



# EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL 97<sup>th</sup> PLENARY MEETING 12 - 13 December 2024, Brussels, BE MINUTES

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

**Scientific Council members present via videoconference:** Liselotte HØJGAARD and Nicola SPALDIN

**Director-General for Research and Innovation (for point 18):** Marc LEMAÎTRE

**ERC Executive Agency staff on site (in alphabetical order):** Niki ATZOULATOU, Mila BAS SANCHEZ, Pascale CID, Philippe CUPERS, Madeleine DRIELSMA, Josefina ENFEDAQUE, Raluca IONESCU, Gwenn JOLIFF-BOTREL, Jose LABASTIDA, Angela LIBERATORE, Alejandro MARTIN HOBDEY, Katja MEINKE, Dagmar MEYER, Laurence MOREAU, Lino PAULA, Anna PELAGOTTI, Martin PENNY, Miguel PESQUERA, Andrea POLYAK, Laura PONTIGGIA, Sejla SEDIC, Sabine SIMMROSS, Wieland STAESSENS, Elena TOMA, Ben TURNER, Elena VOLPI

**ERC Executive Agency staff additional participants (in alphabetical order):** Carlos HERNANDEZ FERREIRO, Ulrike KAINZ-FERNANDEZ DE LA REGUERA, Jhansi KOTA, David KRASA, Veronica MARTINEZ OCANA, Dace RAMBAKA, Eleni ZIKA

**Scientific Council Vice-Presidents assistants (in alphabetical order):** Linling CHEN, Elisabeth CORCELLE TERMEAU, Pam ROSSEL

**Chair of the meeting:** Maria LEPTIN, President of the ERC

**Rapporteur:** Severina SHOPOVA, ERC Executive Agency

## Thursday 12 December 2024

### 1. Welcome, plans and goals of the 97<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting

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

## **2. Adoption of the Agenda of the 97<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting**

The Draft Agenda of the meeting was approved by the Scientific Council with a minor change, reversing the order of points 9 and 10.

## **3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 96<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting**

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

## **4. Action points of the 96<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting**

Unit A1 informed the Scientific Council on the action points from the previous Scientific Council plenary meeting held in October.

## **5. Update on recent meetings and activities**

Eystein JANSEN reported from his recent activities as follows:

- he attended the annual conference of Academia Europaea where he was approached by many participants inquiring what the ERC would need to be stronger in the next framework programme.
- on 11 December he represented the ERC at the signature of the implementing arrangement of the Commission with the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). The agreement would allow further collaboration and would open the avenue for Brazilian nationals to participate in EU calls for proposals.

Gerd GIGERENZER reported from his recent activities as follows:

- he wrote a paper on alternative models of funding, which has been accepted. The paper also included topics such as governance.
- on 16 December he will attend an event at L'Université d'Aix-Marseille to celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> ERC laureate.

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported from his recent activities as follows:

- on 11 November he spoke at the Danish Parliament for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the births of Marie and August KROGH, two of the great voices of Danish basic research and research policy. The event was organised by Liselotte HØJGAARD and the Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters at the Danish Parliament. During the panel discussion he emphasised the importance of basic science.
- on 22 November he attended an EU-LIFE strategy meeting in Copenhagen moderated by Giulio SUPERTI-FURGA, EU-LIFE chair and former Scientific Council member. There was a presentation and panel discussion exploring what enables fundamental research to contribute to innovation, how fundamental research interplays with innovation and how one can make sure that this ecosystem is prosperous. He argued strongly for a well-balanced system where basic science had a central place.
- on 25 November he gave a comprehensive insight into the mission of the ERC and best practices for developing a successful ERC proposal at a webinar for hospital-based researchers organised by Aarhus University Hospital for the European University Hospital Alliance (EUHA), formed by leading European university hospitals with demonstrated excellence in healthcare, education and research. The event was also attended by a staff member of the ERC Executive Agency.
- on 27 November he attended the NTNU 2024 Nobel Prize Jubilee conference on '*Basic research as the engine for societal transition: Fostering international leading research environments in Norway*'. The conference brought together outstanding researchers, including Nicola SPALDIN, politicians, policy makers and university leaders to celebrate the Nobel Prize

of May-Britt MOSER and Edward MOSER (ERC grantees), and to discuss the importance of cutting-edge research now and in the future. Jesper SVEJSTRUP gave the opening speech (*'The ERC: Supporting excellent basic research for a better world'*), participated in a panel discussion (*'The decision-makers and funders: Understanding how to support curiosity-driven blue-sky research'*) and gave the closing remarks. The event can be viewed at <https://www.ntnu.edu/nobelconference>.

Dirk INZÉ reported from his recent activities as follows:

- on 25 October he attended the ERC PI-centric event for Benelux countries and gave a lecture on mapping frontier research.
- on 5 December he attended and moderated a part of the ERC annual conference on *'Frontier Research Within and Beyond the Planetary Boundaries'*.

