

EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 6 May, 2011

**EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
COMMITTEE**

**– ERAC –
Secretariat**

ERAC 1206/11

NOTE

To: ERAC delegations

Subject: ERAC advice on the review of ERA-related Groups

Delegations will find attached the ERAC advice on the review of ERA-related Groups approved by written procedure on 5 May 2011.

ERAC advice on the review of ERA-related groups

Four ERA groups were created or refocused early 2009 to steer the "ERA Partnerships" between Member States and the Commission on Human resources, Joint programming, Knowledge-sharing and International S&T cooperation. In December 2009, the Council invited the Member States and the Commission to initiate a review of the groups by the end of 2010 (Council Resolution of 3 December 2009 on the enhanced governance of the European Research Area).

ERAC agreed during its meeting in December 2010 on the main issues to be addressed in this review and on the procedure to follow. On the basis of the report (attached) from the Rapporteur (Jane Peters, ERAC delegate, UK), the input from the European Commission (attached) and from (the Chairs of) the ERA-related Groups themselves, ERAC has agreed on this advice.

ERAC recalls the Council resolution of 26 May 2010 on developments in the governance of the European Research Area. ERAC has been given a strategic mandate covering “any research and innovation issue relevant to the development of ERA”. In this context, this resolution is especially relevant as it sets the basis for the relation between ERAC and the ERA-related groups; it entrusts ERAC with keeping overview of other ERA-related groups and to cooperate and consult with them.

1. Mandates

ERAC agrees with the report that the basic thrust of the existing mandates remains valid and that all four groups should continue their work.

Against the background of the European Council's Conclusions of 4 February 2011 calling for the completion of ERA by 2014, ERAC welcomes the Commission's request for support from ERAC and the four groups in the process of developing the ERA Framework.

To emphasize the importance and urgency of this process, ERAC suggests that the Council calls on the groups to engage in this work and to give this appropriate priority in order to be able to provide timely input to the Commission and to the ERAC opinion on the ERA Framework, by early October 2011. They could build on their earlier work and the evidence and knowledge already gathered, and focus, in particular, on a sound analysis of obstacles that prevent the realisation of ERA.

The Innovation Union (IU) Communication stressed the role of ERAC in fostering progress by Member States in implementing the IU. Obviously, in addition to supporting the preparation of the ERA Framework, the ERA groups should contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the other commitments in the IU. ERAC welcomes that in some of the groups reflections have started on this issue, but with different degrees of progress. Therefore, in the light of the Commission's Communication on the IU and the Council conclusions of 26 November 2010, ERAC invites the Commission to provide before the end of October more detailed information regarding the aspects of the IU implementation process, on which the advisory work of the groups could focus, to enable them to organize their work. ERAC will then return to this matter at its meeting in November.

On the basis of this additional information, ERAC is prepared to return, in dialogue with the groups concerned, to the question if revision of mandates will be necessary and if so, what changes are necessary and what would be the appropriate way to realise this taking into account the different status of the groups.

2. Harmonisation of the groups and their working methods

The report notes that the four groups were established at different times and on different bases. The report acknowledges the Commission's view in favour of harmonized and streamlined mandates and governance structures, as well as the need for strengthening the links between ERAC and the groups.

ERAC agrees that a first step in the direction of more comparable groups could be to replace the current Steering Group for Human Resources and Mobility (SGHRM) with a new ERAC Working Group, which would carry over the work of the SGHRM. This would emphasize the strategic character of this area and facilitate the linkage between ERAC and this group. Such a change should be further studied.

ERAC also agrees with the suggested changes in working methods. The four ERA groups should function at a strategic level, with representatives from Member States and Associated States at a sufficiently high level. The groups could aim for a limited number of plenary meetings, dealing with strategic issues (approving their work programmes, reporting to ERAC, keeping overview of progress), and for a systematic use of *ad hoc* subgroups with dedicated, task-oriented and time-limited mandates.

ERAC suggests that the report will be well communicated to the groups, and the groups to be encouraged to develop their working methods along these lines.

3. Chairing

ERAC agrees with the report that the Chairs of the groups should be elected Member state representatives, which is already the case in two of the Groups. Member States could consider proposing ERAC delegates for this role. In the case of GPC, the group is chaired by a representative of the Presidency-in-office of the Council. If the mandate of the GPC would need to be amended, it would seem practical to return to the issue of Chair in that context.

