

FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA (ERA)

POSITION DATED 18TH OCTOBER 2019

The universities united within [CESAER](#) have taken note of the inclusion of the task to work with member states to build a true European Research Area (ERA) in the [mission letter](#) to the Commissioner-designate for Innovation and Youth Mariya Gabriel. We also took note of the establishment of an *ad hoc* Working Group on the Future of the ERA by the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC). Recalling that we published a [statement on the ERA](#), joined the [ERA partnership](#) in 2013 representing our Members in the ERA Stakeholder Organisation (SHO) Platform and published a [joint call for new momentum for the ERA](#) (2017), we herewith contribute to the ongoing debate on the future of the ERA and express our collective commitment to bring it to the next level in the years to come.

CONTINUE BUILDING ON PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND REINFORCE NARRATIVE

The ERA emerged along impressive achievements arguably starting with the establishment of the Council of Europe in 1949. Important milestones include - amongst others - the establishment of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) (1954), the Committee for Research into European Science and Technology (CREST) (1973), the first Framework Programme for Research (1984) and the European Research Council (ERC) (2007). Subsequent European Commissioners - including [Altiero Spinelli](#), [Ralf Dahrendorf](#), [Antonio Ruperti](#), [Philippe Busquin](#), [Janez Potočnik](#) and [Máire Geoghegan-Quinn](#) - contributed to establishing a strong, coherent and consistent ERA narrative which led to the creation of the Single Area for European Science (1973), the inclusion of research as a formal community policy objective (1986) and the inclusion of the ERA into the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) (2007).

- We plea for the revitalisation of efforts towards fully realising the ERA by leveraging these past achievements to create a 'reinforced narrative'. We caution against attempts to create a 'new narrative' which could risk neglecting this strong foundation of past achievements.

REVERT TO CLEAR DIRECTION AND CONCRETE GOALS PROVIDED IN TFEU

The TFEU provides for a clear direction and concrete goals: the ERA is about achieving free circulation of knowledge in the form of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology. We point out that education and innovation concern different chapters in the TFEU and that the competencies of the EU in education and innovation are not as elaborate as for research.

- We urge that the focus for the ERA remains on research and to better exploit the possibilities already present in the articles of the TFEU: achieve the ERA (179) and implement it through coordination with activities from Member states (181), the framework programmes (182), supplementary programmes involving certain member states (184), participation in programmes of members states (185), cooperation with third countries or international organisations (186) and joint undertakings with business and industries (187).

- There is an imminent need to link open science (policies) to the ERA respecting the ERA as the superordinate long-standing constitutional obligation. Open science is not a separate objective, but follows as a part to fulfil the treaty obligation to achieve free circulation of knowledge. Emphasising that open science is an enabler and tool to realise the ERA will strengthen both.
- We urge for continued recognition of knowledge from publicly funded research as a global public good with the connected inalienable and non-waivable right of researchers and universities to share findings (including data and other diverse research outputs) respecting legal and ethical boundaries. We further emphasise the need to ensure clear and good ownership models which comply with the [FAIR principles](#) and prevent 'lock-in effects'.

FURTHER EXISTING ACTIONS AND ADOPT MORE AMBITIOUS AGENDA

Although progress has been made on the six priorities, the ERA cannot be viewed as implemented and better European integration is needed. In addition, we perceive a worrying increase towards national and regional isolationism, a reversal of tolerance and open-mindedness, and a deliberate disregard of scientific facts in favour of 'alternative facts' and 'fake news'. Populism, authoritarianism, protectionism and nationalism threaten the free circulation of knowledge and its bearers (including students, teachers, researchers, inventors and other members of the research community). External threats jeopardise key values of universities such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy and their international engagement. The growing intolerance towards divergent opinions and increasing political interference with academia jeopardise the ability of universities to provide education and undertake research in the public interest.

The ERA needs to address some additional pressing issues such as the public-private dimension of S&T in terms of companies doing what universities do, digitisation of science and innovation particularly in terms of a lack of internal market, and local and cultural communities. Finally, the exclusive focus on 'jobs and economic growth' leads to tensions, as it rewards and aligns efforts towards being 'better than others' (i.e. more competitive) instead of towards increasing knowledge. As much of the best research to address global challenges requires broad collaboration, undue and exclusive focus on 'competitiveness' will disincentivise or even punish (directly or indirectly) much needed collaborative efforts towards ecological, social and economic sustainability.

