



European Research Council
Scientific Council

Established by the European Commission

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 96th PLENARY MEETING 17-18 October 2024, Berlin, DE MINUTES

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): Mercedes GARCÍA-ARENAL, Gerd GIGERENZER, Liselotte HØJGAARD, Tom HENZINGER, Dirk INZÉ, Eystein JANSEN, Leszek KACZMAREK, Sylvie LORENTE, Laszlo LOVÁSZ, Maria LEPTIN (ERC President), Luke O'NEILL, Björn OTTERSTEN, Torsten PERSSON, Giovanni SARTOR, Nicola SPALDIN, Jesper SVEJSTRUP, Alice VALKÁROVÁ, Milena ŽIC FUCHS

Scientific Council members present via videoconference: Chryssa KOUVELIOTOU

Scientific Council members excused: Geneviève ALMOUZNI, Harriet BULKELEY, Ben FERINGA

ERC Executive Agency staff on site: Laurence MOREAU, Jose LABASTIDA, Mila BAS SANCHEZ, Pascale CID, Philippe CUPERS, Josefina ENFEDAQUE, Raluca IONESCU, Gwenn JOLIFF-BOTREL, Angela LIBERATORE, Lino PAULA, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Martin PENNY, Laura PONTIGGIA, Sejla SEDIC, Sabine SIMMROSS, Wieland STAESSENS, Ben TURNER, Elena VLOPI

ERC Executive Agency staff via videoconference: Carlos HERNANDEZ FERREIRO, Jhansi KOTA, Agnes KULCSAR, Dagmar MEYER, Anna PELAGOTTI, Monique SMAIHI, Elena TOMA, Mike MUGABUSHAKA, Miguel PESQUERA

Chair of the meeting: Maria LEPTIN, ERC President

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency

Thursday 17 October 2024

1. Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 96th Plenary Meeting

Maria LEPTIN welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the main points to be discussed in plenary. Juergen KROSEBERG from the Federal Ministry of Research and Education (BMBF), as one of the hosts of the meeting, welcomed the Scientific Council (ScC) to Berlin.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 96th Plenary Meeting

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

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 95th Plenary Meeting

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

4. Action Points of the 95th Plenary Meeting

The ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) informed the ScC on the various action points from the ScC plenary meeting in June.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

Maria LEPTIN reported on her recent activities as follows:

- on 13 September she attended the 20th anniversary of the Foundation of Christiane NÜSSLEIN-VOLHARD in Berlin, of which she is co-Director. The foundation has supported young women by providing small stipends, enabling them to dedicate more time to focusing on their scientific research.
- on 23 September she attended a conference dedicated to frontier research of the Polish Academy of Sciences attended by the Polish Deputy Science Minister and the scientific community in Warsaw (300 participants). The conference also included a workshop for potential applicants. Maria LEPTIN also met with the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Polish Science Minister and Deputy Minister, the Heads of the Polish Rectors Conference and the leadership of the National Science Centre (NCN).
- she met with the Estonian research community and ministry at the Estonian Representation to the EU in Brussels at the opening of an exhibition on ERC-funded research in Estonia.
- in September, she met with Sylvie RETAILLEAU, who has been serving as Minister of Higher Education and Science of France to discuss the 10th EU framework programme for Research and Innovation.
- she met the UK Chief Scientific Advisor in Brussels at the beginning of October.
- in early October she met with the French Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU.

Eystein JANSEN reported on his recent activities as follows:

- on 3 and 4 September he attended the Kavli Prize ceremonies and seminars in Oslo and met with the Minister of Education and Research and leading figures in academia. Torsten PERSSON was also present.
- on 6 September, together with Torsten PERSSON and Maria LEPTIN, he attended a meeting in Brussels with Marc LEMAÎTRE, Director General of DG RTD.
- on 13 September he had dinner with Manuel HEITOR, who was in Bergen on a separate mission, to discuss his forthcoming report launch.
- on 19 and 20 September he attended the Körber Prize award ceremony, and the first edition of the Hamburg Science Summit. Nicola SPALDIN was also present.
- on 23 September he gave a keynote speech at the annual conference of Nordic University Rectors in Brussels.
- on 1 and 2 October he observed the CoG Step 2 evaluations of several PE panels and had good meetings with panel members and panel chairs.

