



European Research Council
Scientific Council
Established by the European Commission

ERC SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 76th PLENARY MEETING, Videoconference

23-24 June 2020

MINUTES

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): 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 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, Angela LIBERATORE, Laurence MOREAU, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Thierry PROST, Martin PENNY, Philippe CUPERS, Anthony LOCKETT, Michel VANBIERVLIET, Anisoara ULCELUSE – PIRVAN, Francesca SGRITTA, Matteo RAZZANELLI, Ben TURNER, Laura PONTIGGIA, Katja MEINKE, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Dagmar MEYER, Elena TOMA, Elena VOLPI, Monique SMAIHI, Carmen GARCIA-FERNANDEZ, David KRASA, David KURZ, Alice RAJEWSKY, Sabine SIMMROSS, Eleni ZIKA, Severina SHOPOVA, Brigitte ETIENNE.

DG RTD: Mr. Jean-Éric PAQUET (DG-RTD Director General), Ms Anna PANAGOPOULOU (Director- Dir B - CIC)

Chairs of the meeting: Prof. Eveline CRONE (ERC Vice-President), Prof Janet THORNTON (ERC Vice-President), Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER (ERC Vice-President)

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency.

Tuesday 23 June 2020

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

The meeting took place via videoconferencing for all participants. Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER chaired the first session of the meeting while the second session was chaired by Prof. Janet THORNTON and the third session by Prof. Eveline CRONE. Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER welcomed everyone and outlined the goals of the meeting. Prof. Lene VESTERGAARD-HAU did not attend the plenary meeting and Prof. Barbara ROMANOWICZ was excused for not attending the morning session of 24 June due to the major time difference between Europe and California. Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON attended the meeting as observer, upon invitation by the Scientific Council.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 76th Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The Draft Agenda of the meeting was approved by the Scientific Council (ScC) with a small change, agenda points 14 and 15 were brought up on the agenda and taken after agenda point 5. Also, the ScC decided to have a restricted session after the exchange with the DG RTD Director General.

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 75th Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The ScC approved the Draft Minutes of the previous plenary meeting.

4. Action Points Summary of the 75th Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The ERCEA informed the ScC on the state of play of the various action points from the previous ScC plenary meeting.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

The ScC Vice-Presidents reported on their recent meetings and activities, including among others the Board meeting on 18 May 2020. Prof. Janet THORNTON noted that she recently attended the ERC National Contact Points (NCPs) meeting and gave an introductory speech. Most questions from the NCPs were about the timing of the next calls and Horizon Europe. Prof. Eveline CRONE reported that she has received and accepted three invitations to events. Those include representing the ERC at the Programme Committee on 30 June, at the Austrian Science Fund on 28 August and at the Strategy Summit of German Science organisations in Brussels on 13 September. Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER reported on attending the 11-12 June Step 2 StG meetings as observer. He also noted that he was invited to represent the ERC at the Space Research Day of the Italian Space Agency on 30 June. The ScC agreed to all invitations to the Vice-Presidents to represent ERC. Finally, Prof. Michael KRAMER reported that he attended on 5 May the meeting of the German research organisations liaison office in Bonn and gave a presentation on the ERC.

Update on the process to appoint a new President

The ERCEA Director gave a short update to the ScC on the state of play of the establishment of a Search Committee for the appointment of a new ERC President.

Update on the Identification Committee

The ERCEA Director updated the ScC on the state of play of the Identification Committee's work.

Update on the appointment of the Interim President

The ScC members noted that they are disappointed that the appointment of the Interim ERC President is taking very long. The ERCEA Director explained that the appointment is expected soon.

6. Replacement of the LS and PE domains Vice-Presidents

The ScC discussed the replacement of the two ScC Vice-Presidents whose terms of office come to an end in December 2020.

