

The New ERA at a Glance

Suspense finally came to an end as on Wednesday the European Commission presented their threefold package on research and education: The [Digital Education Action Plan](#) (DEAP), the roadmaps on the [European Education Area \(EEA\)](#) and on the completion of the European Research Area (ERA). Whereas the three are concertedly developed to mutually support one another, this article sheds light on the ambitious plans for European research and innovation set forth in the [Communication on a new ERA](#).

Important takeaways are the four visions for the new ERA: *Prioritising investments and reforms, improving access to excellence, translating R&I results into the economy and deepening the ERA*. The alleged need for action follows the recognition that realisation of ERA has been both insufficient and slowed down. Inferring the need to strengthen the connections of R&I to the economy, training and education, the Commission operationalises its four visions in terms of concrete actions it plans to undertake.

Whereas the target of 3% of GDP in R&I spending has already stimulated investments and R&I intensity, to accommodate the current pace of the twin transitions and the need for recovery all member states are encouraged to raise their public R&I efforts from a current 0.81% to 1.25% of GDP, to leverage and incentivize private investments. Through the intended development of joint R&I strategic agendas, the Commission proposes to establish an *ERA Forum for Transition*. Assisting coordination, the forum will aim towards the voluntary commitment by member states of 5% of national public R&I funding to joint programmes and European partnerships by 2030, thus complementing the *Horizon Europe Strategic Programming* process.

"A new ERA can only thrive if there is no compromise on excellence", Executive Vice-President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age Margrethe Vestager said during the launch press conference. To improve access to excellence the Commission proposes that member states lagging behind the average R&D investment direct efforts such that their total investment in R&D is increased by 50% in the next five years. Importantly, to promote and monitor excellence for researchers and institutions from Widening Countries, the *Era4You* policy initiative aims to improve national researchers' access to excellence and experience through mobility schemes between industry and academia.

To improve translation of R&I results to the economy it is proposed, jointly with member states and stakeholders, to develop common industrial technology roadmaps by the end of 2022, supposedly assisting the implementation of the New Industrial Strategy. R&I ecosystems will be supported through the development of a networking framework, and guidance principles for knowledge valorisation and a code of practice for the smart use of intellectual property are to be updated and developed by the end of 2022.

Paramount in the text are the dictates of attracting and keeping talented brains within Europe. Addressed under the heading of deepening the ERA, the need to increase attractiveness of researcher careers is to be targeted through a fourfold toolbox: Directed at insufficiencies within existing instruments such as the *Marie Skłodowska Curie* actions and *the charter and the code for researchers* as well as the lack of focus within career development opportunities on extra-academic paths and entrepreneurship, the first takes the form of a *Researchers Competence Framework*. Substantiating Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth Mariya Gabriel's statement that "(...)knowledge has no territorial boundaries, because scientific knowledge grows with collaborations(...)

", the toolbox further encompasses a mobility scheme that supports industry-academia exchange, as well as targeted training under Horizon Europe, and a "one-stop shop portal".

As to the ever-hot topic of Open Science practice, the Commission first and foremost plans to launch a platform of peer-reviewed open access publishing and by securing a data sharing through a European Open Science Cloud complying to the FAIR² principle (Web of FAIR). Research and innovation infrastructures are to be strengthened primarily through supporting European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI).

The deepening of ERA further dovetails promotion of the much-desired synergies to the EEA, the importance of which was repeatedly stressed by both Vestager and Gabriel. Synergies between higher education and research will be fostered as roadmaps of actions are developed through the bodies of the EEA and European Research and Innovation Committee (ERAC).

The issue of gender equality is treated under the same heading, to be targeted mainly via the development of "gender equality plans" together with member states and stakeholders, by 2021. Women's participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields will be increased in concert with the *Skills Agenda* and *DEAP*.

Pointing to the importance of science as demonstrated by the COVID crisis, Gabriel also made the case for involvement of civil society in implementing and forming strategic agendas, intentionally to be addressed through pan-European initiatives particularly under Horizon Europe. As to geopolitics, multilateralism, reciprocity and purposeful openness are established as the values upon which the R&I cooperation framework shall build. International cooperation through ERA shall contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing the recovery plan [Next Generation EU](#).

The actions are to be implemented in cooperation with Member States and stakeholders according to a regularly updated ERA Roadmap.