

Norwegian comments to the European Commission's communication on the new European Research Area

Input from the Ministry of Education and Research,
to Commissioner Mariya Gabriel 20 April 2020

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The urgent need for a strong European Research Area (ERA) has been clearly demonstrated this last month, through the dramatic spread of COVID-19 all across the world. Europe's readiness to effectively act in coordinating Research and Innovation (R&I) efforts, cooperate globally, as well as develop and share new knowledge, has in part been possible due to ERA. Though key indicators show that developing ERA has slowed down in recent years, there are also important achievements. European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures, and the establishment of Pan-European research infrastructures, are important examples.

General comments

Norway supports the Commission's Green Deal and welcomes the emphasis placed on ERA for this purpose. New technologies and the underpinning research and innovation are needed to accelerate decarbonisation, bring down costs and give Europe a competitive advantage in global markets. ERA should have a holistic focus on energy transitions and low-carbon society. We need to pay particular attention to socio-economic and political dimensions. This entails that we secure our objectives based on multiple perspectives, including those of the social sciences and humanities. Policy and practice need to be based on us being cognizant of social justice, i.e. how measures for decarbonisation affect and involve different groups.

In line with the ERAC opinion, we see the need to broaden the scope of ERA, to include both research and innovation, with a link to education, and addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To achieve this, ERA must engage high level policymakers at the European, national and regional level. To link R&I with policy development and implementation, sectoral ministries must be actively involved. Even though many stakeholders support the concept of ERA, many consider today's ERA as an abstract vision of policy makers, or too much focused on the academic sector and basic research. This applies both to innovation actors, industries, businesses, investors etc., and to research organisations as well as the public in general.

Users of knowledge, e.g. municipalities, should also be more involved. They are highly knowledgeable about pressing problems, and it is inherent in co-creation that practitioners take part, including in the process of formulating the problems for research. We need, however, appropriate guidelines for user involvement. We must ensure representative sets of users, and we need to safeguard critical distance and the freedom and autonomy of scientists. Europe needs to build an "ERA brand" – both within and outside the EU, that is inclusive and friendly to industry oriented R&I. This should lead to stronger involvement and engagement of an even broader number of stakeholders and the public.

The fact that academic freedom can no longer be taken for granted in an increasingly polarized political climate, is cause for concern. A focus on core academic values must therefore be the foundation of a renewed ERA. The autonomy of universities and the freedom to pursue academic research are building blocks of a democratic society and the advancement of knowledge, as universities are drivers of economic progress and innovation and counteract unsubstantiated information or "fake news".

The considerable disparities in access to knowledge and networks and in mobility patterns across Europe must be addressed. There is also a need to continue the focus on gender. All activities in ERA should build on perspectives of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc., as they are crucial for addressing the multiple dimensions of inequality that researchers experience. The priorities in ERA should conform with European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and other relevant policies initiated by the EU.

Norway will particularly point to the following issues, not listed in any prioritised order.

Human Resources

ERA should focus on the need for improving working conditions and career paths for researchers across Europe, to safeguard attractive research careers and advance the necessary mobility between institutions and across sectors within Europe. This is especially important for young researchers on short-term contracts, often in post-doc positions. Opportunities for tenured positions are important, and will probably also improve research quality. For European competitiveness and innovation, it is essential with equal opportunities for all, i.e. that academic and industrial career prospects are not hindered by barriers or implicit bias. EURAXESS and Charter&Code are important instruments in this respect. Aligning career structures with policies for higher education, research and innovation, including connecting ERA with The European Higher Education Area, will strengthen Europe's talent base and increase the global attractiveness of the ERA.

The current recognition and reward processes must be amended, so that research systems reward the development of a variety of skills, as well as mobility across disciplines and sectors. If society is to benefit from Open Science and closer public-private research and innovation partnerships, researchers have to be credited for sharing data, algorithms, code and software et cetera, and for cooperating with industry and third sector actors, and not only for publishing in high impact journals. Pedagogical merit systems should encourage more teaching initiatives and reward important development work. Merit systems should also promote education quality by remunerating academic employees according to documented results.

