



European Research Council  
Scientific Council

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## EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 89<sup>th</sup> PLENARY MEETING, 14-15 February 2023, Brussels, BE MINUTES

**Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order):** Maria LEPTIN (ERC President), Geneviève ALMOUZNI, Harriet BULKELEY, Eveline CRONE, Ben FERINGA, Mercedes GARCÍA-ARENAL (online), Gerd GIGERENZER, Tom HENZINGER, Dirk INZÉ, Eystein JANSEN, Chryssa KOUVELIOTOU, Sylvie LORENTE, Laszlo LOVÁSZ, Luke O'NEILL, Björn OTTERSTEN, Giovanni SARTOR, Nicola SPALDIN (online), Jesper SVEJSTRUP, Alice VALKÁROVÁ and Milena ŽIC FUCHS.

**ERC Executive Agency staff present:** Laurence MOREAU, Jose LABASTIDA, Anthony LOCKETT, Angela LIBERATORE, Pascale CID, Josefina ENFEDAQUE, Philippe CUPERS, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Lino PAULA, Niki ATZOULATOU, Gwennael JOLIFF-BOTREL, Ben TURNER, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Katja MEINKE, Sabine SIMMROSS, Dace RAMBAKA, Elena TOMA, Laura PONTIGGIA, Anna PELAGOTTI, Jasmin SADAT, Diego CHIALVA, Anne NIELSEN, Luis FARINA BUSTO, Isabelle ORTMANS, Srdjan PERKO, Severina SHOPOVA, Andrea POLYAK and Brigitte ETIENNE.

**ERC Executive Agency staff participating online:** Mila BAS SANCHEZ, Raluca IONESCU, Philippe VIJGHEN, Nikola CAR, Eleni ZIKA, Alice RAJEWSKY, Dagmar MEYER, Eleni CHATZICHRISTOU, Elena VOLPI, Vladan ARSENIJEVIC, David KRASA, Carmen GARCIA FERNANDEZ, Simona ROMAGNOLI, Marcin MONKO, Telma CARVALHO, Frank KUHN, Monique SMAIHI, Jhansi KOTA, Ulrike KAINZ, David KURZ, Fiona KERNAN, Mariam BENJDIA, Marilena PLESU, Agnes KULCSAR, Roberta MAGGIO, Irene PALOMO NUNEZ, Wieland STAESSENS, Miguel PESQUERA, Soudaina WALA and Anne BERGER.

**Expert invited online:** Emma LAZZERI.

**Chair of the meeting:** Maria LEPTIN (ERC President).

**Rapporteur:** Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency.

**Guest:** Former Scientific Council member Paola BOVOLENTA (Agenda item 14 only).

### Tuesday 14 February 2023

#### 1. Welcome of Scientific Council Members, plans and goals of the meeting

Maria LEPTIN welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the main points to be discussed during the plenary. She noted that Nicola SPALDIN and Mercedes GARCÍA-ARENAL would attend remotely. Maria LEPTIN welcomed four new Scientific Council members present, Harriet BULKELEY, Björn OTTERSTEN, Luke O'NEILL, Tom HENZINGER. The new members introduced themselves. She informed that a fifth new member, Leszek KACZMAREK, would start his activities as Scientific Council member once a temporarily existing conflict of interest is over. Maria LEPTIN informed the Scientific Council that a new Director General was appointed for the Directorate General for Research and

Innovation (DG R&I), Marc LEMAÎTRE, who would take office on 16 February. She would try to organise a meeting with him at his earliest convenience.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda of the 89th Plenary Meeting of the ERC Scientific Council**

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

## **3. Adoption of the minutes of the 88<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting**

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

## **4. Action points summary of the 88<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting**

The ERC Executive Agency informed the Scientific Council on the various action points from the previous Scientific Council plenary meeting in October 2022.

## **5. Update on recent meetings and activities**

Maria LEPTIN reported from her recent meetings. Those included the following:

- World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos where she had speaker engagements in two sessions: “State of the pandemic” moderated by Euronews with the CEO of Moderna and “Doubling down on science” with the Director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory;
- STOA annual lecture, opened by Christian EHLER, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and keynote by Özlem TÜRECI on 25 January 2023, who stressed the importance of fundamental science;
- Final Panel Chairs Meeting on 9 February 2023 during which very useful feedback had been shared. The Scientific Council should receive a report and reserve time at the plenary to discuss this in the future. The presence of Scientific Council members at the meeting had been much appreciated.

Eveline CRONE reported that she had given a tutorial on the ERC for the Dutch Society for Brain and Cognition on 24 January.

Eystein JANSEN reported that he had chaired a breakout session at the Final Panel Chairs Meeting and stressed some discussions on how to evaluate budgets in relation to lump sums.

