

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 94th PLENARY MEETING 24-25 April 2024, Brussels, BE MINUTES

Scientific Council members present (in alphabetical order): Maria LEPTIN (ERC President), Geneviève ALMOUZNI, Harriet BULKELEY, Ben FERINGA, Mercedes GARCÍA-ARENAL, Gerd GIGERENZER, Liselotte HØJGAARD, Tom HENZINGER, Dirk INZÉ, Eystein JANSEN, Leszek KACZMAREK, Chryssa KOUVELIOTOU, Sylvie LORENTE, Laszlo LOVÁSZ, Luke O’NEILL, Björn OTTERSTEN, Torsten PERSSON, Giovanni SARTOR, Nicola SPALDIN, Jesper SVEJSTRUP, Alice VALKÁROVÁ and Milena ŽIC FUCHS

ERC Executive Agency staff: Laurence MOREAU, Jose LABASTIDA, Anthony LOCKETT, Angela LIBERATORE, Mila BAS SANCHEZ, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Philippe CUPPERS, Lino PAULA, Josefina ENFEDAQUE, Raluca IONESCU, Gwennael JOLIFF-BOTRELL, Ben TURNER, Elena TOMA, Laura PONTIGGIA, Dagmar MEYER, Anna PELAGOTTI, Isabelle ORTMANS, Carlos HERNANDEZ FERREIRO, Miguel PESQUERA, Sabine SIMMROSS, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Wieland STAESSENS, David KURZ, Katja MEINKE, Miklos NAGY, Severina SHOPOVA, Andrea POLYAK and Sejla SEDIC

Scientific Council Vice-Presidents' assistants: Elisabeth CORCELLE TERMEAU, Pam ROSSEL, Linling CHEN

Chair of the meeting: Maria LEPTIN, ERC President

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency

Wednesday 24 April 2024

1. Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 94th Plenary Meeting

Maria LEPTIN welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the main points to be discussed.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 94th Plenary Meeting

The Draft Agenda and the Draft Annotated Agenda of the meeting were approved by the Scientific Council (ScC), including an additional item under “Any other business”, namely some panel members’ difficulties to evaluate proposals from PIs based in Israel.

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 93rd Plenary Meeting

The ScC approved the Draft Minutes of the previous plenary meeting.

4. Action Points of the 93rd Plenary Meeting

Unit A1 informed the ScC members on the various action points from the previous Scientific Council plenary meeting in February and the progress made on their delivery.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

Maria LEPTIN reported from her recent activities and events that she attended, including the following:

- 10th Framework Programme;

Maria LEPTIN informed the ScC that various universities, associations and industry organisations had issued statements related to FP10. Also, various groups have been working on advising the Commission. She mentioned in particular Mario DRAGHI, working on the EU competitiveness report, and a meeting she had had with Alexandr HOBZA, a DG RTD official working with the DRAGHI team.

- ERT (European Round Table for Industry) meeting;
- Meetings with Manuel HEITOR, Chair of the expert group on the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, Heinz FASSMANN, President of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and Mark FERGUSON, former Chair of the EIC Board.

Gerd GIGERENZER reported from his recent activities as follows:

- He accompanied Maria LEPTIN to her meetings in the German Parliament and the Munich Security Conference;
- He participated at a workshop discussing funding in Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported from his recent activities as follows:

- He visited, together with Liselotte HØJGAARD, the French Ambassador in Copenhagen who expressed his willingness to help organise an event in 2025, on the occasion of the ScC plenary meeting in Copenhagen.

Eystein JANSEN reported from his recent activities as follows:

- On 3 April attended an informal meeting on ERC at the Norwegian academy;

He gave a lecture on the ERC and also spoke to the Prime Minister and the Research Minister, as well as three other ministers and leading parliamentarians. The Research Minister had also committed to meet the ScC in Bergen in June.

- EGU (European Geosciences Union) participation;

He participated at EGU and represented the ERC in a session with ERC applicants and stakeholders. Also, a PE10 AdG grantee had given a very motivating lecture on obtaining the grant.

- Annual Earth Day lecture.

On the occasion of Earth Day on 22 April, the ERCEA greening group had organised a lecture that Eystein JANSEN gave on '*Abrupt Changes and Possible Tipping Points in Earth's Climate-the Arctic Example*', including experiences from his ERC SyG on this topic.

Milena ŽIC FUCHS reported from her recent activities as follows:

- She participated at an ERC information day in Croatia.

Nicola SPALDIN reported from her recent activities as follows:

- She represented the ERC at the second Forum of the European Physical Society (EPS) and gave a plenary talk on '*How to get an ERC grant*', and took part in a round table on '*European Research Infrastructures and the European Research Funding System*';

She strongly recommended to ScC members to offer organisers of conferences to give such presentations.

- She addressed the UN Committee on science and development.