Open Science and Innovation

Europe must continue to take the lead and reach out globally to accelerate the transformation of today's scholarly journals into open access. If we are serious about reaching the SDGs and the ambition of leaving no-one behind, knowledge must be shared. The ERA communication should urge all research institutions and research funding organizations to join the international movement to ensure that authors or their institutions retain copyright to their publications, and to ensure that all research articles are published under an open license. This is the only way in which research can truly fulfil its role as a

global public good. Researchers must have the infrastructure needed for sharing data – as open as possible, as closed as necessary – and the infrastructure in place must lay a foundation for cooperation and knowledge-sharing that extends across countries and sectors.

To ensure inclusiveness and coordination in line with the ambitions for Open Science and Open Innovation, it is necessary to have a federated, inclusive and coordinated approach in Europe. In particular copyright legal frameworks, research evaluation practices and monitoring of Open Science and Open Innovation should become more homogeneous, or at least, interoperable beyond the national borders in accordance with the principles of FAIRness and transparency. We underline that more openness also calls for increased emphasis on research ethics and privacy awareness.

Multilingualism in scholarly communication should be considered an integral part of Open Science. Locally relevant research results conveyed in the mother tongue ensure that research results are disseminated beyond academia for the full benefit of society. National journals should therefore be safeguarded in their transition to open access.

Connecting Research, Innovation and Education

ERA policy should encourage universities to develop their main objectives, research, teaching and innovation, in an integrated way. Concerted development of these activities is a prerequisite for development of the knowledge society and reaching the SDGs. It is important that ERA supports universities' efforts to strengthen quality and excellence across their mandate, from the core of their activities in basic and long term research to innovative activities in interaction with society. Today's students are the entrepreneurs and innovators of tomorrow. What they learn during their studies is decisive for their professional careers and their life as citizens, and hence for development of industry and the public sector. There is a need for close interaction between the tasks, including dissemination of knowledge. A Vision 2030 on the future of Universities in Europe should be based on the full mandate of universities.

ERA and the European Education Area must be bridged in a meaningful way. The European University Initiative in the Erasmus+ programme will hopefully boost outstanding quality in both education and research. The new European Universities can act as a testing ground for innovative approaches, for example through exploiting research outcomes in teaching, or by engaging students in research activities, for example in the context of EU-funded collaborative projects. ERA should also continue to work with the Bologna Process and the Higher Education Area to foster better synergies and alignment. Focus should be on developing research-based learning, enhancing openness, PhD education, and meeting the SDGs.

Placing ERA at the heart of EU policies and programmes

Climate change is the defining challenge in the world today. Increased digitalisation leads to a shift in the societal risk picture. COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for better pandemic preparedness. The need for world-leading academic and research and innovation communities to meet global challenges must inform the development of the next ERA.

R&I has been promoted as vital for the new industrial strategy of the EU. ERA should support Europe as the world's powerhouse for technological innovation and utilization, as well as accelerate piloting and up-scaling of technologies. When EU Member States and the EEA EFTA States combine their national R&I resources better than today, this will provide Europe with an increased competitive force, supporting the SDGs, and in particular the Green Deal.

It is essential that ERA and the Green Deal are developed in a way that ensures synergies and are integrated with other EU programmes, such as Digital Europe and the structural funds. It is important that ERA dimensions are better covered in the Horizon Europe work programs, also outside the 4th pillar, where widening, inclusiveness and ERA are already central ingredients. ERA has to be better understood by policymakers, researchers, representatives in Programme Committees and advisory bodies. A key to success will be to ensure that ERA, the Green Deal, missions and partnerships are well coordinated and mutually reinforce each other, and that we avoid duplication and lack of synergies.

The global perspective - ERA in the world

International cooperation with countries outside Europe is needed to strengthen European competitiveness and attractiveness. Therefore such cooperation should remain a priority for the future ERA, notwithstanding the need to safeguard our values and way of life. To solve global challenges, address the SDGs and advance the Green Deal, we not only need concerted European efforts, but must also cooperate with the very best actors worldwide. Norway has strongly supported the increased emphasis on international cooperation and openness in Horizon Europe. These efforts should be supported by ERA, acting as a driving force.

Actions and initiatives, by Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission, aimed at enhancing cooperation with third countries and international organisations are extensive, and we often share the same priorities. This displays a great potential for joint or coordinated actions towards countries and regions of strategic importance, or the development of joint guidelines on international cooperation. Such cooperation should be promoted and coordinated within the new ERA.