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported that he had participated in an event organised in Denmark for potential applicants in the LS domain.

## **6. ERC Executive Agency housing**

The ERC Executive Agency Director reported on recent developments regarding the housing of the ERC Executive Agency. She explained that in May 2022, the Commission’s Office for Infrastructure and Buildings (OIB) informed the ERCEA that three of the four Executive Agencies that are currently housed in the Covent Garden building would move to a new building, but the ERCEA would stay in the Covent Garden building. However, in November the OIB had changed the plans and informed the ERCEA that it would be the first or second Agency to move to a new building since the Agency’s contract with Covent Garden would end in September 2023. The Agency had already raised its concerns to the OIB and in particular stressed that it would be ready to move only if and when the

evaluation centre is established together with the office of the President and the rest of the Agency. Discussions would continue and the Scientific Council would be updated on any developments.

## **7. State of play of Horizon Europe implementation**

### **– *Update on the association of third countries***

The ERC Executive Agency informed the Scientific Council members on the developments of the association of third countries to the EU Framework Programme. It was noted that negotiations with the UK and Switzerland have been blocked for political reasons, in the case of the UK for issues related to Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol. If an official agreement could be reached, association to the Framework Programme would be possible immediately. 10 April had been identified as an important, politically symbolic date for a possible agreement to be reached on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Good Friday agreement.

In the case of Switzerland, the EU and Switzerland had restarted exploratory talks.

Under Horizon Europe, new countries have been allowed to negotiate association as well. Several have begun and those include New Zealand, South Korea, Japan and Canada. New Zealand had already completed the Commission negotiations, but the European Parliament would still need to ratify the agreement. New Zealand would associate to Pillar 2. South Korea had expressed interest to associate to ERC as well and the Scientific Council would need to discuss further on this.

### **– *Update on reporting templates***

The ERC Executive Agency reported on the discussions with the Commission regarding the reporting templates.

## **8. Panel re-organisation**

The ERC Executive Agency presented current challenges to ERC evaluations and “quick fixes” for Work Programme 2024 on behalf of the Task Force on Panel Re-organisation.

## **9. Lump sums implementation**

The ERC Executive Agency gave an update on the work of the internal Task Force on Lump Sums.

The Scientific Council was reminded of the eight conditions to approve an ERC lump sum model for the Advanced Grant call in the ERC 2024 Work Programme. Additional funding under the lump sum model was noted. For the final payment, the wish of the Scientific Council had been that the notion of “% completion” should be clarified as corresponding to “% payment requested”. A text clarifying % of completion had been negotiated with the Commission to appear in the reporting tool in all lump sum programmes (including eventual calls by the ERC). The Scientific Council voted unanimously in favour of the lump sum model. It was to be implemented for the AdG2024 call with some final adjustments to the text on % completion to be done by the Agency under the guidance of the ERC President.

## **10. Communication activities and forthcoming events**

The ERC Executive Agency reported on recent communication activities, including the following:

- The statement from the Scientific Council on research assessment and the planned changes for the Work Programme 2024 had been published on the ERC website and had been well

received by the community. Good media interviews and positive social media feedback had been recorded;

- Over 40,000 views have been recorded on the session on the pandemic at Davos that Maria spoke at;
- Press releases on PoC and CoG releases had been issued recently and HIs have been communicating actively together with ERC communications unit, attracting good media coverage and social media engagement;
- The science journalism initiative had started with seven eligible proposals that are now under evaluation and an expected announcement of the outcome of the call in March;
- 3rd edition of the Public Engagement with Research Award to be launched later this year (November);
- Event with communications officers from host institutions (a network of the ERC communications unit): over 100 communication officers will come to the ERC in April to discuss how to communicate frontier research;
- Next edition of the R&I Days to take place on 25 and 26 October. It will consist of events in Brussels and in Sofia. More information will be shared with the Scientific Council around June;
- The ERC will be organising an event with the European Parliament in October/November;
- 2024 Nobel dialogue event in Europe to take place in early March with ERC involvement around the topic of science and decision making. ERC projects could be brought forward;
- Communications support to WGs such as the Gender and Diversity Issues WG and the Mapping Frontier Research WG. The Gender and Diversity Issues WG Chair recorded a video advertising the ERC extensions' policy. The Widening European Participation WG had also been working on ideas for communication actions;
- Maria LEPTIN had introduced a tradition to debrief all staff in the Agency from plenary meetings, which had been appreciated in terms of internal communication activities.

