

**European Research Council
Scientific Council
99th plenary meeting
29-30 April 2025, Brussels, Belgium
MINUTES**

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): Geneviève Almouzni, Harriet Bulkeley, Gerd Gigerenzer, Tom Henzinger, Liselotte Højgaard, Dirk Inzé, Eystein Jansen, Leszek Kaczmarek, Maarit Karppinen, Maria Leptin (President of the ERC), Sylvie Lorente, Luke O'Neill, Torsten Persson, Tomaž Prosen, Giovanni Sartor, Nicola Spaldin, András Stipsicz, Jesper Svejstrup and Milena Žic Fuchs

Scientific Council members present via videoconference: Mercedes García-Arenal and Björn Ottersten

ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) staff on site (in alphabetical order): Niki Atzoulidou, Mila Bas Sanchez, Pascale Cid, Philippe Cupers, Madeleine Drielsma, Josefina Enfedaque, Raluca Ionescu, David Krasa, Angela Liberatore, Katja Meinke, Laurence Moreau, Lino Paula, Miguel Pesquera, Martin Penny, Andrea Polyak, Laura Pontiggia, Sejla Sedic, Sabine Simmross, Wieland Staessens, Ben Turner

Assistants of the ERC Vice-Presidents (in alphabetical order): Linling Chen, Elisabeth Corcelle Termeau and Pamela Rossel

ERC Executive Agency staff additional participants (in alphabetical order): Eilish Brault, Nikola Car, Carlos Hernandez Ferreiro, Marie Huysman, David Kurz, Veronica Martinez Ocana, Dagmar Meyer, Alexis-Michael Mugabushaka, Anna Pelagotti, Elena Toma, Elena Volpi, Eleni Zika

Chair of the meeting: Maria Leptin, President of the ERC

Rapporteur: Severina Shopova, ERC Executive Agency

Tuesday 29 April 2025

1. Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 99th Plenary Meeting

Maria LEPTIN welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the main points to be discussed during the plenary. She welcomed András Stipsicz, the new member of the Scientific Council, who introduced himself. Maria Leptin informed the Scientific Council that the selection process for the Head of Unit A1 had concluded, with Dr. Alban Kellerbauer having been appointed to the position.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 99th Plenary Meeting

The Scientific Council approved the Draft Agenda of the meeting.

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 98th Plenary Meeting

The Scientific Council approved the Draft Minutes of the previous plenary meeting, and the members agreed to continue to review the Minutes.

4. Action Points of the 98th Plenary Meeting

The ERCEA updated the Scientific Council on various action points from the February plenary meeting.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

Gerd Gigerenzer reported on a meeting held on 1 April with the British ambassador in Berlin, attended by British professors working in Germany and a Max Planck director. The ERC received significant recognition.

Jesper Svejstrup reported that preparations for the Scientific Council October meeting in Denmark were progressing well, including the high-level event with distinguished politicians and science stakeholders.

Eystein Jansen reported on a meeting with the new Norwegian Minister of Research and Higher Education, Sigrun Gjerløw Aasland, on 27 March. The Minister expressed great interest in the ERC, and they discussed the current challenges facing scientists based in the US, as well as related European and ERC initiatives to support them. Eystein Jansen also presented the ERC Work Programme 2026 at the April Programme Committee meeting and received positive feedback.

Liselotte Højgaard had participated in an online meeting with representatives from the UK Royal Society, which addressed online harassment of researchers and the importance of defending freedom of speech. Liselotte Højgaard also met with Enrico Letta in Copenhagen and discussed research and education as the fifth freedom. Liselotte Højgaard attended a meeting, hosted by Harvard Medical School on freedom of speech and research interests.

Dirk Inzé represented the ERC at the UN University of Comparative Regional Integration meeting, where 150 young researchers discussed international careers and research skills.

Maria Leptin reported on the US situation and reminded the Scientific Council of its recent decision to increase start-up costs for relocating to Europe for ERC grants. She also referenced an upcoming conference on 5 May, organised by French President Emmanuel Macron, titled 'Choose Europe for Science', which would be attended by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation Ekaterina Zaharieva, and high-level representatives of universities, research institutions, and companies. The Commission was expected to announce concrete measures to strengthen science and research. Maria Leptin reported that the new German government had recently elevated the importance of research, technology and space by creating a separate ministry for these topics and splitting it off from education. She recapped meetings from her visit to Ireland, organised by Luke O'Neill, with key government figures, including the Prime Minister, discussing research budgets and interviews she gave. Maria Leptin recently also met with Enrico Letta. She listed her upcoming engagements, including a visit to the UK science, technology and innovation forum, and visits to Estonia and Lithuania.

