



European Research Council
Scientific Council

Established by the European Commission

EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

91st PLENARY MEETING

19-20 October 2023, Pompeii, IT

MINUTES

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

Scientific Council members participating online: Liselotte HØJGAARD

ERC Executive Agency staff present: Laurence MOREAU, Jose LABASTIDA, Anthony LOCKETT, Angela LIBERATORE, Mila BAS SANCHEZ, Pascale CID, Gwennael JOLIFF-BOTREL, Raluca IONESCU, Josefina ENFEDAQUE, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Lino PAULA, Ben TURNER, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Sabine SIMMROSS, Srdjan PERKO and Brigitte ETIENNE

ERC Executive Agency staff participating online: Philippe CUPERS, Niki ATZOULATOU, Anisoara ULCELUSE-PIRVAN, Anita KUCHARSKA, Nikola CAR, Philippe VIJGHEN, Eleni ZIKA, Katja MEINKE, Alice RAJEWSKY, Dace RAMBAKA, Laura PONTIGGIA, Severina SHOPOVA, Dagmar MEYER, Anna PELAGOTTI, Eleni CHATZICHRISTOU, David KRASA, Roberta MAGGIO, Wieland STAESSENS, Fiona KERNAN, David KRASA, Noelie AUVERGNE, Carmen GARCIA FERNANDEZ, Miguel PESQUERA, Christian OSWALD and Andrea POLYAK

Chair of the meeting: Maria LEPTIN, ERC President

Rapporteur: Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency

Thursday 19 October 2023

1. Welcome, Plans and Goals of the 91st Plenary Meeting

Maria LEPTIN welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the main points to be discussed during the plenary. She informed the Scientific Council that Luke O'NEILL would join the meeting later and Liselotte HØJGAARD would participate online.

2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 91st Plenary Meeting

The Draft Agenda of the meeting was approved by the Scientific Council.

3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 90th Plenary Meeting

The Scientific Council approved the Draft Minutes of the previous plenary meeting.

4. Action Points of the 90th Plenary Meeting

The ERC Executive Agency informed the Scientific Council on the various action points from the previous Scientific Council plenary meeting in February.

5. Update on Recent Meetings and Activities

Maria LEPTIN noted that she had already provided a comprehensive update about her activities between July and September to the Scientific Council members. She now reported from her recent meetings. She noted that she had two phone calls with the new Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Iliana IVANOVA, one before her appointment and one after, and they had a physical meeting last week. The Commissioner was interested in the ERC, she listened and asked good questions. All encounters with the Commissioner had been very positive. Other activities of Maria LEPTIN included meetings in Japan with heads of funding agencies, a speech at a conference organised by the German Ministry of Research and the Ministry of Health on the use of human embryos in research and participation at the European Parliament's STOA (Panel for the Future of Science and Technology)-ERC event on science-driven solutions for sustainable food. Maria LEPTIN reminded the Scientific Council members of the plan to have scientific talks by members on the occasions of the plenary meetings. The first one would be given by Nicola SPALDIN at the December plenary meeting, followed by Maria LEPTIN at the February plenary meeting. The Scientific Council members were invited to volunteer for future talks.

Eveline CRONE reported that she had recently attended an SH domain meeting and given a briefing to the evaluation panels.

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported that he recently participated at a meeting in Copenhagen addressing clinical researchers, together with Liselotte HØJGAARD, and he had given a presentation about the ERC. Liselotte HØJGAARD noted that Danish Research Council representatives and Danish Research Ministry representatives also attended the meeting, together with young and senior researchers. She added that it was important to broaden the scope of applications to ERC from Denmark to include clinical translation researchers.

Eystein JANSEN reported that he had attended a few meetings in Norway and given a talk about the ERC. He also brought to the attention of the Scientific Council that the UN (United Nations) General Assembly had declared the next decade a decade for research for sustainable development. The initiative would be launched at a meeting at CERN in December.

Chryssa KOUVELIOTOU reported from her participation at the Aerospace Europe Conference 2023 in Lausanne, a joint event between the 10th European Conference for Aerospace Sciences (EUCASS) and the 9th conference of the Council of European Aerospace Societies (CEAS). She had given a talk about the ERC, which was very well received.

Ben FERINGA informed the Scientific Council that during his participation at the STS (Science and Technology in Society) forum in Kyoto he had exchanges with many young scientists from all over the world. They had expressed their worries about doing fundamental research while feeling pressure from politicians.

6. 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

The Scientific Council discussed several points related to Framework Programme 10 (FP10). Those included the ERC's mission, budget and governance structure under Framework Programme 10. Further discussions would take place at forthcoming plenary meetings.

7. Panel recommendations

The ERC Executive Agency brought to the attention of the Scientific Council information regarding the future handling of feedback from the evaluation panels.

8. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

9. ERC WP2024: Amendment to include a clause establishing the right to object to the transfer of IPR to entities in third countries

Maria LEPTIN introduced the point, noting that the Commission had asked the ERC to amend its Work Programme 2024 to include a clause establishing the right of the Commission to object to the transfer of IPR to entities in non-associated third countries if it was found that such a transfer was not in line with European Union interest. The clause would apply to AdG 2024 grants, if agreed.

The Scientific Council unanimously agreed with amending the Work Programme 2024 to include the 'right to object'. The Scientific Council also acknowledged the ERCEA's efforts in establishing a centralised Commission committee to look into such cases.

10. Implementation of lump sum pilot in Advanced Grants 2024

The ERC Executive Agency provided information regarding different types of financial audits, checks and technical/scientific reviews for ERC grants, distinguishing between the current cost-based model and the lump sum model.

