



ERA FRAMEWORK PUBLIC CONSULTATION: AREAS OF UNTAPPED POTENTIAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA (ERA)

Position of Switzerland's State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER)

Switzerland is a close and dynamic partner of the EU and an integral part of the ERA: Switzerland participates since 2004 as an Associated Country in the Framework Programme, it is the only Associated Country in the Euratom Programme, it is the only smaller nation that is member of all EIROforum research infrastructures, and it runs numerous bi- and multilateral research programmes and common agendas with many EU countries. It is therefore in our common interest to make Europe as attractive as possible for researchers, and therefore we gladly contribute to the consultation on the ERA Framework.

GENERAL COMMENTS

- It is crucial for the realization of ERA to keep to its positive spirit and dynamics: The completion of ERA will be a continuous work in progress. Switzerland thus advocates for realistic milestones that can be achieved and for measuring the progress of the ERA integration. It is important to enable a framework in which researchers can achieve excellence, not burdensome regulations that hinder a bottom-up approach. In any case, ERA must remain a long-term vision and thus an evolving, dynamic construct, where new ideas can be brought in as time evolves.
- The realization of ERA requires clear repartition of work between the national and the European level. Switzerland recommends to respect the different goals of national and EU funding, where national funding for education, research and innovation must build up and strengthen the national science base. EU funding should foster pan-European cooperation and support Europe as a whole in the global competition. Structural Funds can be used as a Community instrument to help building up the science base in less competitive MS. Countries may complement such measures with bilateral initiatives, as does Switzerland.

- The use of “soft” measures to create an attractive ERA and the close collaboration with national actors and funders should be made attractive. Room should be left for national initiatives, notably through a topping-up funding scheme within Horizon 2020 that supports transnational research cooperation within Europe initiated by Member States and Associated Countries. Switzerland recommends making such instruments lean and with minimum conditions, which should encourage states to cooperate and to build up transnational research cooperation in addition to Horizon 2020 or other measures.
- In order to make the ERA as successful as possible and to ensure that ERA-relevant information is used in an optimal way, stakeholders at different levels need to be involved. Overall, the success of the realization of ERA depends on the involvement of all ERA stakeholders on a trust-based approach for cooperation and coordination.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Researchers

Actions recommended at EU level:

- Ensure that academic careers remain a rewarding option for young Europeans.
- Ensure the recruitment of the best researchers inside and outside Europe on the long term.
- Consider carefully the social security of researchers, portability of pension funds, as well as visa and work permit issues at any level.
- Improve gender and family related issues, particularly with regard to aspects such as dual career couples, maternity leave, family-friendly work schedules, flexible child care services etc.
- Ensure that the standards and targets of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers are well known and implemented throughout Europe.

Cross-border operation of research actors

Actions recommended at EU level:

- Ensure that mechanisms should be flexible and easy-to-handle, such as in the D-A-CH- agreements of the “Money Follows Co-operation Line”, which funds a part of a research project abroad, and the “Lead Agency”, in which national funding organisations accept the evaluation results of partner organisations (all organisations involved fund these cross-border projects together). Other instruments like COST already allow for cross-border bottom-up programming of research activities, thus connecting nationally funded research projects. These instruments foster the building of trust among funding agencies, research-performing institutions and researchers and should be used as instruments instead of creating new instruments or initiatives.
- Ensure the legal right for funding agencies to send money abroad (necessary condition to implement the Money follows cooperation line scheme).
- Enhance the political acceptance of such schemes as necessary and beneficiary for all in the medium and long term.
- Recognize that confidence in cross-border activities can be achieved when researchers, research performing organizations or funding agencies have the possibility to build up trust over time. Therefore, such measures must be launched in a bottom-up manner.

Research infrastructures (RIs)

Actions recommended at EU level:

- Allow more bottom-up approaches for research infrastructures, notably by considering also smaller and more regional RIs.
- Allow more trust by supporting the self-organisation of researchers for new projects.
- Allow adequate legal structures adapted for each type of research infrastructure without enforcing a particular type (notably ERIC). Consider notably legal structures that do not preclude a later global participation.
- Given the actual strong focus on new, next generation RI and the challenge to set up such new structures, focus more on supporting and extending the existing RIs, e.g. by creating special projects linked to existing EIROforum infrastructures.

Knowledge transfer (KT)

Actions recommended at EU level:

- Define fair, balanced and transparent IP rules which allow SMEs and academia to participate in partnerships with larger firms in an adequate way.
- At EU-level, strengthen KT enabling networks like the Enterprise Europe Network. Initiatives which foster cross border mobility of researchers (within Europe or on a global scale) should be supported. Training programmes where professionals and researchers collaborate in research institutes and in companies lead to personal networks and an atmosphere of trust for future collaborative projects. A “European KT price” could be created to highlight success stories.

International dimension

Actions recommended at EU level:

- Define common applicable standards that might be useful when Member States (MS) and Associated Countries (AC) negotiate bilateral agreements (for instance in the field of IPR or ethics).
- Share a common understanding of best practices, such as encouraging direct bottom up collaboration between researchers and research institutions and direct bilateral agreements between national funding agencies.
- Furthermore, simplify, standardise and use existing instruments within FP7 (and H2020 in the future) aiming at supporting collaboration with third countries or regions.
- Make the profession of a researcher more attractive on all career stages and in all disciplines.
- Support the development of favourable framework conditions. They are key to attract scientists, including high level facilities and good living conditions for families (not only in financial terms, but also security, schools, means of transportations, communications, cultural life, landscape, etc.). From a governance point of view, autonomy and competition for adequate funding (as opposed to central regulation and “sprinkler effect”) between locations is a basic requirement to foster excellence.

Managing and monitoring the ERA partnership, cross-cutting issues and next steps

Actions recommended at EU level:

- Ensure that national research funding is strengthened through European incentives and not the contrary (i.e. do not force MS to align their research activities within the ERA), in a way that states can build up their science base in order to be ready to compete with European standards.
- Use EU structural funds (SF), according to the own SF rules, to help boosting the science base in less competitive countries. However, one should not mix SF rules and Horizon 2020 criteria: the latter must be based on excellence alone in order to raise European standards as a whole and keep Europe competitive in comparison with other continents.
- Make use of the potential of women and men in research, innovation and higher education,. Further measures to eliminate gender-related barriers are needed: Academic cultures and structures could be re-examined; gender research might be enhanced.