Leszek KACZMAREK reported on his recent activities as follows:

- He met with new Polish Science and Education Minister in March;
- He addressed the grantees and Host Institutions in Warsaw at a meeting organised by the ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA);
- He gave a presentation on the ERC grant schemes for the Southeast regions in Poland, organised by the NCPs.

Harriet BULKELEY reported from her recent activities as follows:

- Participated in the R&I Days in March;

She noted that ERC grantees also took part, together with a Nobel Prize winner and the event was very good in terms of promotion of the ERC. She was also invited to a dinner at the UK Embassy, co-organised by the British Academy.

- She met a green MEP (Member of European Parliament) during her recent travels and promoted the ERC.

Ben FERINGA reported that on 6 May, 27 presidents of academies of science were scheduled to address the candidates for the European Parliament elections on the topics of science and education and make a strong case in support for science. The ERC would likely be mentioned during the event.

6. Lump sum pilot in Advanced Grant 2024

The ERC Executive Agency (ERCEA) provided an update on the developments related to the AdG2024 lump sum evaluation. Information was also shared on the guidance and support to panel members, as well as planned communication activities.

7. Research security

Maria LEPTIN introduced the point and ERCEA informed the ScC members of the Commission white paper on options to fund R&D on technologies with dual-use potential. The ScC discussed research security from the perspective of the ERC operations.

8. State of play of Horizon Europe implementation

ERCEA informed the ScC members about the successful closure of the negotiation of the ERC scientific reporting templates for Horizon Europe. The ScC congratulated the ERCEA on the efforts and the successful outcome of the negotiations.

ERCEA informed the ScC that Switzerland and the EU had restarted negotiations. This implied that the ERC could apply transitional arrangements and allow PIs with Swiss-based HIs to apply to the ERC calls and be evaluated. The AdG 2024 would be the call to which they could apply. As soon as Switzerland became officially associated to the Framework Programme, the ERC would be able to sign grants with Swiss-based HIs. The same approach had been applied to the UK when it was in negotiations with the EU.

Thursday 25 April 2024

9. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

10. 10th EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)

Maria LEPTIN informed the ScC members that a formal first proposal of FP10 would likely be available by the middle of 2025, followed by negotiations in the subsequent years. She stressed the importance of the upcoming European elections, and of encouraging scientific communities to vote. She also mentioned the recently published report commissioned by the European Council (*Much more than a market*: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>) by Enrico LETTA. The report emphasized the importance of innovation and research for Europe's competitiveness.

ERCEA shared with the ScC members the context behind the ongoing discussions about FP10 that began early last year. The ambition and scope of FP10 would be influenced by the ambition and scope of the overall EU budget. While the budget had remained relatively stable over the years, with the majority of funds going towards agriculture and regional spending, and research receiving a smaller portion, change was possible. ERCEA noted that the draft legislation for FP10 would likely be prepared before the next Commission takes office and many factors and developments would influence the fate of FP10. The ERC President's office added some elements from recent meetings of Maria LEPTIN. Those included the ERAC (European Research and Innovation Committee) Task Force, which had expressed its support for ERC in FP10. Several EU Member States and stakeholder organisations were still expected to issue their positions on FP10 in the coming months. Maria LEPTIN also addressed the German Parliament and had a meeting in the margins of the event with the Chair of the Munich Security Conference. In all her meetings Maria LEPTIN had discussed ERC and how to achieve a higher budget for FP10. Dirk INZÉ noted that the ERC grantees should be included in the FP10 discussions, as a very vocal association of grantees could be instrumental in sharing the impact of ERC on the researchers' careers and science overall.

11. Strategic Areas

Maria LEPTIN reminded the ScC members of the "strategic areas" that will be discussed at the Bergen plenary meeting, namely ERC funding schemes, interdisciplinarity and carbon footprint. The leaders of the project teams gave updates on their topics.

12. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and Working Groups

– *Standing Committee on Panels (CoP)*

Maria LEPTIN reported from recent discussions in the CoP. The Committee had discussed the possible revision of the application form to address issues with parts B1 and B2 mentioned in the feedback from panels. Regarding the evaluation panels, CoP had received a suggestion to enable the appointment of independent observers to the ERC evaluations. Torsten PERSSON suggested to invite high-level external experts from other funding organisations to observe ERC evaluation panels. Liselotte HØJGAARD gave an example from the medical field, where patients were invited as independent observers. She felt that "ordinary citizens" should also be given the opportunity to observe ERC evaluations. Maria LEPTIN urged the ERCEA to follow up on this.

– *Standing Committee CoIME*

Eystein JANSEN reported from CoIME's recent activities, noting that normally the number of cases reported to CoIME was rather low and the cases were mainly related to breach of the Code of Conduct of ERC evaluators. The next meeting of the Committee would likely be in conjunction with the December plenary meeting.