ERAC also agrees that the Chairs of the groups should be supported by an elected Vice-Chair.

4. Relationship between ERAC and the ERA-related groups

According to the report, there are differing views among MS on the issue of to whom – Council or ERAC – some of the groups should report. ERAC notes that the reporting line is only one aspect of the relationship. From a Council perspective, and from the perspective of a coherent ERA policy, reporting from the groups should preferably be coordinated in advance. This should clearly be the responsibility of ERAC, given its mandate as described above.

The need to develop cooperation is stressed in the ERAC mandate and the responsibility to pursue this rests on all parties. Strengthened links to support this cooperation could be achieved e.g. through input from each group to be programmed into the ERAC work plan and by regular coordination between the ERAC Steering Board and the Chairs of the groups.

By being informed timely, ERAC can monitor the development of ERA and assess whether reports to be sent to Council would be consistent with broader strategic considerations.

ERA GROUPS REVIEW- RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT**Introduction**

1. The ERAC meeting in December 2010 agreed to a review of the four “core” ERA Groups (GPC, SFIC, SGHRM and KT) in order to assess their effectiveness and determine what changes, if any, in mandate and governance may be required to ensure that they support the delivery of the ERA in the most effective way possible.
2. Further to this the rapporteur (Jane Peters, UK) circulated a questionnaire to ERAC members. 21 Member States (AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PT, SE, SK, UK) and 2 Associated Countries (CH, NO) have replied on all or some of the Groups. Past and present Chairs of the SGHRM and GPC have also been interviewed. The views of the Commission on the operations of the individual groups have also been received as well as a letter from the Director General summarising the Commission's views and suggestions for the future governance of the Groups. The latter is attached. Following the February ERAC meeting the chair of the Steering Board wrote to the chairs of the Groups formally seeking their input into the process.
3. The present document seeks to summarise the points emerging from the questionnaire replies and subsequent input. It is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature since the responses received do not readily lend themselves to quantitative analysis.

General issues

4. Before analysing the experience of each group individually and looking at general governance issues common to the groups, there are a few general points which it may be worth making at the outset. Firstly, it appears that the work of all four Groups has had a positive impact on domestic developments strengthening the ability of Member States to advance the ERA agenda. This impact has however been patchy. All of the Member States report impacts on national developments which can be linked to the work of one or more of the Groups but not all Groups have had an impact on all Member States. In some cases this may be because existing Member State legislation and practices on, say, researcher skills development or knowledge transfer is already in line with the “best practice” promoted by the Groups; in others however it may be because Member States lack resources or national funding programmes to participate effectively in Joint Programming or international cooperation. It is therefore rather difficult to reach general conclusions about the overall effectiveness of individual Groups in influencing national policy developments.

5. Secondly a number of Member States (echoed in some respects for some of the Groups by the Commission) have expressed concerns about the level of commitment to the Groups’ work and the quality of representation (whether in terms of levels of attendance at meetings, the seniority of participants, their effective linkage to domestic policy makers and funding bodies or their expertise) at Group meetings. The other side of this is a concern, particularly voiced by some smaller Member States, that they found participation in one or more of the Groups burdensome and resource intensive. It is not easy to resolve these issues (which appear to have raised fewer concerns in respect of the GPC than the other groups); for example, while some responses in respect of the KT Group expressed satisfaction that its membership was composed of experts in the field, others felt this resulted in an excessively narrow vision. In any case it would not be appropriate (even if it were feasible) for ERAC to dictate who Member States should send to a given Group. Some possible approaches to this set of issues are set out later in this document but it may have to be recognised that it is not possible to arrive at a completely satisfactory solution which resolves all the tensions between the need for high level and/or expert Member State engagement in order to ensure progress on the ERA axes and the need to avoid imposing excessive burdens on national administrations on the other.

6. Thirdly, a number of Member States have expressed concerns about the level of logistical support to the Groups, both from the Council Secretariat (for SFIC) and Commission (for SGHRM and KT), in particular over such issues as timely circulation of papers, booking of rooms for meetings etc.
7. Finally there were some concerns that the work of individual Groups (apart perhaps from that of the GPC) did not have enough recognition and profile in a wider research policy world beyond Brussels. There were suggestions that a dedicated web space for the Groups should be found (e.g. in the ERA web pages on CORDIS) to give their work a higher profile.

