

# An ERA for Europe's competitiveness

The Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN) welcomes the Council conclusions on strengthening the competitiveness of the EU, reinforcing the European Research Area and overcoming its fragmentation, adopted today, 29 November 2024.

## The ERA and competitiveness

To be globally competitive, Europe must place research and innovation (R&I) at the core of its economy. From the [political guidelines](#) for the next European Commission by President Ursula von der Leyen to the report on the [future of European competitiveness](#) by Mario Draghi, this has become clear. The European Research Area (ERA) is essential for achieving this.

In view of this, YERUN [greet](#)s the recently confirmed Commissioner for Startups, Research, and Innovation, [Ekaterina Zaharieva](#)'s recognition of Higher Education Institutions as key R&I actors and central part of the ERA. YERUN therefore [reiterate](#)s our call for greater representation and enhanced support for universities within the ERA, emphasising their role as vital bridge-builders in R&I ecosystems. Their contributions encompass the facilitation of public value co-creation, the nurturing of talent, and the promotion of inclusive innovation. A broader understanding of the value of university R&I which amounts to [much more than competitiveness](#), is therefore key.

## A stronger ERA with and for universities

The expressed commitment by the Council to the reinforcement of the ERA is welcomed. However, although the ERA, as the [EU R&I funding programmes](#), contributes to competitiveness, its priorities should not be entirely driven by it.

Moreover, YERUN welcomes the text's acknowledgment of the critical role of the new ERA collaborative governance structure and [reaffirms](#) our support for the increased stakeholder engagement within the ERA Forum, which has fostered a more inclusive and co-creative policymaking process – both with and for universities – as key actors of the ERA to achieve a single market for knowledge.

Echoing our [recommendations](#), the Council calls for a focused and more streamlined ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027, which should encompass joint initiatives for creating better synergies between research and education. Universities play a central role in the knowledge ecosystem but require enabling framework conditions.

The ERA is stronger with universities actively engaged. It is important to maintain the current open approach to stakeholder engagement throughout the implementation phase of the policy agenda. YERUN also [advocates](#) for structural dialogues with stakeholders at the national level, noting that such dialogues are well-established in some countries but absent in others. Co-creation processes

Involving all actors in the ecosystem are vital, as is the importance of inclusive opportunities for collaboration that address the entire value chain, from research to innovation.

The [Draghi report](#) highlighted universities' contributions to early-stage innovation, research, and talent development. However, it also states that despite a strong university system, not enough institutions are reaching global excellence. Against this background, YERUN calls for a broader indicators of excellence for universities which extends beyond their rankings. This is an important consideration for the design of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism, which should carefully select metrics of progress.

The full potential of ERA can only be unlocked through its transformation to the [fifth freedom](#) of the EU single market tackling fragmentation, enhanced strategic alignment and coordination of R&I policies, the establishment of enabling framework conditions across the EU, and significant investments in R&I at both EU and national levels. Member States must commit to achieving and even exceeding the 3% GDP expenditure target, which many have yet to meet.

For this purpose, the European Research Area Act, announced by the Commission President in the [mission letter](#) to Commissioner Zaharieva, could be an important enabler, and it is a missed opportunity not to have been featured in the conclusions.

## Enabling talent to grow

Enabling talent to grow is at the core of YERUN's [strategy](#) and we fully support the call for strengthening [talent development](#) in the Council conclusions. We welcome the reference in the text to the 2023 [Council recommendation on research careers](#) and specifically the importance of "academic freedom, institutional autonomy and adequate career perspectives" for developing talent for R&I. However, if Europe is to maintain its attractiveness as a research powerhouse, [further steps are needed](#), namely by providing enabling framework conditions for institutions and stable and flexible funding streams.

In this context, YERUN is pleased with the support granted to the [continuation](#) of important European initiatives for supporting talent and careers, the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), which we fully [endorse](#). Likewise, the focus on empowering researchers with improved skills [echoes our call](#) for creating adequate support systems for continuous skills development. A strong European R&I system requires a greater focus on talent, including attractiveness and sustainability of R&I careers.

Aligning with the call of European leaders in the recently adopted [Budapest Declaration](#), YERUN looks forward to close cooperation with policymakers and stakeholders to fulfil the potential of the ERA by making the fifth freedom a reality.

**- About YERUN -**

YERUN - Young European Research Universities Network - founded in 2015 and based in Brussels, brings together excellence and value-driven young research universities. The network's objective is to strategically represent its members in the decision-making process at EU level, thus shaping their future and promoting their role in European societies. Further to its policy advocacy activity, the network also strengthens cooperation opportunities among its members in areas of mutual interest and raises their visibility via a dedicated communication strategy.

**- YERUN Members -**



YERUN, Young European Research Universities Network, November 2024

For questions about this document please contact Ms Silvia Gomez Recio: [secretarygeneral@yerun.eu](mailto:secretarygeneral@yerun.eu)



[www.yerun.eu](http://www.yerun.eu)



YERUN Office  
Rue du Trône 62,  
1050 Brussels