

ANRT contribution to EC consultation on the European Research Area

The European Commission has launched a consultation on the future of the European Research Area (ERA). This is part of a larger revitalisation process of the ERA and a communication is planned for the second half of 2020.

The cross-border challenges stemming from the COVID-19 crisis underlined the need for strong investments in research and innovation. Research is critical for Europe to tackle the pandemic, but also to exit the economic crisis. Addressing and leading the twin transitions requires a strong research and innovation ecosystem to deliver solutions and ensure Europe's competitiveness in the challenges ahead. ERA is an area of excellence and promotes scientific knowledge as a foundation. It aims at supporting the development of scientific potential of Europeans researchers, boosting a stronger Europe in a highly competitive international context. Collaboration between public and private actors should remain the core of ERA development.

The ERA objectives and priorities remain valid, the need today is to speed the work to make the area tangible, for all European researchers and the society.

1/ Make ERA a tangible reality with impactful investments

The ERA would benefit from strengthened links between its conceptual and operational dimension through R&I programmes. Setting "Missions" in Horizon Europe goes in the right direction to guide and mobilize funding for identified top priorities and especially the Green Deal. To maximise the impact of research funding, it remains crucial to work closely on a greater alignment of national and European policies on major thematic priorities such as decarbonization, hydrogen, artificial intelligence etc. and on innovation ecosystems. Effective complementarity and operational synergies between EU funded programmes should also be ensured.

Research and innovation are considered as a powerhouse in the global challenges. They can shape the future we want and tackle the challenges we face. To be forward-looking it needs investments and smart directionality. Nevertheless, the 3% GDP target for research has not been reached and Horizon Europe is struggling in the MFF and recovery fund negotiations. Concrete and ambitious investment targets, aiming at delivering impacts for society, need to be reasserted at EU, national and regional level.

2/ Make ERA a tangible reality with interconnexion with industrial policy

The European research and innovation framework programme, Horizon 2020 today and Horizon Europe next year, is the largest collaborative research programme in the world. Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe, "Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness" aims at developing cross-border collaboration to jointly develop solutions and turning basic research results into more mature technologies. This Pillar will ensure pre-competitive technology development and the continuity of public-private partnerships.

In the perspective of European industrial and technological sovereignty, the ERA could work on aligning research priorities to the key challenges of strategic value chains in order to boost technological development and deployment as well as industry's uptake of products. This can be done supporting important projects of common European interest and European partnerships in Horizon Europe.

3/ Make ERA a tangible reality, articulated with EHEA

Articulation with the European High Education Area is needed to remove obstacles to mobility, transfer of research results to higher education and favour access to lifelong learning. European universities can serve as a testing ground to strengthen the links between the ERA and the EHEA. In addition, to identify further common needs, it would be useful to define topics calling for an enhanced concertation between ERA and the European Higher Education Area. This is even more relevant with the formation of new actors, like European universities that need such a coherence.

Research activities focused on major issues like sustainable development goals would also benefit from convergence between teaching and research activities. The convergence could go even further, developing mechanism for entrepreneurship that would require partnership with industry.

4/ Make ERA a tangible reality achieving the open labour market for researchers

The initial objective of the free movement of researchers (social rights, recognition of mobility in the development of careers) have still not reached their maximum functioning. The mobility of researchers is still too little encouraged. Efforts remain to be made to develop incentive and reward systems to foster the mobility of researchers, both geographic mobility and inter-sectoral mobility (industry / research institutions).

The HRS4R label is seen in this sense as real progress for the convergence of practices. By making it possible to re-examine practices, it invites progress.

Gender should remain a priority in the ERA, particularly within the framework of Horizon Europe to support socioeconomic, environmental, and technological transitions. The progress of gender mainstreaming in research could be evaluated and projects focused on gender issues in research financed.

5/ Make ERA a tangible reality ensuring a European coherence of research systems

Research policy, by becoming a key driver of competitiveness, requires enhanced steering. A reinforced convergence via the European Semester will make possible to articulate the dynamics at the European level while guaranteeing subsidiarity principle.

6/ Make ERA a tangible reality thought knowledge mobility

Open Science has to be developed in a way that balanced the interests of all actors of the R&I ecosystem (states, researchers, industries and citizens). Any concentration effect would have a negative impact on the sustainability of the dynamic. Open access to publications, management of research data, development of infrastructures: all framework conditions must be considered in a comprehensive and articulated manner, considering the diversity of scientific communities and their practices. A balanced approach is also needed to optimise both Open Science and Intellectual Property policies in the dissemination and exploitation of European results.

The ERA should also ensure the science-society dialogue. It requires a shared understanding of the “citizen science” concept and common tools and methods.

7/ Make ERA a tangible reality for research infrastructures

Research infrastructures must also generate a stronger alignment between European and national policies. They represent essential catalysts for the circulation of scientific knowledge, technology and researchers. Promoting access to research infrastructures is essential to establish collaborative R&I projects relevant to society.

Open Science is based on a set of infrastructures making possible its free and wide dissemination. What must be considered is the entire scientific knowledge ecosystem, including publication platforms, open archives, computing, curation and data flow processing environments, data warehouses and even high-performance search engines.

The European Open Science Cloud, EOSC, should be supported by a legislative framework which guarantees both openness and protection of EU interest, especially sectorial strategic interests and the respect of privacy protection. The development of European tools allowing the fluid circulation and co-elaboration, compliant with the European values, will reduce the digital dependence on free or paid tools developed outside the EU.

8/ Make ERA a tangible reality to ensure EU global leadership

The ERA is part of an international perspective. It should cultivate multilateralism while protecting EU's interests and promoting reciprocity of practices.

The scientific diplomacy aspect of the ERA can be developed by making international cooperation in R&I a real lever in the service of European sovereignty.

A more global ERA must position the European Union at the level of cooperation with the great powers, primarily China and the USA, by reaffirming European values (principle of reciprocity, defence of European rules and priorities like Green deal, data ...) and promotion of a collective and inclusive multilateralism to meet the increasingly inter-connected global challenges. It should also promote a coherent action with enlargement and neighbouring countries.

ANRT remains strongly committed to discuss and exchange on the renewed ERA.

About ASSOCIATION NATIONALE DE LA RECHERCHE ET DE LA TECHNOLOGIE

French association, the Association Nationale de la Recherche et de la Technologie (ANRT), gather since 1953, public and private organization involved in research and innovation. Our 354 members come from various sector. Its ERA working group represents around forty public and private organisations capturing nearly three-fifths of Horizon 2020 funding received by France.