Group Specific Issues

GPC

8. There is a fairly broad consensus that this Group has completely or very largely delivered its mandate by identifying ten possible areas for Joint Programming Initiatives and developing Framework Conditions for JPIs- though several MS believe that further work on these Conditions and on reviewing their implementation (e.g. in the context of the Innovation Union Flagship Initiative) is required. There was also a broad consensus that the main immediate concern in this field was to monitor developments on the existing JPIs rather than develop proposals for launching further ones, though it was possible that foresight work to identify possible future candidates might be required in the longer term. There was also a view that work needed to be done on the relationship between JPIs and European Innovation Partnerships, though less consensus on whether a re-launched GPC would be the best forum for this.
9. Looking forward, the majority of Member States took the view that GPC should continue with a mandate which focused on the issues identified above (monitoring and oversight of JPIs and refinement of the Framework Conditions); this might best be delivered via working groups supplemented by one high level meeting of the full Group per Presidency.

10. The Commission's view is that the Group's work has been well aligned with the need to deliver its objectives and that Member State commitment has been adequate, with good links to key national stakeholders. It is argued that the Group has partially delivered its mandate but that further work needs to be done on ensuring commitment to the "second wave" of JPIs. It is therefore suggested that the Group should continue with a revised mandate to oversee the development of the JPIs which have been launched and to provide input relating to cross-border operation of research funding and performing organisations to the development of the ERA Framework. The Commission suggests that future Group membership should ensure the presence of relevant ministries and could be flexible depending on the topics under discussion and that the Group's governance might be strengthened by the creation of a Steering Board to define future work programmes.

11. The Group has replied to the Chair of the Steering Board's letter, underlining that it is successfully delivering its mandate and making suggestions as to future work (monitoring the development of the existing JPIs, further work on framework conditions, work on clarifying the relationship between JPIs and other instruments, especially those funded under the Common Strategic Framework). The response notes a divergence of opinion within the Group on Foresight work (with some members suggesting that this should be outsourced) and on its relationship with ERAC (where some see advantages in it remaining an independent group reporting directly to the Council while others believe it should report to ERAC). The Group will reflect on its working methods, with a possibility that Plenary meetings would be a forum for strategic discussions while more detailed work was carried forward in other fora. The response suggests that the Group's mandate should be reviewed within three years.

SFIC

12. There is considerable divergence in the assessment of this Group, with some Member States expressing the view that it has completely delivered its mandate while others feel that it has only done so to a limited extent and even questioning whether the Group is required in the future. There are concerns about the extent to which the Group has actually developed (or been able to develop) a genuinely strategic overview of international cooperation issues and a feeling from some Member States that initiatives have been launched with inadequate preparation. Several Member States are unhappy with the effectiveness of the “SharePoint” system and, though several Member States express satisfaction at the level of support provided by the Commission, one expresses a concern that the Group’s agenda is increasingly being set by the Commission, if only by default. It may be relevant that there is a tendency for smaller Member States to be more satisfied with the work of the Group than larger ones, though there is one important exception to this generalisation
13. Although one Member State suggests that the Group should be wound up, with its work being “mainstreamed” within that of ERAC and of the other Groups, the clear majority view is that the Group should continue because so much ongoing work remains to be done. There is less coherence about views on its future mandate. While the majority of Member States have suggested that this should be strengthened, the areas which it is suggested a new mandate should cover are varied. The strongest call is for work on the development of an overall European R&D internationalisation strategy taking account of the Innovation Union initiative; other possible topics include contributing to the development of FP8, improving coordination of the international aspects of the other ERA initiatives, establishing procedures to improve coordination of international research policy within Member States and contributing to bilateral agreements between the EU and other major scientific players at national or regional level. There appears to be less support for launching specific initiatives like the India water initiative in future though several Member States clearly felt that this initiative had been useful. There is also some support for the idea that there should be fewer meetings of the full Group with detailed work being taken forward by dedicated sub groups. On the other hand, one Member State suggests that the enhanced role of the Group as a key decision making forum for all issues on the internationalisation of R&D and innovation policy issues should be enhanced, to the extent that a permanent SFIC Secretariat would be required.