The Scientific Council members noted that it is important to connect and discuss with young researchers and with the major foundations in Europe that have good communications offices. That way the ERC could put science and frontier research high on the political agendas, which is very important for the upcoming negotiations on the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

## **11. Research assessment**

The ERC Executive Agency reminded the Scientific Council of recent discussions on research assessment and the decisions taken at the December plenary meeting. The Scientific Council then discussed further some of the outstanding points, regarding the PIs CV and Track Record and evaluation questions.

Maria LEPTIN stated that guidance would be provided to both applicants and panel members on any changes to be implemented by the ERC regarding research assessment.

## **12. Strategic discussion on gender and diversity issues**

The Chair of the Working Group on Gender and Diversity Issues, Geneviève ALMOUZNI, presented an overview of the activities carried out by the WG since its creation in 2008.

The ERC Executive Agency shared information related to requests for extensions by ERC applicants and parental leave in Europe.

The Scientific Council had a brief discussion on ERC extensions and its impact on female applicants over the years as well as parental leaves for fathers. The Scientific Council concluded that the parental leave issue is complex and politically sensitive, but the GDIWG should continue to explore the topic and come back to the plenary for further discussions.

The ERC Executive Agency shared an overview of diversity policies of research organisations and funders in Europe and across the world. Due to time constraints the Scientific Council did not discuss further the topic of diversity but wished to return to the topic at a future plenary meeting.

### **13. ScC Working Groups and their remits**

The ERC Executive Agency reminded the Scientific Council of the background on the WGs over the years, as well as their current structure, composition and rules. The Scientific Council discussed each WG's remit and updated the membership of the various WGs and Committees.

Dirk INZÉ noted that the WG on Engaging with the Public had never started working but perhaps it should be revived in the current context.

### **14. Expert study on the readiness of repositories to enable ERC grantees to comply with the HE Open Science obligations**

The ERC Executive Agency introduced Emma LAZZERI, chair of the expert group that had conducted the study on readiness of repositories to enable ERC grantees to comply with the Horizon Europe Open Science obligations. She presented the outcome of the study. Paola BOVOLENTA attended this agenda item as well. The Scientific Council was asked whether the report could be published and decided in favour of the publication.

### **15. Closed session**

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

## **Wednesday 15 February 2023**

### **16. Work Programme 2024 (WP2024)**

The ERC Executive Agency suggested changes and other issues linked to the Work Programme 2024, together with a reminder of the budget distribution. The Scientific Council was reminded of decisions that had been taken at the December 2022 plenary meeting. The Scientific Council further discussed ongoing issues with relevance to the Work Programme 2024.

### **17. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and Working Groups**

The various standing committees and WGs that met recently reported on their activities.

#### **– *Standing Committee on Panels (CoP)***

Maria LEPTIN reported that CoP met on 13 February and discussed among other things the participation of Scientific Council members at meetings of the evaluation panels as observers. Particular attention was paid to the AdG2024 panels since the lump sum model would be introduced. The ERC Executive Agency would share the evaluation calendar with the Scientific Council members.

- ***Standing Committee CoIME***

Eveline CRONE reported from CoIME and announced that Björn OTTERSTEN had agreed to join the Committee.

- ***Standing Committee PRIME***

Jesper SVEJSTRUP announced that Luke O'NEILL had joined the Committee. Harriet BULKELEY noted that she would like to observe the PRIME Committee as she was interested in ERC policy relevance.

- ***WG on Mapping Frontier Research (MFR)***

Dirk INZÉ reported from recent activities of the MFR WG, including the recent meeting on 13 February. The WG had been discussing the fact sheets produced by the Agency on 'Europe Fit For The Digital Age' and 'EU4Health', among others. The WG had also decided to look further and highlight some societal aspects.

- ***WG on Innovation***

Sylvie LORENTE reported from her introductory meeting with Mark FERGUSON from the EIC. They had agreed that representatives of the ERC and EIC should meet in March to further discuss the innovation internships that had been discussed in the past. Also, the joint seminars between ERC and EIC would be continued but with a different format.

## **18. Information for the Scientific Council members on funded projects**

The ERC Executive Agency presented to the Scientific Council the Scientific Newsletter and explained where the scientific highlights came from. It was noted that around 6% of weekly editorial highlights made by editors from *Nature* and *Science* were ERC-funded projects. The ERC Executive Agency also introduced the mandate and scope of ERIS (ERC Research Information System) and gave a live demo of the tool.

## **19. Operational issues reporting**

The ERC Executive Agency reported on the AdG2022 results.

The ERC Executive Agency shared information on the use of portability by UK and Swiss PIs in the ERC 2021 and 2022 calls.

The ERC Executive Agency gave an update on the EU Council decision on the eligibility for funding of some Hungarian institutions. The context and scope of the sanctions imposed on Hungary were highlighted. It was noted that the impact on the ERC was low.

## **20. Any other business**

No items were discussed under this agenda point.