



**European Research Council  
Scientific Council  
102<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting  
27-28 November 2025, Brussels, BE**

**Minutes**

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

**Scientific Council members present online:** Liselotte Højgaard

**Assistants of the ERC Vice-Presidents present on site (in alphabetical order):** Monica Åberg Yngwe, Linling Chen, Elisabeth Corcelle Termeau, Patrick Finkelstein and Pamela Rossel

**ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) staff present on site (in alphabetical order):** Laurence Moreau, Niki Atzouladou, Mila Bas Sanchez, Rafael Carrasco-Jimenez, Pascale Cid, Eleni Chatzichristou, Colm Carrol, Flavia Cumoli, Philippe Cupers, Madeleine Drielsma, Alexandra Dusa, Josefina Enfedaque, Vanessa Fivet, Gwennael Joliff-Botrel, Ulrike Kainz-Fernandez, David Krasa, Alban Kellerbauer, Raluca Ionescu, Jhansi Kota, Katja Meike, Joan Vazquez Molina, Carole Micmacher, Mike Mugabushaka, Florin Patras, Miguel Pesquera, Laura Pontiggia, Dace Rambaka, Scalzi Giuliano, Jana Sifta, Elena Toma, Miguel Pesquera, Lino Paola, Martin Penny, Pablo Perez-Illana, Laura Pontiggia, Andrea Polyak, Dace Rambaka, Sejla Sedic, Sabine Simmross, Severina Shopova, Wieland Staessens, Ben Turner, Elena Volpi, Nikolaos Vosnakis, Angela Wittelsberger, Eleni Zika

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

**Rapporteur:** Severina Shopova, ERC Executive Agency

## Thursday 27 November 2025

### 1. **Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting**

Maria Leptin welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined key discussion points for the plenary. She introduced the new head of unit for physical sciences and engineering, Pablo Perez-Illana, to the Scientific Council. The assistants of the incoming Vice-Presidents Nicola Spaldin and Torsten Persson, namely Patrick Finkelstein and Monica Åberg Yngwe, also introduced themselves to the Scientific Council.

### 2. **Adoption of the Agenda of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting**

The Scientific Council adopted the Draft Agenda of the meeting with an additional point from the Committee on Panels, which could not be covered during the meeting of the Standing Committee on Panels the day before.

### 3. **Adoption of the Minutes of the 101<sup>st</sup> Plenary Meeting**

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

### 4. **Action Points of the 101<sup>st</sup> Plenary Meeting and Board meeting of 3 November**

The Agency updated the Scientific Council on closed and ongoing action points from the October plenary meeting and the Board meeting on 3 November.

### 5. **Update on Recent Meetings and Activities**

Eystein Jansen reported on his participation in a Science Europe meeting on 20 November, where he had delivered a keynote speech on FP10. The attendees, including Manuel Heitor, received his presentation positively. On 21 November, he had organised a seminar for Norwegian ERC applicants to share strategies for successful ERC applications. The event, attended by 200 participants, benefited from collaboration with the Norwegian National Contact Points and included contributions from Norwegian panel members.

Gerd Gigerenzer shared insights from his discussion on the ERC held on 21 October at the German Ministry for Science, Technology and Space. On 5 November he spoke to a group of 40 presidents and vice-presidents from Paris universities about ERC governance, independence, and limitations of the term of service of the ERC President, all met with strong interest and hope for change.

Jesper Svejstrup noted positive feedback from the October plenary meeting and side events in Copenhagen. During the annual meeting of the Danish National Research Foundation, he had shared ERC concerns about governance, which were acknowledged.

Giovanni Sartor had participated in a Brussels meeting about Article 40 of the Digital Services Act, which allows researchers access to data relevant to systemic risks. He had observed active discussions among researchers about making use of this legislative opportunity and reported on Commission plans to raise awareness through follow-up actions. Maria Leptin added that ERC grantees showed

enthusiasm for the legislation mandating large platforms like Facebook to provide data access, enabling societal effects studies.

Tom Henzinger reported on his interaction with Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva in Vienna, during which he had motivated the request from the Scientific Council to secure the permanence of the ERC.

Harriet Bulkeley had taken part in a panel at the ERC-STOA event in the European Parliament that focussed on transformative access and science policy. The event included ERC grantees as well. She had also attended a Dutch Research Council (NWO) event on the importance of fundamental research, which involved strong advocates for the cause from the Dutch government.

Björn Ottersten had had a meeting with the Luxembourg Ministry of Higher Education, during which he had conveyed the concerns of the ScC over the ERC governance. The concerns had been acknowledged.

