

A new ERA paradigm for the next decade **Working Group (WG) “The Future of ERA”**

A personal view from the Chair

The European Research Area was created about 20 years ago. During this period, it underwent several shifts and priority setting exercises to search for improved ways to reach its grand objectives, set in the Lisbon Treaty (article 179 (1) TFEU). The most recent exercise, including the ERA Communication of 2012, ended with the Roadmap process 2015-2020. At one time, the ERA was even declared as “completed”.

Indeed, comparing the ERA in 2000 and today, the achievements are many and obvious. ERA policies produced significant advances during the last two decades. The ERA has been a success! But many ERA objectives fell short of the initially set goals. Is the glass half full or half empty?

In reality, the ERA is never to be completed... The ERA is a dynamic space that should offer ever-improving conditions for research-based knowledge to be produced, shared and used for the benefit of society, and where its main actors, all researchers and institutions, also have the right conditions to operate with as much freedom and efficiency as possible. The ERA is based on a set of rules and principles that can always be improved. Granted, one day, conditions will be so good that only marginal gains can be achieved, but that is certainly not where we stand today. We are far from having the ideal working conditions for all researchers and institutions and there is still much room to improve the current ERA.

The slowing pace of advance of the ERA since 2015 motivated the decision to launch this WG. Our main mission was to produce a new paradigm for the ERA, to propose a step forward to further advance the quality of the present ERA. The WG made its own first assessment of the main achievements and shortcomings of the ERA, it then heard the views from ERA groups and ERA Stakeholders, and gradually moved towards agreeing on the new framework, objectives and priorities described in its final report. At the end of its six months of intensive work, the WG believes that it identified the main challenges for improving the ERA and the issues that need to be tackled to take the ERA towards a leap forward on the short and medium terms.

The new ERA paradigm and the resulting ERA Objectives are based on the following three main premises:

- The ERA is not mobilizing the whole of Europe. Collaboration among European researchers and institutions is now a good and very positive reality, but certain groups (by geography, by gender or by type of institution) are still mostly excluded, participating at a marginal level or not participating at all. We need an inclusive ERA that effectively mobilises all European resources. Clearly, there will always be differences among national research systems, but Europe should harness that diversity for a stronger ERA.
- The ERA cannot just address its internal problems. R&I policy must move beyond the its usual players and highlight how it can contribute to solve societal problems, including the SDGs, interacting with other sectoral policies. It must also prove its cost-effectiveness, contributing to EU overall competitiveness in a global World. This is the only way that society will value R&I and that the Political Leaders of the Union and its Member States, as well as Associated Countries, will consider R&I as a priority EU policy.
- Nobody knows what ERA is beyond a small group of specialists. Even most researchers are not familiar with the concept of ERA. The ERA needs a lot more visibility, and ERA policy should seize every possible opportunity to show its value to society. ERA needs to become a more familiar concept to a much wider group.

To achieve these three objectives, formulated in a much more elaborated form in the final report, the WG believes that, to take the ERA forward and achieve further progress, at present, ERA policy should target four main priority issues:

- Remove the still many existing barriers for research careers. Research careers are critical for a fully functioning ERA. Despite all the progress made so far, this is still clearly identified by most Stakeholders as the prime ERA problem today. Researchers still face huge difficulties moving from country to country and from sector to sector. Career evaluation needs a major rethinking. There are clear opportunities to establish stronger links between the ERA and the EHEA and to develop common evaluation and rewarding policies for researchers. The more recent Open Science and Open Innovation policies must be brought into the picture.
- Link R&I policy to other policy areas. We need to show how R&I can help solve the societal problems (smart directionality), or, better yet, that societal problems cannot be well solved without good R&I that will enable evidence-based policy formulation and its following implementation. R&I must get other sectoral Ministers to support R&I funding, get them to become allies of the Science Ministers when fighting for budget shares.
- Increase Visibility of the ERA. First, the whole research community needs to know what ERA is! But, mainly, Society needs to know how R&I improves the quality of life of its citizens. Research policy needs to be closely linked to Innovation policy. We need to seize every opportunity to do so. Get political support for R&I at the highest political level, above the “Science Minister’s” level. This will be best done by professionals, not by the typical ERA actors alone, though, clearly, the two groups will need to work closely together.
- Promote Broad Inclusiveness. Nobody can be left out! There are excellent researchers everywhere, as well as infrastructures, institutions, resources, etc. Women and Men must have equal opportunities. Participants from outside of Europe should be welcome. Everybody should be able to carry out their work where they prefer, at their original place or elsewhere, but they should not be forced to move if that is their wish: brain drain must be reduced.

To achieve these objectives and priorities, the WG took the bold step of recognising that, while always safeguarding the subsidiarity principle, some form of central regulatory or other legal measures at EU level might be necessary, e.g., through the European Semester.

In a nutshell, in a much simplistic way, these are the main principles of the new ERA that the WG is proposing. These priorities should however be considered in a dynamic way, with targeted, concrete shorter-term objectives to be achieved, building on incremental successes and solutions before moving on to the next goal, step by step, in a realistic way. Unrealistic goal setting will quickly condemn the ERA to failure.

Thus, our proposed **motto**: ERA - Mobilising knowledge for a better future.

And, as **ERA keywords**, I would propose: Research-based knowledge; Research Careers; Smart directionality; Visibility!; and Broad Inclusiveness.

Eduardo Maldonado
9 December 2019

PS.: Yes, Visibility! With an “!”. It is not a typo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Chair would like to recognise the members¹ of the WG who regularly contributed to our discussions and made significant contributions to the final report, and thank them wholeheartedly for their full and dedicated engagement that created a very positive, friendly and cooperative environment that was amazingly productive and allowed convergence towards the final report when we started with often quite different ideas at the beginning of the work:

- Alexander Grablowitz (Germany) – our invaluable, pro-active and most dedicated Rapporteur
- Ana Butkovic (Croatia)
- Andrej Kurucz (Slovak Republic)
- Anne-Ruthi Knevel (The Netherlands)
- Carlos Martinez (Spain)
- Ciara O’Sullivan (UK)
- Denisa Fancova (Czech Republic)
- Eszter Lakos (Hungary)
- Griet Storr-Hansen (Denmark)
- Heidi Paju (Estonia)
- Iona Ispas (Romania)
- Jana Weidemann (Norway)
- Jurate Vlascenkiene (Lithuania)
- Laurence Lenoir (Belgium)
- Luísa Henriques (Portugal)
- Lynn Wenandy (Luxembourg)
- Magnus Harvinden (Sweden)
- Martin Schmid (Austria)
- Mary Twomey (Ireland)
- Mascha Zurbriggen (Switzerland)
- Saara Vihko (Finland)
- Sergej Mozina (Slovenja)
- Siegfried Martin-Diaz (France)
- Vincenzo Mannino (Italy)

And, from the EU Commission:

- Magda de Carli
- Arie van der Zwan
- Surgeon Marnix

¹ Only one WG member per country is listed, though, often, we had more than one representative per country during the 6 months of the life of the WG. When the national representative changed during the period, the member who approved the final report is recognized.