



European Research Council
Scientific Council
Established by the European Commission

ERC SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 77th PLENARY MEETING, Videoconference 15-16 October 2020

MINUTES

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON (ERC President ad Interim), 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, Mil BAS-SANCHEZ, Laurence MOREAU, Niki ATZOULATOU, Dirk COSTENS, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Martin PENNY, Philippe CUPERS, Anthony LOCKETT, Francesca SGRITTA, Ben TURNER, Laura PONTIGGIA, Katja MEINKE, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Dagmar MEYER, Elena TOMA, Elena VOLPI, Carmen GARCIA-FERNANDEZ, David KRASA, Alice RAJEWSKY, Lino PAULA, Sabine SIMMROSS, Eleni ZIKA, Samantha CHRISTEY, Noëlie AUVERGNE, Marcin MONKO, Severina SHOPOVA, Brigitte ETIENNE.

Chairs of the meeting: Prof Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON (ERC President Ad Interim)

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency.

Thursday 15 October 2020

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

The meeting took place via videoconferencing for all participants. Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON welcomed everyone and outlined the goals of the meeting. He particularly welcomed Ms Mila BAS SANCHEZ who has recently taken up the position of Head of the Granting Department. She declared that she is very honoured to start a new adventure and is here to help the ERC. She also said that she will try to continue promoting the good results achieved so far and also try to improve where possible while keep on serving the stakeholders.

Prof. Lene VESTERGAARD-HAU did not attend the plenary meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 77th Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council

The Draft Agenda of the meeting was approved by the Scientific Council (ScC).

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 76th Plenary Meeting and of the Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council held in August

The ScC approved the Draft Minutes of the previous plenary meetings in June and the Extraordinary plenary meeting in August.

4. Action Points Summary of the 76th Plenary Meeting and of the Extraordinary 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 meetings in June and in August.

5. Horizon Europe Budget: Follow-up on the Actions Taken after the Extraordinary ScC Plenary of 23 August and their Outcome

Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON presented some recent developments, including the results of the Competitiveness Council meeting, which took place on 29 September and went according to the German Presidency planning. The amended budget for Horizon Europe has been agreed, the cuts proposed at the end of the European summit in July being distributed proportionally to the size of the various sub-programmes except for an extra allocation of 200 M€ to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions taken from the EIC budget. The access to the €5 billion of the Recovery Fund is limited to some specific actions in Pillar 2 and to the EIC in Pillar 3. This causes the share of Pillar 1 to go down to 25% when it was 32% in Horizon 2020. In addition, on 6 October the first trialogue for Horizon Europe took place. The second trialogue is most likely to take place at the end of October/beginning November.

Following the update, Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON and the ScC members discussed any developments and discussions that they have had in their home countries in support of a higher budget for research.

6. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

With respect to meetings and activities, Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER informed the ScC that the University of Padova is organising an event to clarify the impact of ERC and frontier research. To that end, he has been asked to participate together with Angela LIBERATORE from the ERCEA. Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER asked for permission to use the ERC logo as well as for support from the Agency to prepare for the event. The ScC members agreed with the request.

Update on the ERCEA Establishment Plan (Cost-Benefit Analysis)

The ERCEA Director reported on the Cost-Benefit Analysis exercise being performed by DG Budget for all Executive Agencies.

Update on the Delegation Act

The ERCEA gave an update on the state of play of the Delegation Act negotiations for the Agency.

Update on the process to appoint a new President

Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON noted that the process to appoint a new ERC President has started with the Search Committee being finalised.

7. State of play in the Preparation of Horizon Europe

The ERCEA gave an update on the state of play of the Horizon Europe preparations. The ScC was reminded that the negotiations on the long-term EU budget are a big fight every 7 years. They always start well in advance to allow enough time for agreement. However, the pandemic came unexpectedly and its huge impact meant that the Commission had to put a radical new budget proposal on the table very late in the negotiation process. The Commission proposed €800 billion extra for a recovery fund. This proposal was made only in May this year and still has to be agreed by December, together with the already proposed €1000 billion budget.

