

European Research Area as a trailblazer

Position dated 4 July 2023

Recalling our long-standing commitments and efforts to [reinforce](#) the European Research Area (ERA) including through our [joint partnership](#) (2015) and recent [contributions](#) (2022), CESAER - the strong and united voice of universities of science & technology in Europe - welcomes the progress made on almost all of the twenty actions of the [ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024](#) to advance the ERA.

We welcome the progress to date and provide recommendations for further advancement of the ERA and towards shaping the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 along four dimensions: (i) progress, (ii) monitoring, (iii) Lisbon Treaty obligation, and (iv) ERA as a trailblazer.

1) ERA progress

We welcome that progress has been made for almost all of the twenty actions of the current ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024. Some ERA actions suffered from start-up difficulties and some are progressing more quickly than others, but overall, it is welcomed that implementation is progressing.

We are pleased to be an active contributor to the ERA Forum, both indirectly through the [ERA university associations group](#) and directly through ERA action subgroups. We value the considerable effort the university sector made to ensure a high capacity of coordination and engagement with the ERA Forum.

We welcome that representatives of stakeholder organisations in the ERA Forum are treated as valued peers by the Commission and member state representatives, that our expertise is welcomed and that our input is contributing to shaping developments. This allows our association, together with our Members, to actively contribute to shaping and implementing the ERA. We look forward to continuing our engagement in the ERA Forum.

We are particularly pleased to see that the ERA Forum brought more transparency in decision making processes at both EU and national levels related to the ERA. To take this to the next level and following these good experiences at the EU level, we encourage that national and regional levels further strengthen engagement.

- We call on the ERA Forum, and particularly the member states, to complement EU level activity and more firmly anchor ERA also at the national and regional levels by further strengthening national and regional communication channels of ERA Forum activities directly with key research actors such as universities.

2) ERA monitoring

While we experience that progress is advancing for almost all ERA actions, the full picture of what has been realised and where more action is needed, will only be known by dedicated

monitoring with measurement of progress. We look forward to the full roll-out of the ERA dashboard, ERA scoreboard, ERA reports per member state, the bilateral and multilateral policy dialogues and the reports on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda, and to learning how these will interact and guide the pace and the direction of the progress that has been made, and is yet to be made.

While we acknowledge that some member states have expressed hesitancy related to the monitoring tools around the potential for ‘naming and shaming’, we underline that to advance together and to enable and facilitate evidence-based discussions around what works and what does not, all monitoring tools and outcomes must be provided at sufficient granularity and open to at least all participants of the ERA Forum.

- We call on the European Commission to ensure that all the monitoring tools and outcomes have sufficient granularity temporally and geographically at EU, national and regional levels to enable comparisons over time and between geographical areas.
- We underline that all monitoring tools and outcomes should be ‘as open as possible’, and at the very least available to all participants in the ERA Forum.
- We look forward to the launch and full roll-out of the Research & Innovation Careers Observatory and the European Higher Education Sector Observatory.

3) ERA as a Lisbon Treaty obligation

Regarding the conceptual discussions in the ERA Forum related to the questions such as ‘What is the ideal concept of an action?’ or ‘How should the next ERA Policy Agenda be structured?’, we recall that the ERA stands on two legs: (i) [sustainable funding](#) and (ii) favourable (legal) framework conditions. The second particularly includes efforts to (a) actively identify and dismantle barriers for ‘researchers, scientific knowledge and technology [to] circulate freely’ at national levels, EU level and beyond, and (b) acknowledging the legal obligation provided by [Article 179 of the Treaty](#), pursue a binding and mandatory approach.

We encourage the ERA Forum to challenge itself regarding (I) which actions to continue from the current ERA Policy Agenda to the next one; and (II) which new actions to launch, by asking (for each new and continued action) the two following [control questions](#):

1. Are new funding commitments needed from national level related to this action where the EU should take on an active role for mobilising and coordinating across Europe?
2. Are there, related to this action, legal and/or other barriers at national and EU levels and beyond for ‘researchers, scientific knowledge and technology [to] circulate freely’ where the EU should take on an active role to ensure the barriers are removed?

The ERA Forum should choose to include actions where the answer is affirmative for at least one of the two control questions. To ensure focus and a high-level status of the ERA as a Lisbon Treaty obligation, we caution against including ERA Actions where the answer is negative to both questions. For proposed actions where the answer is negative to both questions, a range of other tools are available and should be used for advancing other research and innovation priorities at the European level.

- We call on the ERA Forum, and particularly the member states also in the Competitiveness Council configuration of the Council of the EU, to only include

actions in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 where the answer is affirmative for at least one of the two above-mentioned control questions.

- We thank the ERA Forum for mapping many obstacles and we call on the member states to start or speed up the necessary revisions of national and regional legislation to remove identified barriers while avoiding introducing new ones.
- We reiterate our call on the EU institutions and the member states to (i) swiftly enact the 3% GDP target for private and public expenditures for research and innovation agreed by the European Council in 2002, reiterated by the European Commission in 2020 and by the European Council on 23 March 2023, and (ii) endorse and enact the 1.25% GDP public effort target to be achieved by member states by 2030 in an EU coordinated manner, as proposed by the European Commission in 2020 in its Communication 'A new ERA for Research and Innovation'.
- We stress that new ERA initiatives should be funded with new additions to the budget.

4) ERA as a trailblazer

Acknowledging that the EU has more limited competences in education, we urge the ERA Forum to seize the opportunity to reinforce connections to the European Education Area leveraging the momentum provided by the Council of the EU through the May 2023 [resolution](#) 'The European Education Area: Looking to 2025 and beyond' and [conclusions](#) 'On further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality'.

While the focus on ERA should remain on research, we reiterate, as stated in our [position on the Future of the ERA](#) (2019), the importance of exploring ways for the ERA and EEA to mutually reinforce one another. Indeed, universities are in a key position to take advantage of well-aligned policies to concretise the education-research nexus, to the benefit of and to advance both the ERA and EEA.

- We encourage the EU institutions and the member states to fully acknowledge the ERA as the trailblazer, moving swiftly and boldly forward with the full legal backing of [Article 179](#) of the Lisbon Treaty.
- We encourage the EU institutions and the ERA Forum to seize opportunities to further explore how the ERA can act as the trailblazer, also paving the way for advancing the European Education Area.

Underlining that advancing the ERA remains a top priority for our association and Members, we look forward to continuing our active and constructive engagement in the ERA Forum and beyond.

For more information and enquiries, please [contact](#) our Secretary General Mattias Björnmalm. This document can be referenced using <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8108330>

Rooted in advanced engineering education and research, [CESAER](#) is an international association of leading specialised and comprehensive universities with a strong science and technology profile that advocate, learn from each other and inspire debates. Our Members champion excellence in higher education, training, research and innovation, contribute to knowledge societies for a sustainable future and deliver significant scientific, economic, social and societal impact.