14. The Commission believe that the Group has made large progress on achieving its objectives, though these are themselves constantly evolving. In particular the Commission highlight the information sharing activities of the Group and its role in structuring the work of Science Counsellors in partner countries, noting that the former element needs still more attention and effort for Member States. The Commission list a number of initiatives undertaken jointly between the EU and Member States in respect of third countries (e.g. India, China, USA) and on global challenges (the Energy Pilot Initiative) which SFIC has participated in. As far as the future is concerned, the Commission believe that the existing Group mandate is valid, possibly modified to align with innovation-related issues related to the Innovation Union initiative. The need to maintain Member State representation at a high level is stressed; it is also suggested that the SFIC chair should be an ERAC member as a way of improving coordination between SFIC and ERAC.
15. The response of the outgoing and newly elected Group Chairs to the Chair of the Steering Group is that they feel there is more consensus within in the Group than the summary of responses suggests. They think that it should be possible to pursue both the development of a European S&T internationalisation strategy and of specific initiatives like the Indian pilot initiative in future and indeed that this twofold approach should be at the centre of the future work plans of the Group. They note that the Group is working on a revised approach to working methods and will also be presenting suggestions for revisions to its mandate to the Council. The two Chairs stress that the success of the Group lies very much in the hands of the Member States themselves in terms of the level of commitment they are prepared to make to its work and the national level resources they commit to internationalisation. Finally, they underline their belief that it is proper for the body overseeing a Member State driven initiative to report directly to the Council and that their membership of ERAC will ensure adequate cooperation between SFIC and ERAC.

16. Again there are very varied assessments of the effectiveness of this group, which appears to have had very varied levels of commitment from participants (several Member States report that most of the work was done by a minority of the members and one complains of a lack of momentum between meetings). While in formal terms most of the deliverables identified in the mandate have been achieved or are ongoing and likely to be delivered in the very near future most of the work was done by specialised working groups. Some Member States complain of a lack of clarity over lines of communication, linkages to work in other Groups and ultimate ownership of the outputs of the group (such as the report on the implementation of the Recommendation and Code of Practice).
17. Looking forward, one Member State suggests that the work of this Group should be merged with that of SFIC since the main outstanding issues lie in the international cooperation field. Some suggest focussing the future mandate more narrowly on monitoring the implementation of the Recommendation and Code. Rather more suggest expanding it to include a more wide ranging role dealing with IP aspects related to Innovation Union, with some going further and suggesting it should be involved in the preparation of FP8 and even the development of an EU Patent.
18. The Commission's view is that the Group's objectives have been partially delivered and that its activities have had a positive effect within Member States (both through domestic implementation of the Recommendation and through the sharing of best practices). Continuing work on indicators and guidelines related to international cooperation is noted. There are however some concerns that not all Member States are represented at a sufficiently high level. Looking ahead, the Commission believe that the original objectives of the Group- particularly in regard to monitoring and reporting- remain valid but that there is scope for an overhauled mandate more closely focused on meeting Innovation Union commitments. It is suggested that two Group meetings a year (in place of the current four) would be adequate to share best practice and allow mutual learning.

19. The Chair of the KT Group has responded to the Chair of the Steering Board, stressing the closeness of the Groups collaboration with both GPC and SFIC- in the latter case he suggests that this was already in line with the proposals for closer cooperation suggested in the letter. He also notes that the Group gave feedback to ERAC on its activities. He agrees with the suggested future focus of the Group on Innovation Union issues but regrets that timing issues have made it impossible to obtain a considered response from the Group as whole.

SGHRM

20. Yet again there is something of a divergence of opinion on the effectiveness of the Group, though a clear majority think it has delivered an appreciable amount of a very ambitious mandate. It is however noted by many Member States that the Group has oversight of a very wide range of issues in the researcher careers and mobility field and that a certain amount of selection and prioritisation of issues to address is inevitable. Several Member States make the argument that the bulk of the work of the Group has in practice been done through specialist Working Groups, with formal group meetings becoming increasingly dominated by reports and exchanges of information rather than serious policy discussions.
21. There are also complaints from several Member States that some important work (in particular on the pensions/social security dossier) has in effect been taken over by the Commission with input from the Group severely reduced; one Member States goes so far as to argue that the Commission rather than the Member States is driving the agenda in the areas covered by the Group. This links to more widely expressed concerns about issues of expertise and the argument that the Group needs to be more flexible in its membership in order to ensure that people who are genuinely expert in the various issues under consideration are able to attend meetings (or at least that ways of including experts from, say, industry in its work as required need to be found).