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported on his recent activities as follows:

- he authored an article for the prominent Danish newspaper, 'Weekend Avisen', on the significance of basic science, mentioning the ERC several times. The article was published on 30 August.
- on 4 September he attended the Carlsberg Foundation Prize evening, where he was awarded the Carlsberg Prize 2024. He had the opportunity to discuss various issues with the Danish Minister for Higher Education and Science and H.M. Queen Mary of Denmark.

Gerd GIGERENZER reported on his recent activities as follows:

- he visited the University of Southampton, where he gave an introductory lecture on the ERC.

Milena ŽIC FUCHS reported on her recent activities as follows:

- she attended the European University Association (EUA) meeting in Helsinki, which was attended by 220 Nordic rectors.

6. 10th EU framework programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)

Maria LEPTIN reported meeting Gianluigi CONSOLI, Director General for Internationalisation at the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research, in Rome on 18 September to discuss FP10. She also took part in the launch event of the ‘Research Matters’ campaign in Brussels on 2 October. She spoke on a panel alongside Enrico LETTA, who introduced his report, and Christian EHLER, a Member of the European Parliament, and Pascal METIVIER, Head of Research and Innovation at Syensqo, a Belgian multinational materials company. Additionally, she mentioned a recent meeting with Commissioner-designate Ekaterina ZAHARIEVA, during which they discussed the ERC’s stance on several key issues. The ERC President’s office reported on several other FP10 relevant meetings, including the recent visit to Poland. The Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education emphasised the importance of curiosity-driven research. Maria LEPTIN held a joint press conference with him and gave multiple interviews, amplifying the visit’s impact across Poland. Maria LEPTIN will continue her visits to EU Members States to discuss FP10, with trips scheduled to Cyprus and Portugal before the end of the year.

ERCEA reflected on the origins of the ScC FP10 statement, revisiting the early discussions on FP10 that began in 2023, and noted recent relevant reports. Enrico LETTA’s report, for example, analysed the evolution of the EU single market’s trajectory and included reference to a ‘fifth freedom’ focused on research and innovation, alongside the traditional four freedoms. Further bolstering the case for prioritising research and innovation, Mario DRAGHI’s report advocated for doubling the ERC’s budget and safeguarding its independence. This was echoed in Ursula VON DER LEYEN’s political guidelines, which gave research and innovation a central role and included specific references to expanding both the ERC and the EIC. Together, these contributions have created a favourable political climate for advancing the ERC’s objectives. Additionally, on 16 October, Manuel HEITOR presented his FP10 recommendations, emphasising the ERC’s exceptional effectiveness and reaffirming the need to double its budget and protect its independence. The ScC will continue deliberations on the recommendations outlined in the reports of LETTA, DRAGHI and HEITOR.

7. Strategic Areas

Maria LEPTIN provided an update on ‘strategic areas’, drawing from a collection of ideas, suggestions, and various concerns, ranging from major to minor, accumulated over time. The ScC reviewed and discussed issues that had been resolved, those still in progress, items currently on hold, and topics considered no longer relevant.

8. Update on the strategic areas ‘Interdisciplinarity’ and ‘Funding Schemes’

Leszek KACZMAREK provided an update on the recent deliberation of the funding schemes project team.

9. Lump sum pilot in Advanced Grant call 2024

Maria LEPTIN reminded ScC members of the outstanding issues concerning the lump sum pilot for AdG2024, drawing attention to those that needed further discussion.

10. Eligibility windows in StG and CoG calls

Maria LEPTIN recalled the ScC’s discussions during the Bergen plenary about adjusting the eligibility windows for the StG and CoG schemes. The ScC continued its deliberations on the topic, also exploring potential mitigating measures.

11. Update on security matters

Maria LEPTIN recalled earlier discussions of the ScC on security matters. She noted that Tom HENZINGER and Björn OTTERSTEN had been designated to monitor developments on behalf of the ScC and liaise with ERCEA staff engaged in the Commission's discussions on this issue. The ScC will continue its deliberations on security matters as the situation evolves.