7. ScC representation in the Steering Committee

As the term of office of one of the ScC members representing the ScC on the Steering Committee is coming to an end in December 2020, the ScC discussed nominating a new representative. Prof. Kurt MELHORN was nominated and he expressed his availability and willingness to serve. The ScC then unanimously agreed to have him represent the ScC on the Steering Committee together with Prof. Margaret BUCKINGHAM.

8. ScC Rules for Procedure in the ScC

The ScC members discussed some revisions of the Rules of Procedure of the ScC.

9. Communication activities update

Report on this year's Public Engagement with Research Award and decision on future editions

The ERCEA reported on the ERC Public Engagement with Research Award for ERC grantees exercise. The Prize was launched at the DG Research and Innovation Days on 24 September 2019. A deadline for applications was then set for 10 January 2020 and the preselection took place on 11 February 2020. The evaluation Jury met online on 24 April. It was chaired by Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER and among the jury members was also Ms Eva KAILI (Member of the European Parliament and Co-Chair of the Jury). 138 proposals have been reviewed and the winners will be announced through an online event on 7 July.

Updated crisis communication strategy

The ERCEA noted some updates as regards the ERC Crisis communication strategy.

Upcoming events including the Research and Innovation Days

The ERCEA reported on recent communication activities and upcoming events, including the DG RTD Research and Innovation Days, which will take place on 22-24 September 2020, via an online event. The Communications unit is in touch with the Kavli Foundation to repeat last year's Kavli and Nobel Prize Foundation event. Furthermore, ERC is looking into organising a specific session on ERC and COVID-19 projects. In addition, a small webinar with the winners of the Public Engagement with Research Award will be organised and a virtual ERC booth will be present during the R&I Days. ScC members who are available during those days were encouraged by the Communication team to participate and network with the audience. Finally, virtual lab visits are planned to be organised and the EIC has also approached ERC to possibly organise one or more events together in the context of the ERC-EIC collaboration. Last but not least, the Friends of the ERC Association has expressed its interest to participate in the R&I Days.

As regards other events, the ScC was informed that ESOF will take place on 2-6 September and the ERC Annual Sex and Gender Dimension conference on 16 November. Also, the 10 000 ERC grant will be awarded soon.

EIC-ERC joint Working Group update

The ERCEA reported from a recent meeting of the joint ERC-EIC working group, which took place on 4 June.

10. Qualitative evaluation of completed projects 2019

The ERCEA gave an update on the 2019 Qualitative Evaluation of ERC completed projects.

Wednesday 24 June 2020

11. State of play in the Preparation of Horizon Europe

The ERCEA gave an update on the state of play of the political negotiations as regards Horizon Europe. It was noted that a recovery instrument has been added to the budget and on 17 and 18 July the EU Council is expected to meet again as last Friday the budget proposal was discussed but the EU leaders did not reach an agreement. Moreover, it was mentioned that influencing the top line figures would perhaps be quite difficult at this point of time but there will most likely be a political discussion for the distribution of the budget under the main headings.

The ERCEA gave an update to the ScC on the state of play of the various implementation points related to Horizon Europe, including submission forms, reporting, Model Grant Agreement (MGA), Work Programme (WP) 2021 and Open Science.

12. Meeting with DG-RTD Director General Jean-Éric PAQUET

The ScC met with the DG RTD Director General, Mr. Jean-Éric PAQUET. Prof. Janet THORNTON welcomed the Director General and asked him to give an update to the ScC on the following points: appointment of the next ERC President; progress on the appointment of the Interim ERC President; publication of the Head of the ERCEA Scientific Department post; status on Open Access.

The Director General noted that he is delighted to speak to the ScC and started with a short update on COVID-19. He noted that science, research and innovation will be made more visible in the future and will also work on the green digital transformation in Europe. To that end, a lot of resources will be mobilised out of the EU budget. Mr. Jean-Éric PAQUET also noted that he has seen some recent comments from associations regretting that the increase recommended in the budget does not cover the ERC. As regards the particular points of interest to the ScC for discussion, the Director General mentioned that he is in touch with Commissioner Mariya GABRIEL on the composition of the Search Committee for the next ERC President. Also, it has been agreed that a member of the ScC will be part of the Search Committee ad personam. The Search Committee should be in place in July and then the call for applications will be launched. Individual applications and recommendations from institutions will both be accepted by the Search Committee. The Director General expressed his strong

hope to have the Search Committee deliver a short list to the ScC and the Commissioner by the end of this year.

