European Research Council
Scientific Council
Established by the European Commission

European Research Council
Scientific Council
104th plenary meeting
23-24 April 2026, Brussels, BE

MINUTES

Scientific Council members present on site (in alphabetical order): Conny Aerts, Harriet Bulkeley, Michel Campillo, Emmanuelle Charpentier, Tom Henzinger, Liselotte Højgaard, Dirk Inzé, Leszek Kaczmarek, Maarit Karppinen, Kateřina Králová, Maria Leptin, Sylvie Lorente, Susana Narotzky, Luke O'Neill, Björn Ottersten, Torsten Persson, Tomaž Prosen, Karin Roelofs, Giovanni Sartor, Nicola Spaldin and András Stipsicz

Scientific Council members excused: Eleftheria Zeggini

Advisors of the ERC Vice-Presidents present on site (in alphabetical order): Monica Åberg Yngwe, Elisabeth Corcelle Termeau, Patrick Finkelstein

DG RTD staff present for point 22: Marc Lemaître, Director-General

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

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

Rapporteur: Severina Shopova, ERC Executive Agency

Thursday 23 April 2026

1. Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 104th Plenary Meeting

Maria Leptin welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined key discussion points for the plenary.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 104th Plenary Meeting

The Scientific Council (ScC) adopted the Draft Agenda of the meeting

3. Adoption of the minutes of the 102nd and 103rd Plenary Meetings

The Scientific Council approved the Draft Minutes of the 102nd and 103rd Plenary meetings of.

4. Action Points of the 103rd Plenary Meeting and Board meeting of 16 January

Unit A.1 updated the ScC on the status of action points from previous meetings.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

Liselotte Højgaard reported that from 23–25 February she took part in the international evaluation of Aarhus University, and she also presented the ERC to the university leadership. On 5 March she attended the Olav Thon Foundation Prize awards ceremony in Oslo and, as a member of the Advisory Committee, awarded the Prize for Nordic Research Cooperation in Medicine at the University Aula. On 13 March she participated in a meeting on research integrity and confidence in science at the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, with an international audience including Dr. Robert Habeck, former Vice Chancellor of Germany. On 26 March she was invited to the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters to present on European research policy from her perspective as ERC Vice-President. On 16 April she attended the DTU (Technical University of Denmark) leadership retreat in her capacity as a science policy and leadership adviser, and on 17 April she delivered the opening keynote, “100 Years of Nuclear Medicine in Copenhagen”, at the Siemens Molecular Imaging Summit 2026 in Copenhagen as an expert clinician-researcher.

Torsten Persson reported on recent engagements with Swedish government representatives regarding FP10 preparations and possible scenarios, including meetings with state secretaries from the Ministry on EU Affairs and the Ministry of Upper Secondary School, Higher Education and Research, and the Director-General of the Swedish Research Council, Katarina Bjelke.

Nicola Spaldin informed the ScC about an upcoming Swiss referendum on 14 June 2026.

Conny Aerts reported on her participation in a Horizon Europe panel discussion at CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies) Ideas Lab 2026 alongside Manuel Heitor.

Luke O’Neill reported on a science event in Ireland, where he met with the Korean Minister of Science and Maria Christina Russo, Director for Prosperity at DG RTD.

Maria Leptin reported on several exchanges with the European Parliament, including discussions with the ITRE and Budget Committees and noted strong support from the European Parliament for the ERC in FP10. She also attended an event organised by the Royal Society and the Wellcome Trust in Brussels. At an event organised by the DFG and the German Rectors' Conference, Maria Leptin met

with Katja Becker and Walter Rosenthal, who presented a proposal about Nexus (Networking excellence – Enabling participation – Transforming European Science), an instrument to fund networks of excellence consisting of at least three universities or research institutions from different countries. Finally, she reported from a workshop on assessing impact of funding initiatives that was organised in London by the Wellcome Trust and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in partnership with the Impact Funders Forum.

Tomaž Prosen reported from an online presentation he delivered at the Italian National Quantum Science and Technology Institute congress, where he highlighted the role of the ERC in quantum research.