11. 2023 calls: distribution of additional budget

The Scientific Council decided to allocate the available additional budget of €36.9 million to SyG2023, which would allow to fund another three SyG grants and would increase the SyG success rate to 9.4%.

12. ERC Executive Agency housing

Maria LEPTIN reported that the extension of the rental contract for the Covent Garden building, where the ERC Executive Agency was housed, had been signed by the ERCEA Director, Laurence MOREAU.

13. Strategic Areas

Maria LEPTIN introduced the point and noted that the "strategic areas" were a list of items proposed for discussion by the Scientific Council or received from the scientific community or from the ERC evaluation panels. The Scientific Council considered which topics should be dealt with in the upcoming plenary meetings, and which could be reviewed at a later stage. The topics that were prioritised included Framework Programme 10, gender and diversity, ethics, budget allocation, artificial intelligence, and carbon neutrality.

14. Use of generative AI (GenAI) in proposal preparation and peer review

The ERC Executive Agency gave an overview of the use of generative AI in general, as well as by applicants and reviewers.

Maria LEPTIN stressed that it was necessary for the Scientific Council to share with the scientific community its view on artificial intelligence.

The Scientific Council agreed to continue monitoring the development of GenAI and to delegate the task of assessment of AI cases to the Open Science Working Group. The Scientific Council also agreed to delegate the task of monitoring of any developments on the subject to a dedicated group at the ERCEA. Finally, the Scientific Council agreed to establish a common view on the use of GenAI in proposal preparation and evaluation to guide the ERCEA. In treating concrete cases, the ERCEA shall inform and consult the Open Science Working Group.

Nicola SPALDIN invited any Scientific Council members interested in AI to join the Open Science Working Group.

Friday 20 October 2023

15. Refresher on Open Science rules under Horizon Europa focused on publications

Nicola SPALDIN gave an overview on open access to scientific publications. She focused on the Horizon Europe requirements, including the use of trusted repositories, metadata requirements, licensing of the deposited version, and information needed for validation of the research published. She also explained the various ways to meet the requirements. “Standard models” of providing open access to journal articles were also shared with the Scientific Council, as well as several other more recent models. Nicola SPALDIN also provided information regarding the Rights Retention Strategy (RRS) as it is implemented by Horizon Europe (as open access prior obligation) and then briefly explained the difference to other forms of the RRS.

16. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and Working Groups

The various committees and WGs that met recently reported on their activities.

– *Standing Committee on Panels*

ERC Executive Agency Secretariat reported that a first meeting took place on the annual information exercise of the renewal of panel members in September. The StG2025 panel chairs and the panel members who should be reinvited had been discussed. The next CoP meeting will take place in December.

– *Standing Committee CoIME*

Eveline CRONE reported that the Committee had been discussing two difficult cases and had been able to resolve them. A physical meeting of the Committee will take place around the December plenary meeting during which Eveline CRONE will hand over to Eystein JANSEN as Chair.

– *Standing Committee PRIME*

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported that PRIME had a very constructive meeting in Stockholm. The focus of discussions had been on scientific assessment of projects.

Dirk INZÉ reported on the mapping of frontier research activities, which were part of the PRIME activities. The dedicated group had met the previous week and had a report on ongoing data analysis and topics.

– *WG on Widening European Participation*

Alice VALKÁROVÁ reported from the meeting of the WG on 10 October. The WG members had discussed how to motivate or support grantees from non-widening countries to move to widening countries.

– *WG on Innovation*

Sylvie LORENTE reported that a survey was being prepared of ERC grantees who had patented the results of their research. The WG will meet again in late November.

– *WG on Gender and Diversity*

Geneviève ALMOUZNI reported from the meeting on 25 September and updated the Scientific Council on recent activities and discussions in the Gender and Diversity Working Group. She also encouraged the Scientific Council members to attend the ERC Annual Conference on ‘Research on Diversity and Diversity in Frontier Research’ on 28 November. The programme was shared with the Scientific Council members, and it was noted that the event would be hybrid. Geneviève ALMOUZNI noted that work was ongoing to review the unconscious bias briefing material and Maria LEPTIN had been working on this with ERC Executive Agency staff.

17. Communication activities and forthcoming events

The ERC executive Agency reported on communication activities, including recent events and activities for next year. A significant increase of media coverage by 26% compared to last year was reported, together with a 200% increase in ERC video material views. The objectives for the ERC communication strategy 2024 were presented to the Scientific Council, including target audiences and ongoing actions to be continued. A list of events for 2024 and possible new initiatives were presented as well.

18. Operational issues reporting

The ERC Executive Agency reported some observations from the evaluation panels regarding budget cuts. The ERC Executive Agency also reported on the SyG 2023 Step 3 provisional results and the CoG 2023 Step 2 results.

19. State of play of Horizon Europe implementation

– *Update on the association of third countries*

The ERC Executive Agency informed the Scientific Council on the developments of the association of third countries to the EU Framework Programme. The EU and the UK had reached an agreement in September. This would come into force on 1 January 2024, and it would apply to all ERC 2024 calls but not the ongoing 2023 calls.

Regarding Switzerland, the ERC Executive Agency noted that there were negotiations concerning the overall relationship between the EU and Switzerland. In May, Switzerland had withdrawn from the negotiations until new elections took place. There would be elections in Switzerland on 22 October. Perhaps there would be a small window for negotiations to restart after the Swiss elections and before the European Parliament elections scheduled for next year. In any case the prospects for discussions were uncertain and the situation was to be monitored.

20. Any other business

-Use of generative AI in proposal preparation and peer review¹

The Scientific Council discussed posting a statement on the ERC website regarding the use of generative AI in proposal preparation and peer review. Such a statement could be revisited and amended in the future.

¹ Following some developments after the plenary meeting, it was decided not to publish the text at this moment.