Conny Aerts had participated in a Hungarian ERC event on 29 October where she received many questions and provided tips for applicants.

Maria Leptin reported on numerous meetings in which she had participated related to the 10<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme for Research, including Members of the European Parliament and Member State representatives. At the joint ERC-STOA event, MEP Christian Ehler had underscored the importance of the ERC and frontier research for Europe's competitiveness in his opening remarks. At the European Business Summit, Maria Leptin had moderated a panel with Philippe Aghion, Pascal Lamy and Jean-François van Boxmeer and engaged with top-level CEOs on European competitiveness. Fundamental science and academic freedom had become very important topics for discussion at the European policy level, due to the situation in the US and to the prospect of a European Research Act to be prepared in 2026 by DG-RTD. Maria Leptin had participated in several panels on academic freedom at Falling Walls in Berlin. She had also delivered several speeches in the past months on the importance of academic freedom for fundamental science. Maria Leptin had visited Bulgaria, where she had met with representatives of the scientific community, policymakers and business leaders. Maria Leptin informed the Scientific Council that the implementing arrangement between the ERC and the African Academy of Sciences had been signed, with the aim to strengthen ties and provide young African researchers the opportunity to join ERC groups for a short period of time.

Gerd Gigerenzer pointed out that Stephan Lewandowsky from the University of Bristol, had advocated for scientific freedom and warned at the opening panel of the JRC Science Week about threats to ERC governance.

## **6. 10<sup>th</sup> EU framework programme for research and innovation**

Maria Leptin reminded the Council of their discussion in October on the proposals of the Commission for the next medium-term EU budget and for the next framework programme for 2028 – 2034, where they had focussed on the proposed budget and ERC governance.

The Agency reminded the Scientific Council that the next long-term EU budget and the legal texts for the next framework programme were being negotiated on different tracks in both the Council and

the European Parliament. The Agency also explained that the Danish Presidency would present a progress report on the legal texts for the next framework programme at the final Competitiveness Council of their mandate on 9 December. On the side of the European Parliament (EP), Christian Ehler had been selected as the rapporteur for the Framework Programme Regulation and René Repasi had been selected as the rapporteur for the Specific Programme Decision. The aim of the EP was to prepare a draft report in April next year with the final report to be voted on in the EP plenary next October. Christian Ehler had also been selected as a co-rapporteur for the European Competitiveness Fund.

## **7. Strategic areas: mitigation measures**

The Agency presented proposed mitigating measures, with a focus on the Work Programme 2027. Several measures for Work Programme 2026 had been approved previously. The Scientific Council agreed that urgent measures were needed for 2027, notwithstanding longer-term strategic decisions.

## **8. Strategic areas: interdisciplinarity**

Maria Leptin introduced the agenda item by explaining that the group had decided to focus on one aspect of interdisciplinarity, namely ERC proposals which receive reviews from more than one panel. The group has been tasked with making suggestions on how to improve the evaluation of such proposals and had decided to focus on measures which can improve communication between panels and cross-panel reviewers. The Agency will now begin working on their implementation and monitor their effects. They will report back to the Scientific Council at a future plenary meeting.

## **9. ERC Work Programme 2027**

The Agency presented the status of the amendment to Work Programme 2026, which introduces the ERC Plus grants, and the draft of the Work Programme 2027. The amendment was expected to be adopted within the following two weeks. The Scientific Council discussed the proposed Work Programme 2027, including increased eligibility periods for StG and CoG and other changes. The ERC President asked the Agency to prepare an updated proposal for the February plenary meeting.

## **10. Widening European Participation**

Leszek Kaczmarek reported from recent discussions, including data on Widening countries and ERC grants. The working group considered examples of good practices and success stories in Widening countries (e.g. Czech Republic in CoG and SyG) and put forward possible actions to improve the overall participation of such countries. The Scientific Council will further discuss those at the February plenary meeting.

## **11. Operational reporting**

The Agency reported on the outcome of the CoG2025 with a call budget of € 719 million and additional budget of € 10 million, 349 proposals invited for funding, and a call success rate of 11.3%.

## **12. Update on communication activities**

The Agency reviewed recent media coverage on ERC-funded research, the “Choose Europe” initiative, the 15<sup>th</sup> Nobel prize for an ERC grantee (Philippe Aghion), the outcome of SyG 2025 and ERC leaders in the press. The ERC Communication strategy for 2026-2027 was presented, highlighting key objectives. The Scientific Council discussed the upcoming ERC 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign under the ERC 20 brand, involving Member States, host institutions and international partners.

