.
14. STRESSES that transnational access to research infrastructures remains a priority for the research community across Europe and NOTES the need for common standards and harmonized access rules and conditions for the use of research infrastructures and for continued EU support to transnational access activities.

15. EMPHASISES the need for renewing and adapting the mandate of ESFRI to adequately address the existing challenges and also to ensure the follow-up of implementation of already on-going ESFRI projects after a comprehensive assessment, as well as the prioritisation of the infrastructure projects listed in the ESFRI roadmap.

An open labour market for researchers

16. RECALLS the need to realise a genuine European research labour market, and NOTES that one of the most important remaining challenges across the EU is the realisation of transparent, open and merit-based recruitment where this is not available, which would make research careers more attractive and foster mobility and ultimately research quality. NOTES that adequate measures should be taken within the EU research and innovation programmes using instruments within Horizon 2020 to promote the shift to brain circulation across the Union.
17. EMPHASISES the need to, inter alia, improve human resources policies within research organisations, and further promote innovative doctoral training, gender equality practices, academia-business cooperation, including mobility and fair recognition of academic degrees.

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in research

18. UNDERLINES that both national and EU-level strategies should be strengthened in order to make optimal use of female talent and of increased participation of talented and highly skilled women, including by establishing more attractive working conditions, and CONSIDERS that the integration of a gender dimension into the design, evaluation and implementation of research needs to be improved to effectively foster research and innovation excellence.
19. NOTES the intention of the Commission to propose in 2013 a Recommendation to Member States with common guidelines on institutional change to promote gender equality in universities and research institutions.

Optimal circulation, access to and transfer of scientific knowledge

20. UNDERLINES the importance of Open Access and that broader and more rapid access to scientific publications and, where appropriate, data will help researchers and businesses to build on the findings of publicly funded research. This will boost Europe's innovation capacity, help to tackle societal challenges and provide citizens with quicker access to scientific discoveries. EMPHASISES the relevance for achieving the ERA of the Communication "Towards better access to scientific information: Boosting the benefits of public investments in research"²⁶. Regarding open access to data, RECOGNISES the need for further preparations and discussions for launching a pilot scheme in Horizon 2020.

²⁶ Doc. 12847/12

21. STRESSES the need to foster effective knowledge transfer between both public research institutions and the private sector in general and also in the context of Open Innovation.
22. EMPHASISES that as most knowledge creation and dissemination uses digital means, barriers to online access to digital research services for collaboration, computing and accessing scientific information (e-Science) and to e-infrastructures must be addressed to promote a "digital European Research Area". Moreover, transfer of knowledge should also be taken into account when establishing research cooperation with non-EU countries. This is also vital to increase Europe's competitiveness, by securing mutual benefits of high value knowledge and avoiding, where possible, any unwarranted loss of know-how.

Conditions for success

23. INVITES Member States to identify the national reforms and actions needed for achieving the ERA in the context of the Innovation Union, according to their national specificities, and to present these reforms and their subsequent implementation when reporting on national ERA measures, where appropriate in the National Reform Programmes starting from the 2013 European Semester, to cooperate with national research stakeholder organisations in implementing the necessary measures and to contribute actively to the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the achievement of the ERA.
24. ENCOURAGES research stakeholder organisations to, within their mandate, take responsibility for the implementation of the relevant ERA actions addressed to them in the ERA Communication.
25. NOTES the intention of the Commission to implement a number of actions in the context of the reinforced ERA partnership, in close cooperation with Member States and to support Member States and stakeholder organisations with the implementation of their relevant actions, including by ensuring inclusive ERA policy by structured dialogue with relevant stakeholders.
26. CONSIDERS that achieving the ERA will require monitoring of ERA progress in close connection with the European Semester, as well as top-level steering by the Council, informed by regular dialogue with all stakeholders and annual feedback from monitoring of implementation and evaluation of ERA progress, and INVITES therefore the Commission to develop a robust ERA monitoring mechanism (EMM), in close cooperation with the Member States, based on well defined indicators for actions and monitoring of ERA policy reforms and their implementation. These indicators should be developed based as much as possible on existing indicators in close coordination with the relevant process followed by EUROSTAT. Member States will be consulted on the whole process through ERAC.

27. EMPHASISES the need to maintain overall consistency between this mechanism and other relevant monitoring activities, in particular of the Innovation Union and Horizon 2020²⁷, and the need to avoid burdens for Member States and research organisations by additional data gathering; WELCOMES in this regard the intention by the European Commission to explore available data on ERA progress to the full extent and to streamline all R&I monitoring activities in a single European Research and Innovation Observatory.
28. INVITES Member States via ERAC, while consolidating input by other ERA related groups, to contribute to the monitoring of ERA progress based on exchange of best practices and mutual learning from national actions and reforms made to achieve the ERA.
29. NOTES the progress in the review of the mandate of the European Research Area Committee (ERAC)²⁸ and CONFIRMS its intention to take a position on this review as soon as possible in 2013.
30. NOTES the intention of the Commission to ensure that the implementation of Horizon 2020, including the EIT, will help to consolidate the functioning of the ERA from 2014 onwards, by ERA-compliant actions relating to, in particular, researcher careers and mobility, gender, cross-border cooperation, open access, digital research services, knowledge transfer and research infrastructures.
31. NOTES the intention by the Commission to prepare, in close interaction with ERAC, a first annual ERA progress report by the end of 2013, and an annual assessment of progress from 2014 onwards to be transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament. The first progress report will take into account the progress made since the start of the Ljubljana process in early 2008, based on official statistics and other quantitative and qualitative data as provided by Member States and the baseline mainly based on 2011 data, while comparing these data with the ERA actions announced by Member States following the ERA Communication.
32. INVITES ERAC to provide strategic advice to the Council on ERA progress based on the progress reports, and to identify for Member States and the Commission, if necessary, the possible further development of the statistical basis."

²⁷ ERAC advice on the relationship between the ERA and Horizon 2020 of 30 August 2012 Doc. 1207/12.

²⁸ Council Resolution on Developments in the Governance of the ERA of 26 May 2010. Doc. 10255/10.