- We plea to maintain the current [six priorities](#) as areas for action, to broaden the 'gender equality' priority to include Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and to open up the technology transfer ERA action line to Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH).
- We urge the European institutions to reinforce their efforts to guarantee the conditions for peace, prosperity and sustainable development. There is an immediate call for action to safeguard the respect for the rule of law and human rights, freedom from political interference, tolerance of divergent opinions, democratic citizenship, evidence-based policymaking, free circulation of knowledge and its bearers, academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

- Structural reforms in national and European legislation are unavoidable to create and assure 'favourable framework conditions' underpinning all areas of action of ERA, such as sufficient funding, academic freedom, social security and immigration.
- We need to refine the definition of quality of research and promote more risk-taking approaches by our researchers. Academia should focus on excellent performances, including mentorship, supervision and coaching of students and not (only) quantity of research.
- Acknowledging that the EU has more limited competences in education, we call for the ERA to seize the momentum established by the recent launching of the European Education Area (EEA) to establish a dialogue - once EEA structures have concretised - on the issues where ERA and EEA can mutually reinforce one another. Indeed, universities are in a key position to take advantage of well-aligned policies to concretise the education-research nexus.

ADOPT MULTI-INSTRUMENT AND -LEVEL APPROACH

The past two partnership models between 1) the Commission and the member states and 2) the Commission and the ERA SHO had some impact. Legislation, such as ERA directive (-s), and a pact with the citizens were dismissed earlier. However, in order to bring the ERA to the next level a better governance is clearly needed.

- The revitalisation of the ERA needs a strengthened European level though stronger roles for the Commission and the Parliament, not least because the EU institutions must explore legislation in areas needed to safeguard the favourable framework conditions and the level playing field. We advise learning from successful European integration in other fields such as energy, transport and climate, leading to system transitions and more direction-oriented research.
- We advise to involve citizens and society more and to communicate better to increase awareness around and understanding of the ERA. It must become evident that the ERA concerns a pact between science and citizens at the European level, changing the life of citizens for the better.
- The ERA must be implemented at the global, European, national and institutional levels:
 - a. Global: Openness to the world; a stronger brand making the ERA known;
 - b. European: European Roadmap, alignment with the EU framework programme for R&I, organise comitology, linking with the European Semester, association of third countries;
 - c. National: structural reforms, National Roadmaps, ERAC;
 - d. Institutional and stakeholder organisations: effectuation of the ERA.

BROADEN SCOPE AND TAKE LEADING ROLE WORLDWIDE

The temptation is to view the ERA as limited to the EU through the TFEU. In our view, this is a largely wrong interpretation. In the light of the past achievements often pre-dating the EU and the opportunities of article 186, a broader scope is needed: the ERA is situated in the world and should constitute a major contribution of Europe towards tackling global challenges.

- It is of the highest importance to extend the ERA fully across the countries associated to the EU framework programmes for research and innovation, even if it concerns countries on other continents.
- It is essential to shape future ERA policies towards the positioning of European researchers, scientific knowledge and technology globally, namely through its focus on contributing to solving the grand societal challenges and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

ASSURE BETTER LINK TO EUROPEAN SEMESTER AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

ERA deserves more commitment and attention at the top-level, clarity on the governance and inclusion of the universities as important stakeholders.

- To monitor progress and inform interventions, we recommend linking the ERA even more closely to the European Semester while also benchmarking the ERA against other integrated research systems such as the United States and China. Particular focus and attention is needed to achieve the 3% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Research & Development (R&D) objective and sufficient funding for the EU framework programmes.
- We emphasise the need to include universities through their associations as stakeholders in the implementation and the governance of the future of ERA.

The leading universities of S&T united within CESAER have contributed to building the ERA throughout the past decades from within. Our collective transformative force has been demonstrated in the past and we are ready to continue contributing moving forward.

- We offer to continue to play an inspiring, progressive and constructive role in further developments, to continue our leading role in advocacy, and to commit further resources towards achieving a true European Research Area.

For more information and enquiries, please contact our Secretary General David Bohmert david.bohmert@cesaer.org

CESAER is the European association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities of science and technology that: champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation; influence debate; contribute to the realisation of open knowledge societies; and, deliver significant scientific, social, economic, and societal impact.