



European Research Council
Scientific Council

Established by the European Commission

ERC SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 74th PLENARY MEETING, Brussels (BE) 25-26 February 2020

MINUTES

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): Prof. Mauro FERRARI (ERC President), Prof. Genevieve ALMOUZNI, Prof. Manuel ARELLANO, Prof. Paola BOVOLENTA, Prof. Margaret BUCKINGHAM, Prof. Eveline CRONE, Prof. Ben FERINGA, Prof. Mercedes GARCIAL ARENAL, Prof. Gerd GIGERENZER, Prof. Andrzej JAJSZCZYK, Prof. Eystein JANSEN, Prof. Tomas JUNGWIRTH, Prof. Michael KRAMER, Prof. Kurt MEHLHORN, Prof. Barbara ROMANOWICZ, Prof. Jesper QUALMANN SVEJSTRUP, Prof. Nektarios TAVERNARAKIS, Prof. Janet THORNTON, Prof. Milena ŽIC FUCHS and Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER.

Scientific Council members excused (in alphabetical order): Prof. Lene VESTERGAARD HAU.

ERC Executive Agency staff present: Waldemar KUTT, Jose LABASTIDA, Niki ATZOULATOU, Dirk COSTENS, Theodore PAPAZOGLU, Angela LIBERATORE, Laurence MOREAU, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Thierry PROST, Martin PENNY, Michel VANBIERVLIE, Philippe CUPERS, Anthony LOCKETT, Francesca SGRITTA, Matteo RAZZANELLI, Ben TURNER, Laura PONTIGGIA, Severina SHOPOVA.

Chair of the meeting: Prof. Mauro FERRARI, ERC President.

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency.

1. Welcome of ScC Members, Plans and Goals of Meeting

Prof. Mauro FERRARI welcomed everyone and outlined the goals of the meeting, as well as the expectations of the ERCEA in terms of outcomes/decisions of the ScC to be taken. He asked the two new ScC members who joined the ScC on 1 January 2020, Prof. Gerd GIGERENZER and Prof. Milena ŽIC FUCHS to briefly introduce themselves. Moreover, Prof. Mauro FERRARI welcomed Prof. Eveline CRONE in her capacity as ScC Vice-President for the first time at plenary. Finally, Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER welcomed Prof. Mauro FERRARI on behalf of the ScC to his first plenary meeting as ERC President and wished him all the best. Prof. Lene VESTERGAARD-HAU could not attend the plenary meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 74th Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The Draft Agenda of the meeting was approved by the Scientific Council (ScC) with a small modification, removing any reference to relevant ERCEA staff only being present when required.

The ScC discussed plenary meetings in Brussels and abroad and Prof. Janet THORNTON noted that when the ScC is abroad, it is an opportunity for the ScC members to meet with the ERC grantees. This is, however, usually organised at the end of the meeting, which is not good as many ScC members leave shortly after the meeting ends. In future, that could be improved.

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 73rd Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The Scientific Council adopted the Draft Minutes of the previous plenary meeting.

PRIME Committee

As regards the follow-up of the PRIME Committee, the Chair Prof. Janet THORNTON noted discussions related to the scoring of core publications by grantees reporting the outputs of their projects.

Working Groups

Prof. Eveline CRONE reminded the ScC that it had decided at the end of last year to continue with the existing WGs, but that a question had been posed on whether the format should be changed. Several ScC members spoke in favour of having clearly defined, core membership and shorter mailing lists of the WGs while allowing for observers to attend the meetings. Furthermore, the ScC was asked whether the WGs could be run in parallel to save some time. The ERC President noted that he is fine with this idea and as he would not be able to attend all of them in that case, he will make sure to be debriefed by the Chairs of each WG.

Standing Committees

The ERCEA/A1 Unit reminded the ScC that its Rules for Procedure need to be revised in order to include the recently established Standing Committee PRIME. That would be an occasion to revise the Rules also on other points, if needed. Moreover, Prof. Eveline CRONE proposed Prof. Manuel ARELLANO as member of CoP and CoIME representing the SH domain (as is expected according to the Rules of Procedure). The ScC unanimously agreed with the proposal. Also, as Prof. Margaret BUCKINGHAM decided to step down as member of CoIME, Prof. Janet THORNTON proposed that Prof. Nektarios TAVERNARAKIS replaces her. The ScC unanimously agreed with the proposal.