## **13. Update on Agency activities and housing**

The ERCEA Director reported from the last Steering Committee meeting, discussions on housing for the Agency and the ongoing large-scale review of the European Commission services.

## **14. Follow up from earlier discussions and presentations**

### ***- CoP follow up point from the meeting on 26 November***

The Agency presented insights from the CoP discussions and noted the need to explore interdisciplinarity within ERC panels. CoP will continue the discussion at a future meeting.

## **15. Closed session**

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

## **Friday 28 November 2025**

## **16. Update from the Standing Committees and Working Groups**

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

Maria Leptin reported from the discussions and decisions taken at the last CoP meeting.

### ***– Standing Committee CoIME***

Eystein Jansen gave a short report on the cases CoIME had dealt with. The Scientific Council was reminded that Nicola Spaldin would take over as chair from Eystein Jansen as of January 2026. Maria Leptin thanked Eystein Jansen for his work and he thanked Agency staff for being especially diligent with the CoIME work.

### ***– Working Group on Innovation***

Sylvie Lorente reported from a meeting of the joint ERC-EIC Working Group held in September.

### ***– Working Group on Gender and Diversity***

Geneviève Almouzni reported from the last working group meeting, including an overview of the working group activities and future plans. Maria Leptin thanked Geneviève Almouzni for her work, and she thanked all Agency staff who had supported the working group over the years. She announced that Liselotte Højgaard would take over as chair of the working group in 2026.

– ***Strategic group on carbon neutrality***

Harriet Bulkeley reported that the group would present its findings at the February plenary. The group was considering the Scientific Council's and evaluation panels' carbon footprint, considerations of environmental sustainability in ERC projects and was exploring legal and practical details. New members of the group would be welcome.

**17. Strategic Areas: Ad Hoc Working Group on AI**

Nicola Spaldin reported that the AI working group had met on the previous day and decided to revise slightly the current statement on the use of AI, as requested by the Scientific Council at the Copenhagen plenary meeting. At their meeting, the group had also discussed more broadly the use of AI in the evaluations.

**18. Group Photo with Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva**

A photo was taken of the Scientific Council together with Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva.

**19. Exchange with Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva**

The Scientific Council met with Commissioner Ekaterina Zaharieva. In her opening statement, the Commissioner outlined her political priorities, putting a strong emphasis on scientific freedom, which she intends to strengthen through the upcoming European Research Area (ERA) act. The "Choose Europe" initiative is not just about funding, it is mostly about principles and values. The European Commission has a responsibility to support these principles not just in Europe but in the world. The Commissioner underlined the success story of the ERC and the importance of safeguarding the proposed doubling of its budget throughout the FP10 negotiations.

Members of the Scientific Council took turns thanking the Commissioner for her visit, her words on scientific freedom, and her stance on gender equality. They showcased different aspects of the work of the ERC, including the rapid development of the ERC Plus grant to support the "Choose Europe" initiative, the efforts of the ERC on equality, diversity, inclusion and widening participation, the links between blue-sky research and innovation, and making use of data for research under the Digital Services Act. The Commissioner reiterated her commitment to excellent research and the independence of the ERC.

**20. Standing Committee PRIME**

Torsten Persson, incoming chair of PRIME as of 1 January 2026, presented the 2026 implementation plan for the Scientific Council's approval. A novel aspect is the use of external expertise, both via an External Advisory Group and via a group of experts tasked to conduct specific analyses. In addition, new ways to involve the scientific community in ERC monitoring and evaluation are being explored. Maria Leptin thanked Jesper Svejstrup for his past work as chair of PRIME.

**21. Plan for the feedback-to-policy activities in 2026-2027**

The Agency outlined how, despite the challenges of a bottom-up scheme, it had developed a thematic, portfolio-based and increasingly AI-supported approach to demonstrate the value of

frontier research and inform policy debates. A biannual feedback-to-policy plan was presented, to be finalised by the February plenary meeting.

## **22. Follow up from morning discussions and presentations**

No points were discussed under this agenda item.

## **23. Any other business**

### ***- ScC plenary meeting in Dublin in 2026***

Luke O'Neill updated the Scientific Council on practicalities concerning the Dublin plenary in June 2026. The programme will begin in Dublin and conclude in Belfast. The event will see high-level political and corporate participation. The public session in Belfast will count on the participation of renowned scientists and researchers to discuss the importance of research for Europe's competitiveness.

### ***- Leopoldina initiative***

Maria Leptin reported on an initiative by Leopoldina on scientific publishing and open access. Nicola Spaldin, Gerd Gigerenzer and Giovanni Sartor were involved in these discussions.