6. 10th EU framework programme for research and innovation

The ERC President updated the ScC on the status of the FP10 negotiations in the European Parliament and the Council. Draft reports by the rapporteurs of the ITRE Committee on the Commission proposal have been published. There is strong support for an increased overall research budget, even beyond the proposed doubling . Concerning the timeline, the Parliament will hold the first reading on the proposals in the plenary in October 2026. In parallel, the Council will discuss its proposal, including the overall budget, until the end of 2026. It is unclear whether it will reach an agreement by then.

While the Danish presidency actively worked on Pillar 1 of the Council proposal for FP10 until December 2025, the Cypriot presidency has not reopened discussions on Pillar 1. Discussions in the Competitiveness Council focused on other parts of the proposal for FP10, including Widening. The MFF and FP10 budget will come into the focus as the Irish presidency takes over in July 2026.

6.5 Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

7. Strategic topics: overview and discussion

Maria Leptin reminded participants that the Scientific Council had last looked at the full list of possible strategic topics (formerly strategic areas) approximately two years ago, and that good progress had been made on those selected at the time. Now it was time to reflect which of the previous topics should be picked up and which new ones should be added. Among the older items still on the list are the publication of panel member names, panel chair training, PI salaries paid from grants, grant sizes, funding schemes, panel structure and dynamic panels, budget allocation to different calls, AI in evaluation, metascience, and ranking of proposals across panels.

8. Strategic topics: mitigation measures (part I)

The Agency presented a set of further mitigation measures to address oversubscribed calls (individual calls and SyG call in Work Programme 2027).

9. Strategic areas: mitigation measures (part II)

The Agency presented measures proposed to implement the SyG call evaluation under ERC Work Programme 2027.

10. Research Security

The Agency presented a request by DG RTD on an additional restriction for participation in PoC grants for Chinese entities in projects dealing with 10 critical technologies.

11. Standing Committee of Panels: discussion on panel structure 2028

The Committee on Panels updated the Scientific Council on discussions regarding the panel structure for 2028.

12. Strategic topics: PI Salary in ERC Grants

The Agency presented the state of play on the use of grants to fund PI salaries, including information on the current legal framework.

13. Feedback-to-policy (F2P)

The Agency reported on recent publications and Feedback-to-policy activities mostly focused on portfolio analyses to inform policy reflections, identify emerging trends and develop tools for F2P to address greater volumes of requests for analysis. Other F2P activities include a joint STOA/ERC event "From Science to Policy" in November 2026. The Agency highlighted a recent F2P report on Advanced materials as well as contributions to reports on AI and Biotechnology, among others.

14. Update on Agency activities and housing

The ERCEA Director informed the ScC on housing developments for the Agency and discussions with the Commission OIB (Office for Infrastructure and Logistics Brussels)

15. Presentation of the 105th Plenary Meeting

Luke O'Neill presented the programme of the 105th plenary meeting in Dublin and Belfast in June, on behalf of the local organisers . The visit is scheduled for 23–24 June 2026 in Dublin and 25–26 June 2026 in Belfast.

16. Follow up from morning discussions and presentations

The ScC continued its discussion from the closed session

17. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

18. Networking event with Ambassadors for the ERC

The ScC had a networking event with the Ambassadors for the ERC.

Friday 24 April 2026

19. Update from the Standing Committees, Working Groups and Strategic Topics

The chairs of the Standing Committees, Working Groups and other structures reported on recent activities.

- ***Standing Committee PRIME***

Torsten Persson reported that there had been no meeting since the last Council plenary, but work is progressing on contracting external experts and building the necessary data resources.

- ***Standing Committee CoIME***

Nicola Spaldin reported that the Committee finalised and issued guidelines on reviewers' permitted uses of AI. It is also updating its membership list and Terms of Reference with a revised draft expected by October and a corresponding website update. Susana Narotzky has joined as an active new member.

– ***Working Group on Innovation***

Sylvie Lorente reported no substantive progress. The group is restarting discussions with the EIC.