4. Action Points Summary of the 73rd Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The ERCEA informed the Scientific Council of the state of play of the action points from the previous ScC plenary meeting.

5. Future functioning of the Scientific Council

Prof. Mauro FERRARI opened this agenda item with a presentation of some facts and figures, as well as questions for consideration by the ScC. He reminded the ScC that the EU constitutes 3% of the world land surface, 7% of world population, 17% of Global GDP, 20% of global R&D, 24% of global patents and 34% of publications. Also, he noted that the ERC is a top funding agency (by bibliometric excellence). Moreover, lately there have been multiple dimensions of change, including Commission (leadership, programmatic), financial and Brexit, new Framework Programme (Work Programme 2021, Proposal Submission and Evaluation, Model Grant Agreement, Open Science, Gender Parity), Scientific Council changes in terms of composition, Vice-Presidents and President, ERCEA Director, and corona virus, to name a few. Prof. Mauro FERRARI then mentioned that all of the above may present an opportunity for a rethinking exercise.

Prof. Mauro FERRARI also asked the ERCEA Scientific Department to give an update on the implications of the corona virus on the evaluations. It was reported that all efforts are being made to organise optimal video conferencing for panel members for the evaluations. Preventive measures have already been taken for panel members coming from China for the AdG evaluations. In the case of StG there will be 4 panel members from China joining via videoconference. Now there are also questions from panel members coming from the North of Italy. The ERC has fully equipped rooms and for next week's evaluations there will be 2 panel members joining via video conference. The ScC was also informed that there is discussion on how to handle the briefing of all panels before the start of the evaluation when

about 150 evaluators are invited together for a briefing, in order to avoid big groups of people.

Going back to the discussions on a rethinking exercise, Prof. Mauro FERRARI stressed that all actions that he is and will be taking are aimed at generating greater empowerment of the ScC and the Agency by putting people in the best position so that they can contribute their greatness to the organisation. Furthermore, he noted that he had about 9 months from his announcement as the next ERC President to his entry into service, which he has used to observe the organisation and has as a result collected several observations.

Several ScC members picked on the fundamental principles of the ERC and stressed the importance of securing its independence. The ScC members also underlined that the ScC must at all times serve the scientific community and be accountable to it. Other important points for future discussion supported by the ScC referred to the panel structure and the relationship of ERC with innovation and the EIC, among other organisations.

Prof. Mauro FERRARI asked the ERCEA/A1 Unit to present the ERC's legal framework, and the roles and tasks of the ScC, the Agency and the European Commission. ERCEA/A1 Unit pointed out the continuity of the legal provisions since the inception of the ERC.

State of play in the Preparation of Horizon Europe

Work Programme 2021

ERCEA/A1 Unit recalled the 2021 Work Programme decision process and milestones since the first ScC orientation debate in December 2019. In January, following the President's request, the draft Work Programme 2021 had been circulated to all members for written comments and for further information requests. Based on the comments received, the text had been adapted and the information requested had been circulated to the members. The ScC then further discussed and decided on several points, which included, among others, project management logic, open access/open science, PoC, eligibility of international organisations, personnel costs and external support actions.

Horizon Europe Rules for Submission

The ERCEA Legal Unit reminded the ScC of the revision of the Rules for Submission and asked the ScC members to decide on some points that require their attention.

Model Grant Agreement (MGA)

The Director of the DG RTD Common Implementation Center (CIC), Ms Anna PANAGOPOULOU, was accompanied by Mr. Reinhard SCHULTE (Head of Unit B1/DG RTD) and Mr. Julien DULOT (Unit B1/DG RTD) to present the corporate MGA and the novelties for Horizon Europe. Ms Anna PANAGOPOULOU thanked the ScC for the good collaboration and noted that they would be interested in having the ScC's input, which would be considered in the establishment of the MGA with some specific parts for ERC.

Following the introduction from the DG RTD representatives, the ScC members noted that they will further discuss the relevant issues for ERC and will get back to DG RTD with their input. The ScC members also noted as a general comments that the scientific areas are different and trying to harmonise and impose the same rules/templates on all of them may be dangerous.