As regards the Interim ERC President, work is in progress to hopefully appoint the Interim ERC President formally before the summer. In case there are some delays it would surely be done after the summer.

On the issue of open access, the Director General noted that there have been several exchanges with Prof. Paola BOVOLENTA and the three ScC Vice-Presidents. The discussion is not new and open science and open access and publications have been in a transition period that has lasted for about 15 years. There has been good progress made and the Commission is continuing to work with other funders on Plan S. The Commission will also promote the use of open access in the MGA, by asking either to publish straight in open access or use other journals but the content will be available to everyone. The Director General stressed that it is his understanding that this will work for the ScC.

Finally, as regard the post of the Head of the ERCEA Scientific Department, the Director General noted that the selection can be organised by launching an internal publication and if following this procedure the applications are not satisfactory, then the position could be open to external candidates.

As regards open access, several ScC members took the floor and stressed that the ScC supports very much open access, however the ScC is concerned about the proposed implementation by the Commission.

The Director General addressed the comments of the ScC members and noted that he agrees on the quality control and also pointed out to recent comments in the press that the peer review system is broken. Therefore, work should be done on the latter to fix it. As regards publishing in major journals around the world (whether open access or non-open access), he stressed that this will be possible, as long as the articles are made available via other means.

Prof. Janet THORNTON concluded the discussion by noting that the ScC will further discuss the matter of open access among its members and will get back to the Director General. She then thanked him one more time for taking the time to speak to the ScC. The Director General thanked the ScC for its engagement and underlined how much he admires the ERC and respects the quality of the minds serving on the ScC.

13. Follow up discussion of the meeting with DG-RTD Director General Jean-Éric PAQUET

The ScC held a closed session.

12. State of play in the Preparation of Horizon Europe (continued)

Association of 'category d' countries in HE (Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Singapore)

The ERCEA informed the ScC about the association of 'category d' countries in Horizon Europe. Potential candidates include Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, and Singapore. Switzerland and UK will also fall under this category under the proposed new rules. The new rules also introduce a new method for calculating how much each country should pay into the programme in order to participate. The new system is designed so that the funding received by researchers in each Associated Country is balanced by the amount that those countries pay into the programme. However, the proposed method is based on average receipts from the whole of Horizon Europe so could still result in imbalances for the individual parts of the programme such as the ERC. It was clarified that the Article 12 of the proposed Horizon Europe Regulation has not yet been agreed between the European Parliament and the Council.

Following the presentation, the ScC had a discussion on the principle of association and the pay as you go rationale and whether it will be implemented in a fair way. The ScC did not reach a position on the matter during the meeting and decided to further discuss it after the plenary meeting over email.

14. Operational Issues Reporting: Evaluation Analysis & Grant Management activities

Grant Management activities state of play

The ERCEA informed the ScC on the state of play of the granting activities, including a report on the running grants portfolio for FP7 and Horizon 2020.

Update on Calls

The ERCEA/Department B gave an update on the outcome of the ongoing evaluations, including StG2020, CoG2020 Step 1 and SyG2020 Steps 1 and 2.

15. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and WGs

The Chairs of the Standing Committees and WGs that met recently reported on their activities.

16. Any Other Business

-Task Force on time commitment and remuneration of the ScC members

Prof. Eveline CRONE noted that, following the completion of a draft job description document for the ScC members, the ScC Vice-Presidents are suggesting to create a Task Force on their time commitment and remuneration. The Task Force should complete its work by September and ScC members from the different domains are invited to join it.