

Principles for the further development of the European Research Area (ERA)

EUROHORCs is committed to supporting the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA) and looks to work actively with the Commission to achieve our common goals. Thus, EUROHORCs would like to draw the attention to a number of principles and recommendations that it considers crucial to the further successful development of the ERA.

General principles

Frontier research as foundation of innovation

The scientific community is called to tackle the Grand Challenges of mankind and try to find solutions for the most pressing problems of society. For this endeavour, new ways of collaboration among researchers, within and across disciplines, need to be sought. EUROHORCs strongly believes that research funding must embrace the whole range of research, from frontier to applied research and innovation. As history teaches us, important contributions to the solutions of the great questions often come unexpectedly from areas of basic research. Therefore, the support of basic research must always play a key role in research funding. EUROHORCs acknowledges the current achievements of the Commission in this regard. It would like to emphasise that instruments such as those currently funding basic research, investigator-driven research and individual researchers (e.g. collaborative research projects, ERC and Marie Curie) must be continued and further developed, in order to secure the constant supply of new ideas and knowledge needed for innovation.

Excellence as the central criterion for European research funding

In order to increase European competitiveness in research, international excellence must be the central criterion for all European research funding. For example, the success of the ERC clearly stems from the fact that the ERC bases itself uncompromisingly on excellence. EUROHORCs is convinced that the whole of Europe can profit from the adherence to the highest standards as it is the only way to remain internationally competitive in the long run. Instruments supporting cohesion, which is a valued but separate agenda, must be clearly identified as such and funded separately.

Strong support of instruments triggering mobility

Mobility is a key component of most successful research careers. Marie Curie is a good tool to help researchers gain international experience, take part in training programmes and increase their knowledge in an international context. Especially important is the support of young researchers who must have the opportunity to learn from colleagues in different countries but also form networks that are crucial for their future research career, as well as fostering enhanced future European interaction. While the support for the Marie Curie

instrument is important, it is also essential to facilitate and reduce any legal and/or bureaucratic barriers preventing national research organisations to support their investigators in their efforts to greater mobility. Therefore, reducing legal and bureaucratic obstacles to mobility of people and money, e.g. the transfer of research grants, must be pursued. Action to support Marie Curie and other measures enhancing mobility, as provided by national research organisations, enable European investigators to advance their careers but also help Europe by attracting high quality researchers to Europe, again enhancing the perception and contribution of Europe in the global arena.

Clear re-partition of work

EUROHORCs would like to emphasise the importance of a clear re-partition of work between stakeholders at the national and the European level. The European Commission should avoid any funding instruments that can be offered in a better way at the national level but should concentrate on instruments that favour the supra-national such as co-ordination of programmes for collaborative projects, the operation of large infrastructures, funding of very expensive projects and excellence programmes such as the ERC. European Commission funding should constantly seek the 'added value' in the European context and not become a substituent for effective national programmes. Added value also comes from administration of real common pots for projects involving scientists from various countries, which may become more important in the context of 'joint programming'. Enhanced dialogue and collaboration between EU institutions and national organisations is essential to ensure this complementarity, which can yield real benefits in the wider European as well as the national context.

Simplification of rules for research funding

European research funding needs robust and simple rules with a clear rationale, well-communicated and consistently interpreted. The basic principles for any rules governing public research funding should be stability, consistency and the acceptance of tolerable risk. This particularly applies to the EU bureaucracy associated with application and accounting regulations which are in urgent need of reform to ensure that they are not shunned by the very best scientists in the EU.

Clear and simple rules building on these principles ensure the attractiveness of European research programmes for the most talented researchers. They help the new Member States to be successful in participating in the Framework Programme and motivate private companies, in particular SMEs, to contribute to European research programmes. These factors have decisive influence on the quality of the research performed, the attractiveness of such funding to the very best in Europe to ensure the quality of work supported and hence the success of any research funding programme.

Funding Activities

Continuation of collaborative research projects

The collaborative research projects have proven to be successful tools for enhancing the co-operation between researchers working on projects and topics that could not be tackled by researchers of one single country alone. However, this instrument needs to become more flexible in order to close current funding gaps such as the opportunity for smaller projects

for research disciplines that traditionally do not work in large consortia (such as the Humanities and Social Sciences) and in order to allow for different time frames for a variety of research methods and topics.

The structure of the programme for collaborative projects needs to be simple and flexible and multiple programmes with different sets of participation rules must be avoided. This inherently prevents overlap and duplication, as it stops the development of multiple funding instruments where one flexible approach would suffice. This collaborative research project scheme should be aligned with Grand Challenges and their inherent requirement for interdisciplinary research endeavour. Again, this instrument must be simplified to make it more attractive for the best researchers in Europe and beyond.

Strengthening of the European Research Council (ERC)

EUROHORCs supports a strong and independent ERC. The generous support of excellent individuals is important in order to attract and keep the most talented researchers in Europe. Support for the individual as enshrined in the current schemes must remain the focus of ERC. This provision of good framework conditions for individuals to pursue their excellent research ensures that the best talent remains in Europe and European research can increase its competitiveness. Thus, the ERC's funding must be continued or even increased and its independent governance strengthened and secured. The quality standards of its evaluation procedures must be kept very high in order to ensure that only the very best researchers are funded.

Support of research infrastructures

The funding of research infrastructures is an area in which the financial support of the EU can make a huge impact. The support of research infrastructures is an obvious task of the research funding on European level, especially when it comes to large-scale infrastructures. Single countries, especially smaller ones, are unable to fund these on their own, yet their scientists need access to maintain their competitiveness. However, support for such endeavours must be considered in the global context, scientific excellence and recognition that all scientific infrastructure has a finite life-cycle and cannot be continued in perpetuity without detriment to the development of new science. As such an 'exit strategy' must be built in to all such proposals and rigorous scientific and strategic review of value for money incorporated for every initiative. This is particularly important because not only the construction but also the operation and maintenance of research infrastructures must be assured if the sought for and essential longer term sustainability continuously assessed alongside scientific value.

To be attached:

- Position paper ERC mid-term review
- Position paper EU Regulatory Framework for Research Actions – Basic Principles for Robust Rules
- Position paper Simplifying the Implementation of the Research Framework Programmes – Key Elements
- EUROHORCs input for CREST debate on ERA instruments

EUROHORCs

EUROHORCs (European Heads of Research Councils) is an informal association of the heads of 45 European research funding organisations (RFO) and research performing organisations (RPO). It was established in 1992.

From the start, the ambition of EUROHORCs has been to play an active role in the field of European research policy by promoting and enhancing inter-council cooperation. EUROHORCs seeks to enhance the role of the research funding agencies and research performing organisations in Europe by creating a platform for discussion, initiating joint activities and promoting their input on EU research strategies.

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