Open Science

Mr. Konstantinos GLINOS, Head of Unit G4/DG RTD, gave an overview to the ScC of the proposed approach on open science in Horizon Europe. The ScC expressed concern that

the comments of the scientific community had not been reflected in the Commission's proposal, which could be detrimental for science once the currently proposed measures have been agreed and start to be imposed on the researchers. The representatives of DG RTD argued that, on the contrary, the changes suggested would increase the quality and impact of publicly funded research and bring science and society closer together. They were very appreciative of the ScC's feedback on the topic and were open to more suggestions as regards ensuring quality control and the importance of books for the social sciences and humanities.

6. EIC Presentation

The ScC had an exchange with the Chair of the EIC Advisory Board, Prof. Mark FERGUSON. He was accompanied by Mr. Keith SEQUEIRA who is leading the policy and coordination unit in the EIC Task Force in DG RTD. Prof. Mark FERGUSON noted that the EIC is looking for collaboration and synergies with the ERC and he is very open to working together constructively. He also welcomed any ideas from the ERC on how to develop such a collaboration. Furthermore, he explained that the EIC is currently working in pilot mode and has essentially taken over existing instruments, such as the SME instrument and FET-OPEN and is consolidating and reforming them. The Commission has proposed to dedicate €10 billion to the EIC under Horizon Europe for support to innovators through two main funding instruments: the Pathfinder for advanced research (for early-stage research for innovation) and the Accelerator, a blended financing model (grants plus equity). The EIC, following the model of the ERC, is also conducting interviews as part of the evaluation for funding allocation. The EIC will be operational in Horizon Europe, as of January 2021. Also, a fast track access to the latest evaluation stage of the EIC Accelerator is envisaged in the legislation for innovation stemming from projects already funded by other pillars of the EU Framework Programmes, which includes the ERC, and in particular the ERC Proof-of-Concept programme. The EIC was described as bottom-up but there will also be thematic calls on topics, such as climate change and energy and DARPA-type calls. Prof. Mark FERGUSON called this a bottom-up plus.

The ScC members asked several questions, including about the expected outcomes for those who would be funded, and it was explained that a number of key performance indicators will be developed. Moreover, the ScC members were interested in the selection criteria for the proposals and the implementation, including whether EIC will be looking into funding high-risk high-gain proposals. It was noted that the EIC will be joining hands with the EIB (European Investment Bank) and EIF (European Investment Fund) to attract investors with large pockets. The ScC members and Prof. Mark FERGUSON agreed to further discuss possible ERC-EIC future cooperation through the setup of a common Working Group. Several ScC members expressed their interest in joining such a WG, namely: Prof. Kurt MEHLHORN, Prof. Ben FERINGA, Prof. Geneviève ALMOUZNI, Prof. Milena ŽIC FUCHS, Prof. Andrzej JAJSZCZYK and Prof. Nektarios TAVERNARAKIS.

7. Open Science matters

Prof. Paola BOVOLENTA introduced the topic of open science and drew the attention to a number of points that needed a decision from the ScC, linked to proposed text for the articles related to Open Science of the MGA. The ScC then discussed open access to publications.

Due to the lack of time, the ScC did not discuss metadata of deposited publications and did not address any of the issues related to research data or other research outputs at this stage.

8. Points from the Vice-Presidents

-Corona virus update

The ERCEA Scientific Department updated the ScC on corona viruses in terms of background of the disease and recent research actions of the Commission, as well as research on corona viruses supported by the ERC. Finally, information on ERC projects on viruses was shared with the ScC from the Science Behind the Projects Horizon 2020 exercise.

-Global Biodata Coalition (GBC)

Prof. Janet THORNTON introduced a request that she had received for the ERC to join the Global Biodata Coalition. A short overview as regards biodata resources was given and several challenges to the biodata infrastructure were presented. Moreover, the missions of the Global Biodata Coalition were listed to the ScC, together with an overview of the current status and activities of the organisation. The ScC members were asked whether the ERC should become a GBC member and/or whether the ERC should produce a letter of support. The ScC discussed and unanimously decided that the ERC should not contribute financially to the GBC but it can produce a letter of support.

9. ScC Executive session

The ScC did not hold an executive session.

10. Any Other Business

No items were discussed under this agenda point.