6. Workshop on Research & Innovation for a Competitive Europe

Maria Leptin introduced the Workshop on Research and Innovation for a Competitive Europe that had been organised by the ERC to engage leaders from research, industry, and policymaking in discussing ways to enhance Europe's competitiveness. It took place on 10 April and featured three closed, invitation-only sessions, followed by a public event. Attendees included Ben Feringa ((former member of the Scientific Council), Robbert Dijkgraaf (President-elect, the International Science Council), Christian Ehler (Member of the European Parliament), Marcus Schindler (Executive Vice-President and Chief Scientific Officer, Novo Nordisk), Henna Virkkunen (European Commission Executive

Vice-President for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy), Ekaterina Zaharieva (European Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation) and Andrzej Szeptycki (Undersecretary of State, Polish Ministry of Science & Higher Education). Sylvie Lorente, who attended the workshop as well, expressed satisfaction with the support and success of the event. The open session was also very well attended.

7. 10th EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

Maria Leptin explained that the Commission were working on the next long-term budget for the EU Multiannual Financial Framework but not releasing any details. Leaks suggested that there might be a plan for a significant overhaul of the current programmes. Meanwhile many others, including the European Parliament and the scientific community, were defending the current programmes and advocating for robust funding and independent governance for the ERC and the EIC. Maria Leptin reported that she recently addressed the ITRE Committee of the European Parliament, where she had stressed the importance of the independence of the ERC and its critical role for competitiveness. The informal Competitiveness Council in March, under the Polish Presidency, had issued the Warsaw declaration, which also called for an independent framework programme for research and an independent ERC. The ERC and the EIC issued a statement on 26 March, which called for the two organisations to be kept separate and independent to maintain their high standards.

The ERCEA noted that the Commission was expected to release a proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework on 8 or 9 July, followed by the proposals for the funding programmes a week later. It appeared that the Commission aimed to make research and innovation part of a new competitiveness fund along with several other current funding programmes.

8. Strategic areas: overview

Maria Leptin provided an overview on the strategic topics discussed by the ERC, including recent changes, ongoing discussions and new topics for consideration.

9. Strategic areas: interdisciplinarity

Milena Žic Fuchs, chair of the interdisciplinary project team, provided an update on their progress and referenced different approaches to handling interdisciplinary proposals since the early days of the ERC. A workshop was planned to further discuss interdisciplinarity. Leszek Kaczmarek noted positive feedback regarding the concept of Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs), which brought additional interdisciplinary expertise. Maria Leptin noted that the Scientific Council would continue its discussions on interdisciplinarity at the next plenary meeting.

10. Strategic areas: carbon neutrality

Harriet Bulkeley, chair of the carbon neutrality project team, updated the Scientific Council on the work done by an external consultant on how other research funders address climate neutrality. The project team will provide further updates to the Scientific Council at the next plenary meeting.

11. Ethics review

The ERCEA reminded the Scientific Council of the comprehensive overview presented in December 2024, referencing measures the ERCEA implemented over two years in the ethics review process and proposing new improvements. Between January and April 2025, discussions were held with members of the Scientific Council. Updates on the progress of the measures and the outcomes of mapping significant ethical issues were reported to the Scientific Council.

12. Research security

The ERCEA provided an update on dual-use research in Framework Programme 10.

13. External panel observers (new model)

Maria Leptin introduced a plan to allow independent external experts to observe ERC proposal evaluations and the Scientific Council discussed options on how to enable such observations.

14. Operational issues reporting

The ERCEA presented the Advanced Grants 2024 results, noting that 2,534 proposals had been submitted, a 38% rise in submissions compared to 2023.

15. Audits of ERC grants

The ERCEA presented information on ERC audits, elaborating on financial audits, as well as explaining the roles of independent auditors, the Commission, and the European Court of Auditors.

16. ERCEA Steering Committee rules of procedure

The ERCEA Director informed the Scientific Council about the ongoing process of revising the ERCEA Steering Committee rules of procedure.

17. Update on ERCEA activities and housing

This agenda item was not covered, as there were no new developments to report.

18. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

Wednesday 30 April 2025

19. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and Working Groups

The committees and working groups of the Scientific Council provided updates on their activities.

– *Standing Committee on Panels (CoP)*

Maria Leptin reported on recent discussions by the Committee on Panels, identifying two recurring issues: requests for additional funding and the recruitment of remote referees.