22. There appears to be general agreement that the Group's mandate and work remain relevant and indeed has a particular importance in an Innovation Union context. This does not exclude some fine tuning of the mandate to reflect a changing environment (e.g. Innovation Union and the proposed ERA Framework) and shifting priorities which need to be addressed in order to deliver the European Partnership for Researchers- for instance to address an evolving situation in which work on issues related to researcher careers takes an increasingly high priority as against the purely mobility-related issues on which the Group initially focused.
23. The Commission believe that the Group has partially met a very ambitious set of objectives, consciously choosing to concentrate on a limited number of issues at a given time. This means that important issues remain to be addressed. The Commission view is that Member State representation has mostly been adequate, though there are concerns that some delegates have had difficulty in getting unified positions from their authorities and a feeling that they may need more support at higher political level to exercise real influence on national developments. Nevertheless much useful work has been done which had had impact on national level activities. Looking forward, the Commission think that the Group's mandate should be adapted to have the implementation of Innovation Union and preparation of the ERA Framework as its primary objectives. It is also noted that reporting to the ERAC has been largely formal.
24. The chair of the Group has responded to the Steering Board chair's letter requesting the Group's collective views. In this letter he stresses the "independent" nature of the Group while being open to the concept of reporting to the Council via ERAC provided the Group's specificities are respected. He underlines the Group's view that its chair should be elected from its members and that it should be possible to strengthen links with ERAC without insisting that the Group chair be an ERAC member. He notes the Group's intention to continue using specialist Working Groups to deal with specific issues in future, pointing out that the decision to entrust work on pensions and social security to a Commission Expert group mentioned in paragraph 18 above was taken because of the technical nature of the subject. Looking ahead, he argues that the Group's mandate does not need to be substantially amended but rather adjusted to reflect the Innovation Union initiative and the ERA Framework- processes which have already begun within the Group. He then sets out roles which the Groups has played and will continue to play in advancing the European Partnership

for Researchers, suggesting that additional work on gender and dual career issues needs to be undertaken.

25. A note of dissent from the Spanish delegation was also circulated. This argues that the Chair's views on the relationship between the Group and ERAC have not been agreed by the Group as a whole, nor has a future focus on gender and dual career issues. They also contest his account of the decision concerning the pensions and social security expert group.

General Governance Issues

26. There is a clear majority of Member States opposed to the proposition that all four Groups need to have totally common governance structures since, it is argued, a substantial amount of flexibility is required in order to take account of differences in their tasks. In particular there is no consensus on a possible common length of mandate with some Member States denying that it would make sense to have one. Even those who call for a common length of mandate do not propose a standard period.
27. There are some areas where there appears to be substantial support for common approaches. In particular there is support for the view that all the Groups should be Member State chaired and that each group should elect a Vice Chair as well. The majority view is that Chairs and Vice Chairs should be elected by the Group members, though the rotating Presidency-based chairing arrangements of the GPC are not seen as having impaired that Group's work. It would strengthen coordination between the work of the Groups and that of ERAC if the Group chairs were also ERAC members. No Member States have suggested that ERAC should appoint Group chairs but it may be worth considering options to ensure that chairs elected from the Group membership are also full members of ERAC.
28. While there is general agreement to the proposition that the work of the Groups needs to be reviewed at regular intervals, there is less consensus on how this should be done; external expert review and a repetition of the present exercise were suggested.

29. There is a wide consensus that links between ERAC and the Groups need to be strengthened. There is however a clear divide (even within the Groups themselves) over how the relationship between ERAC, the Groups and the Council should be structured. While some Member States remain supportive of the existing situation in which GPC and SFIC report directly to the Council and SGHRM also has an independent status, a majority appear to favour a situation in which all four Groups report to ERAC, with ERAC reporting to the Council on all ERA-related issues. This should not mean ERAC seeking to duplicate or repeat the work of the Groups, though it is suggested by some Member States that ERAC does need to engage more fully with reporting from the Groups rather than passively receiving formal reports. In addition there are some concerns that the linkages between the Groups have not been as strong as they might have been- though the KT groups has had some linkages with both GPC and SFIC the links between the other Groups have not been particularly close.
30. The Commission's views are summarised in the attached letter from the Director General. In summary, the Commission favour harmonised and streamlined mandates and governance structures, mandates and rules, with revised mandates focused on Innovation Union and the ERA Framework. They want to strengthen links between ERAC and the Groups, not least by ensuring that Group chairs are ERAC members. They also want the Groups to report to Council via ERAC and to have a harmonised length of mandate of three years, with mandates subject to review after 18 months linked to the ERA Framework and the planned review of ERAC itself in 2012. Unless a specific decision is taken to renew a Group's mandate at the end of three years the Group should lapse.