12. ERCEA housing and Steering Committee rules of procedure

The ERCEA Director provided an update on developments concerning the housing of the ERCEA and recent discussions within the Steering Committee regarding its rules of procedure.

13. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

Friday 18 October 2024

14. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and Working Groups

– *Standing Committee on Panels (CoP)*

Maria LEPTIN provided an update on recent activities of the CoP, including discussions on parts of the application form and feedback from panel members. She also noted discussions on the re-invitations for the 2026 StG, CoG and SyG panels.

– *Standing Committee CoIME*

Eystein JANSEN reported on the activities of CoIME, covering recent cases involving conflicts of interest of panel chairs and panel members. He also noted incidents of alleged sexual harassment and ongoing research integrity allegations.

– *Standing Committee PRIME*

Jesper SVEJSTRUP updated the ScC on recent PRIME meetings, which included discussions with external experts on the monitoring and evaluation activities of the ERC Scientific Council, as well as relevant reports related to mapping frontier research.

– *WG on Widening European Participation*

Alice VALKÁROVÁ reported on the most recent meeting of the Widening European Participation WG, held on 16 October, where discussions focused on the participation of Principle Investigators from widening countries in ERC calls.

– *WG on Innovation*

Sylvie LORENTE reported on the recent activities of the Innovation WG, which convened the day before the plenary. She mentioned a recent survey of ERC grantees regarding the use of their patents and a campaign aimed at publicising in local media the success stories of ERC Proof of Concept grantees whose research led to innovations.

– *WG on Open science*

Nicola SPALDIN provided an update on recent activities of the Open Science WG, noting three main topics that have been discussed: Open Research Europe (ORE), the Digital Services Act (DSA), and an update on the ERC study on repositories.

15. Proposal for the ERC Conference in 2025

ERCEA shared with the ScC relevant criteria for selecting topics for the ERC conference in 2025, as well as proposed several potential themes for consideration. Additionally, an update was provided on the upcoming ERC conference on *'Frontier research within and beyond the planetary boundaries'*, scheduled to take place in Brussels on 5 December. The ScC was informed about the sessions, speakers, and the roundtable composition.

16. Communication activities

ERCEA reported on recent communication activities, highlighting key takeaways from social media engagement, including LinkedIn and a WhatsApp channel as growing forums for ERC. The ERC website has continued to experience significant growth in terms of visitors and page views. ScC members were informed that six winners of the Public Engagement in Research Award (PERA) would be announced on 24 October during a live event in Brussels, which would also be livestreamed. Regarding the Science Journalism Initiative, the first seven journalists had already been awarded grants, and a second call for applications had recently closed.

17. Operational issues reporting

ERCEA reported on the 2024 Starting Grant and Synergy Grant evaluations.

18. Proposal for evaluation-panel observers

ERCEA outlined options for the participation of external observers in ERC panel meetings in 2025, noting their role and potential working arrangements. The ScC will continue its discussions on the expert profiles and recruitment approach.

19. Allocation of additional credits from associated countries

The ScC discussed the allocation of an additional €25.5 million in credits from associated countries across the ERC grant schemes.

20. Appointment of the chair of the Working Group on Widening European Participation

Mercedes GARCÍA-ARENAL proposed the appointment of Leszek KACZMAREK as the new chair of the Working Group on Widening European Participation since the mandate of Alice VALKÁROVÁ will end on 31 December 2024. The ScC members unanimously approved Leszek KACZMAREK to take over as chair, effective 1 January 2025. He accepted the appointment.

21. Any other business

-ScC plenary meeting on 8-10 October 2025 in Copenhagen, Denmark

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reminded the ScC members about the upcoming Copenhagen plenary, scheduled for October 2025. The meeting will begin with a high-level event on the afternoon of 7 October, which may be attended by H.M. Queen Mary of Denmark, depending on her availability. He encouraged ScC members to make their travel arrangements in advance to ensure their attendance.