– ***Standing Committee PRIME***

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported that he had received updated information on SAP (Scientific Assessment of Projects) for the years 2015-2022. During the December meeting, PRIME members had decided to review the ERC “mapping” activities. Further discussions on the review would continue in PRIME in future. A smaller group of PRIME members had agreed to look for external experts to help with the review task. ERCEA had also provided relevant information to identify external experts. Two experts out of the five invited so far had already accepted. A meeting with the experts would be scheduled for May or June. The next PRIME meeting was set to take place online on 19 June. Jesper SVEJSTRUP noted that the review exercise should deliver results soon so that PRIME could take some decisions on the matter by the end of the year.

– ***WG on Widening European Participation***

Alice VALKÁROVÁ noted that the WG would be meeting after the plenary meeting and a report would be provided at the next plenary meeting.

– ***WG on Innovation***

Sylvie LORENTE reported that a meeting with EIC (European Innovation Council) colleagues was planned for early June. She added that following discussions at the ScC October plenary meeting in 2023, the WG had had further exchanges with the ERCEA Communications unit and decided to promote ERC grantees with contributions to innovation. A campaign would be organized to advertise success stories of ERC grantees who had inventions as a result of their grant.

– ***WG on Gender and Diversity***

Geneviève ALMOUZNI reported from the last WG meeting. The WG had discussed various actions related to diversity, equality and inclusion that had been agreed by the ScC in February. The WG would need to prioritise which actions to take on first. The WG members also received an update regarding an external study on ERC gender data. The WG briefly followed up from the Final Panel Chairs Meeting (FPCM) on 12 March, which focused on mitigating biases in peer review and promoting diversity. Geneviève ALMOUZNI reported from her recent presentation on gender and diversity to the ERC Programme Committee. She received a question regarding childcare costs and the possibility to make those eligible costs for projects with field work. She noted that while there were some legal barriers to that, perhaps there could be a way to promote this with host institutions.

– ***WG on Open science***

Nicola SPALDIN reported from recent activities of the WG, including the ERC scientific seminar on the preprint server arXiv by ERC grantees Licia VERDE and Ralph WIJERS under the title “Thirty Years of arXiv: Open Access Avant la Lettre”. The talk had been organized by ERCEA with input by the WG, on the initiative of Chryssa KOUVELIOTOU. Nicola SPALDIN noted that the area of open science was evolving very quickly, including recent developments on policies regarding preprints, with the Wellcome Trust allowing posting of a preprint to be considered as meeting its open access requirements in exceptional cases where open access to the final peer reviewed version was impossible. Also, the Gates Foundation had issued new requirements on preprints and additionally would no longer cover per-article open access charges (APCs). Finally, a new Barcelona Declaration¹ about the use and support of open research information had been published.

13. Communication activities

ERCEA reported on communication results from the year 2023, including social media presence and media mentions. The ScC members were informed about the Public Engagement with Research Award

¹ <https://barcelona-declaration.org/>

timeline. The Nobel Prize Dialogue on 5 March at Bozar in Brussels had been a great success. The main hall was sold out and there were many views online, as well as much engagement on social media. A survey had been organised after the event and 94% responded that they would attend a Nobel Prize Dialogue again. The ERC also participated in the R&I Week (and R&I Days) in Brussels, including an ERC session chaired by Harriet BULKELEY and a closing session with Maria LEPTIN, Marc LEMAÎTRE and Manuel HEITOR. The Feedback to Policy Report on AI, which had recently been published was mentioned. Regarding upcoming events with ERC participation, ERCEA reported on a Vivatech event on 23 May in Paris on *The European Union: a booster of innovation from public research?* and ESOF on 12 -15 June in Katowice, Poland. The ScC members were also informed about a set of activities planned under the operational budget for communication that was agreed for 2024. Liselotte HØJGAARD congratulated the ERCEA on the Nobel Dialogue event. She noted that the event should be repeated in future and in particular in view of the FP10 negotiations.

14. Operational issues reporting

ERCEA presented information on the proposals selected for PoC funding in 2023.

15. Any other business

-CoI of panel members

Maria LEPTIN informed the ScC of recent cases of panel members feeling uncomfortable with applicants from Israel-based institutions being funded by the ERC. The ERCEA had addressed the issues and the cases had been closed.

-ScC Bergen plenary meeting

Eystein JANSEN reminded the ScC members to register on time for the events and hotels in Bergen.

-Update on the ERCEA annual conference

ERCEA informed the ScC on the ERCEA annual conference for which a new date had been agreed, namely 5 December. The ScC members were invited to participate and volunteer to lead the sessions. The topic selected for this year was related to frontier research within and beyond planetary boundaries. The conference was intended to explore interactions between these boundaries and tipping points on Earth, as well as connections with the wider universe. Policy discussions involving stakeholders, including UN-level representatives and business leaders, were also planned.