Possible Ways Forward for ERAC to consider

31. The intention is that the May Competitiveness Council should agree Conclusions on the future of the ERA Groups. This is a very tight timetable and suggests that the Conclusions will have to be "light touch" rather than detailed. Some possible approaches to how they might be framed are suggested below:

- a) In general terms, the Conclusions might pick up the points raised in the DG's letter, looking to encourage the Groups to consider how best to address the Governance issues set out there.
- b) On the detail of Group **mandates**, there is a broad consensus that the basic thrust of the existing mandates remains valid and all four groups should continue their work. In an ideal world there might be a case for undertaking a process of revising and updating each Group mandate in detail to take account of developing priorities and what has already been delivered. It is however unlikely that there would be time to carry through such a complex process while still enabling ERAC to agree the proposed new mandates for submission to the Council. The Conclusions might therefore invite each of the groups to review their own work programmes, revising these along lines to be suggested by ERAC so that they take full account of matters arising from the Innovation Union initiative and the development of the ERA Framework.
- c) It is noted that the groups were established at different times and are based on different instruments. An option for consideration might be to replace the current Steering Group for Human Resources and Mobility (SGHRM) with a new ERAC WG on Human Resources and Mobility, which would carry over the work of the SGHRM.
- d) On **chairing**, it might be suggested that the Chairs of the Groups should be elected Member State representatives. They could also in practical terms be supported by a Vice Chair and/or a Steering Board/Bureau. While it is no doubt desirable that the Group chairs should also be ERAC members, it is also reasonable that the Groups themselves elect their own chairs; in cases where a Group chair is not already an ERAC member, consideration could be given to co-opting them to ERAC on an ex officio basis.

- e) On **Group working methods**, all four Groups have in practice made use of dedicated working groups to deliver important parts of their mandate; in some cases the working groups have done a high proportion of the Groups' work. This may suggest the benefits of an operating model in which the key deliverables under future mandates are developed in dedicated, task-oriented and time limited working groups, with the full Group meeting when circumstances require to determine the work programmes of the working groups, set their strategic agenda, have an overview of their activities and organise reporting to ERAC. This would allow for expert participation in the working groups going beyond the "regular" membership of the Groups, somewhat limit the burdens of participation in the Groups' activity for resource-stretched Member States while at the same time allowing these Member States continued "ownership" of the agenda through participation in the agenda setting and reporting back stages. It would also potentially allow Group plenary sessions to focus on more strategic policy discussions. Groups could therefore be encouraged to consider formalising this model.
- f) As regards the **relationship between ERAC and the ERA groups**, there is a need for more interaction and coordination between them, as well as a need for improved interaction and dialogue between the ERA groups and other relevant groups, such as ESFRI and Helsinki Group. It should be recalled that ERAC was set up with an explicit remit to provide timely strategic input to the Council, Commission and Member States on any research and innovation issues relevant to the development of the ERA. This overview role includes the provision of advice on the identification and design of strategic priorities for policy initiatives, advice on broad orientations for future policies and interaction between existing policies and monitoring the development of the ERA. Clearly the Groups have a vital expert role to play in the delivery of this mandate and ERAC ought to take the fullest possible account of their input.

- g) This leads to the question of the **relationship of the Groups to ERAC on the one hand and the Council on the other**. There are clearly strongly held and divergent views between Member States on this issue with some arguing strongly that GPC and SFIC should continue to report directly to the Council while others favour them reporting in the first instance to ERAC. In the light of ERAC's mandate, it could be argued that its ability to deliver input on all relevant issues is potentially weakened if other bodies report directly to Council on important issues. As noted above, ERAC ought to take the fullest possible account of the Groups' input. Nevertheless in formal terms it appears appropriate that the Groups should normally transmit their conclusions and input via ERAC rather than direct to the Council. There could however still be the possibility that in exceptional circumstances the Groups might retain the right to report direct to the Council.
- h) In order to further **strengthen links** between ERAC and the groups it would be sensible for input from each Group to be programmed into the ERAC work plan, possibly on a rolling basis with a dedicated slot for each group once a year.
- i) As far as the **length of mandates** is concerned, it could be suggested that, as ERAC itself is due to be reviewed by the end of 2012, there might be a case for a further fine tuning of the Groups to monitor the need for possible further adjustments to their mandates. Furthermore, it could be proposed that based on an evaluation by ERAC, in full consultation of the groups themselves, the mandates of the four groups would be reviewed, as appropriate, by 1 July 2014 in order to arrive at recommendation on the continuation of each group.