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

Liselotte Højgaard reported from the last meeting, where the Working Group discussed maternity/paternity/parental leave extensions. The Gender and Diversity Working Group agreed on further data collection on maternity/paternity/parental extensions, and relevant stakeholder consultations. The group also signalled a broader scope of diversity beyond gender, starting with improving LGBTQIA+ visibility and inclusiveness.

– ***Task Force on Carbon neutrality***

Harriet Bulkeley updated Council members on new Commission guidance recommending premium economy class for all flights over four hours (including those over eight hours) that would qualify for business class travel. The Scientific Council decided to adjust its previous recommendation in order to align it with the new Commission guidance by recommending that panel members choose economy or premium economy class travel for flights of over four hours.

- ***Standing Committee on Panels***

Maria Leptin reported from the Committee on Panels, focusing mainly on preparations for ERC Plus 2026.

– ***Task Force on ERC-I***

On ERC-I, Maria Leptin noted discussions in response to proposals (including the Draghi report) on an "ERC for Institutions", setting out principles, possible formats and key risks.

– ***Working Group on Widening European Participation***

Leszek Kaczmarek reported that the ScC position paper on widening participation (released on 25 March) and the accompanying document on measures (26 March) have received a positive response from both the research community and policymakers, and are being taken seriously, including in Programme Committee discussions. He stressed that the documents include concrete commitments that now need to be delivered, notably increasing participation of researchers from Widening countries in evaluation panels and more targeted outreach to lower-performing Widening countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania (with Bulgaria and Romania highlighted as priorities). Further follow-up includes promoting mentoring and other bottom-up initiatives for Widening countries.

20. Update on communication activities

The Agency gave an update on recent and planned communication activities and outlined the emerging communications and events package for the ERC 20th anniversary. The events will start with a joint Nobel Prize Dialogue with the Nobel Foundation on 27 April 2027 and a main celebratory event on 28 September 2027. The plan also includes a decentralised campaign of of community-led activities across Europe, plus anniversary content such as a "then & now- GenERC" profile series, a host-institution podcast initiative and recorded testimonies from ERC founders, and a Lithuanian EU Presidency conference, to be held adjacent to the June plenary. Additional communications actions in the short term include an ERC Plus webinar on 2 June, the joint event with the Leopoldina on the "5th Freedom" on 29 June, and the presence of ERC grantees in some key science festivals in summer 2026.

21. Standing Committees and Working Groups

The ScC discussed the membership of the Standing Committees and Working Groups.

22. Exchange between the Scientific Council and Marc Lemaitre, Director-General for Research and Innovation (DG-RTD)

Maria Leptin invited the six new Scientific Council members to introduce themselves. Marc Lemaître (Director-General DG RTD) reaffirmed strong support for the proven, scalable model of the ERC and highlighted the Commission's ambition to increase funding significantly in the next framework programme. He pointed to "Choose Europe" and the forthcoming ERC Plus call as key signals of Europe's intent to offer the best conditions for research and attract talent and he noted the value of the ERC for advice to policymakers.

Maria Leptin gave an update on ERC Plus preparations and relayed planned actions to support Widening countries. András Stipsicz described a largely pro bono mentoring initiative in Hungary modelled after the Czech practice, with plans to expand to other Widening countries. Marc Lemaître welcomed Widening initiatives and encouraged further dialogue on scaling them.

23. Global code of conduct for research-poor settings

Liselotte Højgaard presented the TRUST Code of Conduct, developed through the TRUST project, as an ethics framework for international research partnerships covering the full research lifecycle

(including local participation, fair data/resource sharing, high ethics and safety standards and transparency). Although promoted by the Commission and the European Council and referenced in various funder and publisher contexts, adoption remains limited and it is not legally required in EU funding schemes. The code has recently been revitalised via a 2025 supplement on fragile settings. Liselotte Højgaard noted that the ERC already references the code in its ethics guidance and takes it into account in ethics reviews.

24. Follow up from morning discussions and presentations

No items were discussed under this agenda point.

25. Any other business

No items were discussed under this agenda point.