



The new Pact for R&I in Europe: what next?

YERUN's reflection on the future ERA Governance

Since 2000, the European Research Area (ERA) has led to important achievements in the Research and Innovation (R&I) European landscape, notably in areas such as Open Science, mobility of researchers, research infrastructures, among others. (1) However, progress has recently been slowing down, showing that improvements in key areas are needed. (2) It is in this context that the Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) welcomed the Communication a "A New ERA for Research and Innovation" and the Council Conclusions on the new ERA launched at the end of 2020. They set a direction for the future of the ERA through four strategic objectives: prioritising investments and reforms, improving access to excellence, translating R&I results into the economy, and deepening the ERA. It is now time to move from strategy to implementation, and to answer the questions: How to translate such strategic objectives into the reality of the different European R&I actors? How to ensure a strong commitment from the entire European R&I community, including national governments? How to keep track of progress and foster an inclusive and effective governance and implementation of the ERA?

YERUN welcomes the European Commission's recently published proposal for a **Pact for R&I in Europe**: this is an important step forward to mobilise the entire European R&I community around key principles and values, priority areas for joint action, investment targets and monitoring mechanisms under the new ERA. Nevertheless, for the Pact to be effective, it is paramount to consider some aspects listed in this document. These refer to the implementation of the Pact for R&I, as well as to the participatory mechanisms and monitoring system related to the governance of the new ERA.

1. A structured governance that secures national commitment through a strategic involvement of stakeholders

For the Pact for R&I to be effective and for the new ERA to reach its four strategic objectives, **securing commitment at national level is key**. Regrettably, the Pact does not include any legally binding measures to ensure commitment from national governments. Therefore, prioritising additional participation mechanisms that foster dialogue among different relevant stakeholders at national level will be crucial, to ensure that the ERA advances in each member state and in the EU as a whole. Such additional mechanisms could include, for example: selective legislation on key issues when appropriate, a memorandum of understanding with national funding agencies in member states, policy support facilities to countries which show ambitious commitment, and community-building initiatives fostering the promotion of good practices in specific ERA-objectives.

(1) Commission Communication COM(2020) 628, 30 September 2020, A new ERA for Research and Innovation, p.1.

(2) *Ibid.*, pp.1 and 2.

In addition, in order to ensure adequate progress across all member states, European **R&I stakeholders, universities and umbrella organisations** in particular, as key contributors to the implementation of the ERA, should play an active role in this dialogue by engaging in the future multi-level ERA governance in a structured, systemic, inclusive and transparent way.

Bridging the EU policy making with their local member institutions, university umbrella organisations are strategic partners in the ERA governance: they already have the necessary working structures in place to communicate with their local institutions, analyse their needs and learn from what different countries are doing, and contribute to achieving the ERA objectives. Actively involving these stakeholders in the ERA governance would therefore allow discussions to be much more efficient and richer, thanks to the different perspectives and views that they will be able to bring.

2. A Pact which is coherent and aligned with national and regional policies

A clear alignment between the different sections of the Pact and future actions of implementation will be necessary so that its principles and values are directly related to the actions to be taken at regional and national level. For example, if the Pact includes principles and values related to future requirements to be achieved by individual researchers or institutions, without necessarily envisaging related reforms at regional and national level, impact will be significantly lower. An **alignment of policies** will facilitate the adequate support structures **at regional and national level** directly targeting the needs of individual researchers and institutions.

3. A balanced monitoring mechanism with a clear purpose

There are two important aspects to be considered when discussing the monitoring mechanisms for the ERA progress: i) the type of indicators used to monitor progress and ii) the purpose of the monitoring exercise overall.

Regarding the **type of indicators** used to monitor progress: it is important to acknowledge that no monitoring tool is perfect, and that **a balance needs to be found** between easily available but less-than-ideal indicators on the one hand, and more suitable but hard to compose indicators on the other. This should be considered as a learning process in which we move away from indicators used until now and which are no longer fit for purpose, and embrace new, more inclusive ones. However, such evolution of approach should refrain from overdeveloping new indicators, which would make the monitoring exercise even more challenging, eventually sorting the opposite effect.

Regarding the **purpose of the monitoring** exercise: further discussions should clarify what we expect these indicators to monitor, and above all, what happens if the outcomes of the monitoring exercise appear to be insufficient. Is a negative outcome going to be followed by sanctions, or rather by supporting mechanisms? These are important questions that should be addressed, especially considering that monitoring mechanisms require considerable resources that not all countries have yet. Supporting those countries through capacity building initiatives is advisable.

Finally, it would be beneficial to develop a rewards/incentives mechanism, related to the successful achievement of future R&I indicators, which could motivate national governments to report their progress and act upon results. Such mechanism could not only recognise and reward, but also further accelerate progress.

4. A holistic approach to research

Actions following the launch of the Pact for R&I should strengthen research in a holistic way, and in particular without prioritising **targeted research** over **curiosity-driven research**, and **support the entire research cycle**, without differentiating parts of it. While attention to targeted research priorities is certainly welcomed, a focus on frontier-led research should be equally prominent, as this is and will remain the heart of new knowledge creation. This is also particularly important as funding for curiosity-driven research is declining both at European and national level. The situation will only become worse if this is not promptly addressed.

As representatives of young European research universities, in view of the Competitiveness Council meeting in September 2021, we call on policy makers to take into account the above-mentioned recommendations. We reaffirm our commitment to continue taking part in this co-creation exercise and to collaborate with other stakeholders with the aim of working towards a new ERA governance that is effective, efficient, inclusive and impactful.



- About YERUN -

The Young European Research University Network (YERUN) is an umbrella organisation of young and research-focused universities in Europe, that strengthens and facilitates cooperation in the areas of scientific research, academic education and services which benefit society. The network's activities revolve around three main lines of action: policy advocacy, members' collaboration and communication. Through these activities, YERUN contributes to place young research universities on the map of Europe.

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YERUN, Young European Research Universities Network, July 2021

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