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Rapporteur
6 April 2011.



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
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Sent by email only

SUBJECT: COMMISSION INPUT TO THE REVIEW OF ERA GROUPS

Dear Ms Peters,

Regarding the questions posed in the review of ERA groups, I am happy to set out a number of general observations and orientations as the Commission's views.

First of all, our main observations regarding **past effectiveness** of the groups:

- In general, all groups as well as the Chairs from Member States performed and delivered well, and the Chairs often demonstrated strong personal commitment;
- For all groups, the objectives as originally formulated in the mandates of the groups have been partially realised. In the case of the GPC, most of the objectives would seem to have been realised;
- Participation by Member States has in general been adequate, although in some cases, we would have wished for a higher profile of the representatives and/or a stronger influence on national policies.

Secondly, the Commission favours **harmonized and streamlined mandates and governance structures, working methods and rules**, taking into account however the different nature of the issues addressed by each group:

- All groups should have a strategic orientation. The groups should contribute to the implementation of the Innovation Union and in the short term to the preparation and implementation of the ERA Framework. The issue of cross-border operation of research performing organisations, funding agencies and foundations could be better reflected in the mandates of ERA groups, e.g. of the GPC. The mandate and role of the current Knowledge Transfer Group could be strengthened to be stronger aligned with different Innovation Union commitments.
- All groups should be composed of high level representatives with good knowledge of and sufficient influence on the relevant national policies. A systematic use of ad hoc subgroups at appropriate expert level would reduce the number of plenary group meetings needed,

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and allow the plenary sessions to assume a more strategic steering role on a higher level. The aim should be to keep both the number of plenary and subgroup meetings manageable in terms of (human) resources, for delegations, Commission and the Council secretariat.

A third issue concerns the **linkage between the ERA groups and ERAC**. Formally speaking, the two dedicated ERAC configurations GPG and SFIC are currently independent of ERAC. The same holds true for Steering Group for Human Resources and Mobility. In December 2009 and May 2010, the Council stated that ERAC "shall keep overview of the other ERA related groups, which it should cooperate with and consult, as necessary to attain its objectives". Improvements to realise this aim could be:

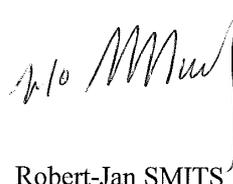
- Improving the coordination and dialogue between the groups, to ensure a coherent approach to objectives, topics and instruments and create synergies wherever possible;
- Strengthening the relation between the ERA groups and ERAC by appointing Chairs from the ERAC delegations.

One aspect of the relation between the ERA groups and ERAC is their **reporting to Council**. Reporting via ERAC would fit into ERAC's broad strategic mandate and its expected role regarding monitoring and periodic reporting to the Council on overall ERA progress. This practice could also give rise to a more coherent ERA policy discussion in Council.

A final point concerns the **length of the mandates** of the ERA groups, which should be harmonised to be, for example, three years. The mandates could be updated after 18 months in connection with the planned ERA Framework as well as the review of ERAC, as agreed by the Council to take place by the end of 2012. After three years, a decision would be needed to renew the mandate, otherwise the groups would cease to exist.

All the changes should be introduced in a tactful way, so as not to endanger the momentum built up so far, but rather to give new political support and impetus to the work of the groups. An elegant solution could be the adoption by the Council of a single set of conclusions adapting the mandates of all the ERA groups, possibly as part of the announced May Council Conclusions on "synergy between ERA Vision 2020 and the Europe 2020 Strategy".

I finally want to thank you for taking on the task of rapporteur for this important review and I wish you every success in bringing it to a successful completion!



Robert-Jan SMITS

For the Director General absent
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