– *Standing Committee on Conflict of Interest, Scientific Misconduct and Ethical Issues (CoIME)*

Eystein Jansen noted that there had been no recent meetings of CoIME but shared updated statistics on handled cases, which were now available on the ERC website.

– *Widening European Participation Working Group (WEP)*

Leszek Kaczmarek reported on recent activities of the WEP WG, including discussions on the loss of scientific innovation due to not fully utilising talent and creativity from widening countries.

– *Innovation Working Group*

Sylvie Lorente reported on two initiatives of the Innovation WG: communicating the innovation potential of ERC grants through local newspapers and rekindling a relationship between the ERC and the EIC. Maria Leptin added that a joint statement about the link between the ERC and the EIC had been issued at the initiative of the EIC President, Michiel Scheffer.

– ***Gender and Diversity Working Group (GDWG)***

Geneviève Almouzni reported from the recent GDWG meeting, which included an update to the ERC GDWG webpage and recent ERC gender and diversity data. Other topics reported were discussions on caregiving expenses under ERC projects and developments in the implementation of gender equality plans.

20. Call for action to support a “global research ecosystem”

Nicola Spaldin drew attention to a statement¹ advocating for a "global research ecosystem" and asked whether the ERC would endorse it. The statement, published by Invest in Open Infrastructure (IOI), responded to funding cuts in research and education and stressed protecting open knowledge infrastructure. The Scientific Council agreed that the ERC President should sign the statement on behalf of the ERC.

21. ERC strategy for programme monitoring and evaluation

Jesper Svejstrup, chair of PRIME, reported on the revision of the ERC strategy for programme monitoring and evaluation, which was the result of extensive internal discussions and consultations with external experts.

22. Models to follow open science policies

Nicola Spaldin, chair of the Open Science Working Group, introduced alternatives to a working group for the Scientific Council to follow open science policies, weighing the options of maintaining the working group model versus adopting a champion model. The Open Science Working Group expressed a preference for a more informal model, where members of the Scientific Council would be consulted whenever a need arose. The Scientific Council appointed Nicola Spaldin and Giovanni Sartor as members responsible for open science matters. Maria Leptin would also be kept informed about open science discussions.

23. Update on communication activities

The ERCEA updated the Scientific Council on recent communication activities and noted the event "R&I for a Competitive Europe," which marked a collaboration with key industry and policy stakeholders. The event had attracted over 80 onsite participants and 750 online views, gathering extensive media coverage with notable entities like the Wall Street Journal in attendance. The media worldwide prominently featured funding cuts for research in the US, including quotes from the ERC President in many articles, alongside the ERC increased funding for startup costs. The ERCEA also briefed the Scientific Council on the launch of the ‘Ambassadors for the ERC’ initiative, which included 32 ERC grantees from different countries having been selected as Ambassadors by the Association of ERC Grantees. At the request of the Scientific Council, an analysis of the ERC social media presence was presented, with a specific focus on the use of the platform X. The ERC presence on X and the usage of X will be further discussed at the next plenary meeting in Durham.

24. Presentation of the study on gender equality

Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln and Felix Holub, who were contracted for a study to examine ERC gender data, presented their findings to the Scientific Council. The study explored whether and how the gender and nationality of applicants and reviewers influenced ERC evaluations across the three grant schemes, Starting Grants, Consolidator Grants and Advanced Grants. The experts engaged with the Scientific Council in a discussion of their findings, which will be reflected in their final report.

¹ Link to the statement: <https://investinopen.org/blog/statement-of-support-for-a-global-research-ecosystem/>

25. Any other business

- "Choose Europe for Science" conference in Paris on 5 May

Maria Leptin informed the Scientific Council about the upcoming conference titled "Choose Europe for Science" scheduled for 5 May in Paris and hosted by French President Emmanuel Macron. The event would include leading scientists and politicians. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was expected to attend and deliver an announcement on European efforts to support science. The ERC would be mentioned, particularly in relation to its increased additional funding for start-up costs.

- Scientific Council plenary meetings in 2026

Maria Leptin presented potential countries to host Scientific Council plenary meetings in 2026, with Austria and France as candidates. Spain had already been chosen for October 2026, and another host country needed to be identified. Maria Leptin proposed Ireland, in light of the Irish Presidency, as the host of a plenary meeting from 1 to 3 July 2026. The Scientific Council agreed, and asked Luke O'Neill to explore organising high level meetings and events in the margins of the meeting.