

On the Future of the European Research Area

The Leibniz Association herewith wishes to contribute to the ongoing discussions on the new European Research Area (ERA). Even though the ERA Progress Report 2018¹ has shown that substantial advancements have been made over the last decade, progress has slowed down in recent years and large disparities between European Union Member States (MS) still persist concerning performance level and growth rate. Although many of the barriers encountered can be assumed to stem from structural aspects, which need time and very often decades to overcome, the fact remains that the objectives linked to the current six ERA priorities² have either not yet or only partially been met. We therefore advice against the creation of a completely new ERA narrative. Above all there is an urgent need for genuine ownership of the ERA project as well as satisfactory financial commitment by all MS. The Leibniz Association recommends that

- MS show their political determination by meeting the Barcelona target of 3 % and committing to a Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027 that allows for an ambitious budget for research and innovation, which are the indispensable basis for a competitive and prosperous European Union.
- the proposal for a new ERA be subject to a prior assessment by the European Commission of the current ERA priorities and related achievements, including a SWOT analysis of the feasibility of new objectives.
- based on this assessment, current ERA priorities be continued where necessary and new objectives and measures be designed taking into account the EU's political priorities as well as the global political environment.
- the European Commission, while overseeing its governance, assumes a more active role as facilitator and catalyst for the ERA, e.g. through the Policy Support Facility.

Creating framework conditions for the production, circulation, and use of knowledge

One of the main goals of the new ERA will be to implement effective framework conditions for mobility and brain circulation through policy reforms and support tools. The EU's regulations concerning social security rules, pension funds, and migration in general need to be optimised and better coordinated. There is, for example, a strong need for

- the implementation of common principles as defined by the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers throughout all MS, e.g. through the Human Resources Strategy initiative³.
- reworking these principles to fit new transformative changes, for example by aligning standards for the recruitment and assessment of researchers and their scientific output to reflect the new Open Science policy of the EU.
- a clear commitment by all MS to the implementation of Charter and Code, possibly by means of council conclusions.
- further measures of strategic engagement for the achievement of gender equality.
- coordination and, wherever possible, harmonisation of EU legislation related to social security rules.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/era/progress-report_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/era_en

³ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter>

Strengthening R&I driven joint action at national, European, and global level

Over the last decade, the coordination of research programmes at national and EU level has been greatly developed. Joint programmes of MS offer researchers within the EU similar possibilities for transnational research cooperation as the EU funding programmes. Nevertheless, more efforts are still required

- to better coordinate national and European programmes and call funding mechanisms as well as to harmonise and simplify participation rules in order to allow for better planning and sustainable collaborations (e.g. tripartite funding for Joint Undertakings).
- to establish (pilot) measures at a European level for the opening-up of national programmes with a limited number of participating MS, allowing for joint calls, joint evaluation procedures, and project funding (c.f. D-A-CH initiative⁴).
- to take stock of existing European legislation and regulations and ensure that they create the framework conditions for excellent research without hampering scientific collaboration and progress, while reflecting European standards and values.⁵

The ESFRI Roadmap and the financial support provided by the EU framework programmes have been decisive in developing pan-European research infrastructures over the last two decades. Today, they constitute an essential building block of the ERA. In recent years, good progress has been achieved in the strategic monitoring and planning processes. Nevertheless, the long list of existing ESFRI projects, tight national research budgets and a growing interest in researchers for new ESFRI projects require

- an in-depth analysis of the current research infrastructure landscape and future needs,
- a feasibility study in view of political determination and financial capacities at the European and national level.
- the implementation of national roadmaps by all MS and an even stronger coordination between the national and European roadmap processes.
- training programmes for technical staff working on infrastructures, for example through a MSCA Technical Fellowship.

To date, the international dimension of the ERA shows some shortcomings as regards its implementation despite being one of the ERA's priorities. Liberalisation of capital, finance and trade as well as free flow of information and digitalisation have resulted in a globalised world. Thus the future ERA must be characterised by its openness to the world not only in terms of diplomacy but even more so in terms of research cooperation. To this end,

- current Horizon 2020 association agreements with third countries should be renewed for Horizon Europe, based on fair standards.
- association agreements for Horizon Europe with other third countries such as Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand should be established to allow researchers from these countries and the EU to cooperate more easily on challenges of a global nature, in particular with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁴www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/programmes/international_cooperation/joint_proposal_submission_dach

⁵ e.g. related to GMO or the Nagoya-Protocol, but also with regard to A1 forms for business trips (regulation 883/04 & 987/2009), and the implementation of the enforcement directive on the posting of workers (Directive 2014/67/EU), for which a clear framework for local notifications at EU level is required.

Promoting relevance and visibility of R&I to society

As Europe is facing a general tendency of retrenchment behind national borders and a distrust of society in scientific facts it is even more important to promote the benefits and strengths of the ERA on different levels (in the scientific community, to policy-makers, and to society at large) by

- supporting and increasing funding activities such as the Marie S. Curie Researchers' Night, Science meets Parliament, and introducing a ring-fenced budget for science communication in EU-funded R&I projects.
- not pushing for quick research results to increase visibility and acceptance of R&I by society, but rather promote long-term research as a necessity for future innovation.
- establishing and supporting European "Little scientists' houses" following the German model⁶. This would create an important link between the ERA and the European Education Area (EEA).

Revitalizing efforts to create a "single ERA"

The precondition for an ERA open to the world is a "single ERA," by analogy with the European single market. To date, vast differences with regard to investment in R&I and thus research performance exist among MS and regions within the ERA. Besides necessary national reform efforts, the innovation gap between MS and regions should be addressed through

- continuation and fine-tuning of the Widening programme taking into account the lessons learned under Horizon 2020.
- support for the enhancement of national research management systems, in particular with regard to research administration (command of English, knowledge of EU research programmes and the related political context, expertise with proposal preparation and management of EU research projects) via the establishment of mutual learning platforms and mentoring programmes on a European level.

Committing to an ERA of values

The new ERA should be built on prior achievements and provide a framework for both actions to be continued where necessary and new ones that take into account new challenges and a context that has evolved over time. More importantly, if the ERA stakeholders and society at large are to have some sense of ownership of the future ERA high priority must be given to the definition of its key principles. Values such as freedom of research, good scientific practice, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, free circulation of knowledge, and respect for human rights and common ethical standards must be the underlying principles of any action and cooperation of ERA Member States and their international partners.

In line with the ERAC opinion paper that suggests to be open for the potential need of soft law measures or legislative action at European level, the Leibniz Association considers this as a possible useful step towards more integration, at least in some areas such as the implementation of the Charter for Researchers.

⁶ www.haus-der-kleinen-forscher.de/en

The Leibniz Association

The Leibniz Association connects 96 independent research institutions that range in focus from natural, engineering and environmental sciences to economics, spatial and social sciences and the humanities. Leibniz Institutes address issues of social, economic and ecological relevance.

They conduct basic and applied research, including in the interdisciplinary Leibniz Research Alliances, maintain scientific infrastructure, and provide research-based services. The Leibniz Association identifies focus areas for knowledge transfer, particularly with the Leibniz research museums. It advises and informs policymakers, science, industry and the general public.

Leibniz institutions collaborate intensively with universities – including in the form of Leibniz ScienceCampi – as well as with industry and other partners at home and abroad. They are subject to a transparent, independent evaluation procedure. Because of their importance for the country as a whole, the Leibniz Association Institutes are funded jointly by Germany's central and regional governments. The Leibniz Institutes employ around 20,000 people, including 10,000 researchers. The total budget for all the institutes is approximately 2.1 billion euros.

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