Moreover, the negotiations were not only about the amounts but also about the rules for how they were spent. There is a lot at stake. That is why raising the profile of the ERC and explaining how important ERC is, so that the key stakeholders do not forget about ERC, is vitally important. The ERC Interim President and all ScC members have made significant efforts in this direction and have succeeded in raising the visibility of frontier research to the top of peoples' minds in the negotiations. Regarding recent developments, it was explained to the ScC members that the agreement reached by the Heads of State during the infamous 90 hours European Summit in July is not the final one. In order to turn it into a law and an actual EU budget, an act of the Council of the EU is required with the approval of the European Parliament. The Parliament has its own views on the budget. So the final decision is still to come.

Model Grant Agreement (MGA)

The ERCEA reminded the ScC that the corporate MGA was adopted in June 2020 and the adoption of the Horizon Europe MGA is expected in the Fall.

Rules for Submission

The ERCEA reminded the ScC that in April the ScC approved the Rules for Submission and the document was sent to DG Research and Innovation for comments. It was stressed that it is vital for the adoption to take place before the launch of the first calls from the ERC Work Programme 2021.

Expert contracts

The ERCEA informed the ScC that for the first Horizon Europe calls the Horizon 2020 expert contract will be used. The Horizon Europe expert contract is only expected by the end of the year 2021.

Submission forms

The ERCEA gave an update to the ScC on the state of play of the discussions with DG Research and Innovation on the submission forms. It was noted that the ERC needs a set of submission forms quite urgently as the first ERC calls will hopefully open in January (StG 2021 and PoC 2021). Moreover, the ScC was informed that a new, common submission template for Horizon Europe has been discussed and developed by DG Research and Innovation.

Reporting templates

The ERCEA reported that DG Research and Innovation is also developing a new, common template for reporting.

Work Programme 2021

The ERCEA noted that there are not many recent developments as regards the Work Programme 2021. The document is ready for adoption but this can only happen once Horizon Europe is agreed, then all related legal documents will be approved in cascade.

8. ScC Rules for Procedure in the ScC

The ERCEA reminded the ScC that in June they were presented with their revised Rules of Procedure and Code of Conduct. Modifications were agreed to both the Rules of Procedure and the Code of Conduct at the last plenary meeting. The ScC discussed and agreed some further modifications and adopted the final version of the document.

9. Chairing of ScC Standing Committees

Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON informed the ScC that the Board discussed the chairing of the Standing Committees and is proposing to keep the ERC Interim President as Chair of the Standing Committee on Panels (SCoP). The ScC agreed with the proposal.

As regards the Standing Committees for CoIME and PRIME, given that the mandates of the two Vice-Presidents Prof. Janet THORNTON and Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER are coming to an end in December 2020, new Chairs need to take over as of 1st January 2021.

Prof. Janet THORNTON proposed that Prof. Nektarios TAVERNARAKIS (Vice-President as of January 2021) replaces her as Chair of the Standing Committee PRIME.

Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER proposed that Prof. Eveline CRONE replaces him as Chair of the Standing Committee CoIME.

Both candidates accepted the nominations and the ScC agreed with the proposed changes.

10. Outcome of the Task Force on ScC time commitment and remuneration

The ERCEA Secretariat of the Task Force on ScC time commitment and remunerations reported on the conclusions and recommendations of the group.

11. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and WGs

The Chairs of the Standing Committees and WGs that met recently reported on their activities. Those included the PRIME Committee, the Committee on Panels, the Working Group on Gender Issues and the Working Group Science Behind the Projects.

12. ERC mentoring initiative

Prof. Tomas JUNGWIRTH presented a proposal from the Widening European Participation WG for an ERC mentoring initiative, inspired by the Visiting Research Fellowships initiative. The main idea behind it is to have ERC grantees and former panel members willing to assist local offices who help applicants to prepare ERC proposals. The ScC unanimously approved the proposed initiative.

13. ERC-EIC activities

Prof. Kurt MEHLHORN gave an update on the state of play of the ERC-EIC activities.

Friday 16 October 2020

14. ERC and Open Science activities

Follow-up on the ERC's withdrawal of support to cOAlition S and related topics

Prof. Paola BOVOLENTA thanked the Open Access WG members for all the work on the topic and the ERCEA Secretariat of the WG for the excellent summary of the issues at stake. The ScC members then had a discussion on possible follow up actions.

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

Prof. Paola BOVOLENTA reported on the outcome of the WG discussions on the ERC's alignment with the DORA principles. Following the discussion, the ScC voted in favour of signing DORA.

15. Operational Issues Reporting: Evaluation Analysis & Grant Management Activities

The ERCEA gave an update on the outcome of the ongoing evaluations, including CoG 2020 Step 2 and SyG 2020 Step 3 and AdG 2020. The ScC was reminded of the overall timeline of the 2020 calls and also shared some overall comments and take home messages. The evaluation of the ERC is perfectly on time due to the extraordinary dedication of the ERCEA staff and of the panel members.

16. Visiting Research Fellowship Programme

Prof. Tomas JUNGWIRTH reported on a proposal received by ERC in June as regards a Visiting Research Fellowship Programme. The ScC agreed to the CNR proposal.

17. Communication activities update

The ERCEA reported on recent activities and events. The ScC was reminded of the work done in support of the research budget battle, including publicity, media mentions (56 media quotes) across Europe and social media interactions (about 9000).

Report on R&I days

The ERCEA reported on the ERC participation at the R&I Days, which took place on 22-24 September, via an online event. It was noted that the ScC was very well represented by Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON, Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER, Prof. Kurt MEHLHORN (in an ERC-EIC session) and Prof. Tomas JUNGWIRTH (in a session on widening). The ERC-organised Nobel and Kavli Prize winners' session was excellent and more people attended online this year, compared to last year.

Past and upcoming events

The ERCEA reported on the recent announcement of the StG results.

Moreover, ERC awareness raising webinars (5) have taken place worldwide, organised in partnership with EURAXESS. 1300 attendees participated at the 5 online webinars at virtually no cost.

In addition, the public engagement with research award 2020 announcement event took place in July. 7500 people watched the award ceremony live. This gave a lot of visibility to ERC, including increasing the ERC website visits. In addition, there was a webinar with the winners of the public engagement with research award 2020 at the R&I Days. As regards the next edition of the public engagement with

research award, it was proposed to have focus groups/discussion with the ScC in December 2020. Also, the ScC was informed that Prof. Eveline CRONE has kindly agreed to take over from Prof. Fabio ZWIRNER the Chairing of the Jury.

Also, social media followers of ERC were reported to have increased with ERC having more Tweeter followers than DG Research and Innovation and Commissioner Mariya GABRIEL. Nevertheless, it was highlighted that there are some challenges for the communications team with technical difficulties related to organising online meetings.

10.000th ERC Grantee

The ERCEA noted that a celebration event for the ERC 10.000th grantee could be organised around April 2021 at the earliest. At the same time, the ERC could take the opportunity to celebrate all of its 10.000 grantees since its creation.

External Communication Strategy 2021 – first ideas

The ERCEA presented some first ideas as regards the drafting of the ERC external communication strategy 2021. Also, the strategy would come in the context of a pandemic, which will most likely continue for a while.

18. Any Other Business

Revision of the Panel structure 2021 - 2022 - Additional changes to the PE1 panel descriptors

The ScC discussed and agreed on some small changes related to the PE1 panel descriptors, as well as approved the revised Panel structure for the ERC calls 2021 and 2022.

Thanking the staff

Prof. Jean-Pierre BOURGUIGNON thanked all staff involved in organising/running the plenary meeting.

12:30 Close of the Meeting