Leszek KACZMAREK reported from his recent activities as follows:

- on 13 November he attended the Brain Innovation Days in Brussels, organised by the European Brain Council (EBC) and gave a presentation on the ERC.

Alice VALKÁROVÁ reported from her recent activities as follows:

- on 22 October, she attended the National Information Day on the ERC Grants in Prague, Czech Republic, attended by 25 ERC grant holders. The event included practical presentations from the ERCEA. Representatives from Czech institutions responsible for providing ERC information gave practical information sessions during the event.
- at the end of October, she attended an international conference on nanoscience and nanotechnology in Tirana, Albania and gave a presentation on the ERC activities. The conference attracted about 50 participants, including many Albanian researchers.

Giovanni SARTOR reported from his recent activities as follows:

- he attended a conference in Rome of the Italian Association of Universities and spoke about the way that interdisciplinarity was addressed at the ERC level. Italy was looking at the ERC as a model for that.

Maria LEPTIN reported from her recent activities as follows:

- she attended the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EMBO in Heidelberg, Germany, and spoke on a panel on research careers alongside Nobel Laureate Katalin KARIKO and Ottoline LEYSER, Head of UKRI.
- she attended Falling Walls in Berlin, Germany and spoke at the ERC-organised plenary session on *'Boosting Frontier research- Europe's next move'* with three ministers from France, Czech Republic and Poland, Nobel Laureate and ERC grantee Alain ASPECT and Marie Noelle SEMERIA, CTO of TotalEnergies. The discussion in the panel emphasised the importance of frontier research to understand and enhance knowledge, but also to bring solutions, whether it is for advancing the decarbonisation of the economy or addressing other societal challenges. Maria LEPTIN also gave several interviews, including to the German Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. She met with the new German Science Minister Cem ÖZDEMİR, who had just been appointed, for a brief introduction.
- she visited Cyprus, at the invitation of the Cyprus Academy of Sciences and the Cypriot government and gave a keynote speech at the University of Cyprus. Cyprus today hosts 32 ERC grantees while 40 years ago it had no universities. Maria LEPTIN noted that Cyprus was keen to support education and science as well as the ERC.

- she met the EU Research and Innovation Science Counsellors in Brussels, a group of some 20 officials seconded by DG Research and Innovation (RTD) to the EU Delegations all over the world. There was also renewed interest by the African Academy of Sciences in an implementing arrangement with the ERC.
- she attended the AI for Science Forum, a workshop organised jointly by Google DeepMind and the Royal Society in London. The meeting provided a unique overview of the current state of deployment and development of AI and the thinking of leaders in those fields, including senior staff at Google and other industries.
- she met with the new chair of the ITRE (Industry, Research and Energy) Committee of the European Parliament (EP), Borys BUDKA, who was very supportive of the ERC and asked about links with the EIC (European Innovation Council), innovation, defence, and knowledge transfer. He invited Maria LEPTIN for a hearing at the ITRE Committee in early 2025.
- she attended a high-level workshop by Science Europe and the World Science Forum in Budapest, Hungary, where she gave a speech about the competitiveness of European research and participated in a panel discussion moderated by the Austrian FWF. She had an informal meeting with Hungary-based ERC grantees and panel members together with Laszlo LOVÁSZ. She participated in a panel about ‘trust in science’, during the first plenary debate at the World Science Forum, alongside researchers from Brazil, Lebanon, Netherlands, moderated by the CEO of AAAS. Laszlo LOVÁSZ thanked Maria LEPTIN for attending the event and speaking to the scientific community. Ben FERINGA added that during a recent visit to Hungary he spoke in support of the independence of Hungarian universities, and this was much appreciated.
- she met with the Chinese Science Minister YIN and a week later the Taiwanese Vice-Minister for Science in Brussels. Both wanted to enhance their participation in the ERC and very much praised the ERC.
- she received representatives of the scientific community, such as Swiss Rectors Conference President Luciana VACCARO, the Bettencourt Foundation, Inserm, NCN, Taltech Estonia, ALLEA.
- she participated in a meeting of the G6 Presidents of research funding organisations, who will issue a position on Framework Programme 10 (FP10) soon. Very supportive individual position papers have already been issued by Helmholtz and Max Planck.
- she visited Portugal last week, on the invitation of Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT). She had meetings with the scientific community and government officials, namely the State Secretary of Science, Ana PAIVA and the Minister for Energy and Environment, Maria DA GRAÇA CARVALHO. Portugal was very supportive of the ERC, as reflected in their position on FP10, and would like to see stronger links between the ERC and the EIC.
- she spoke at the ERC Public Engagement with Research Award event and at the ERC annual conference on planetary boundaries, which was opened by Commissioner Ekaterina ZAHARIEVA. The Commissioner outlined her priorities for her mandate saying that she was supportive of the independence of the ERC and committed to fighting for a better budget.

Nicola SPALDIN congratulated Maria LEPTIN on receiving an Honorary Doctorate from the ETH.

Maria LEPTIN in turn congratulated Nicola SPALDIN for receiving the 2024 Award for Best Teaching from ETH Zurich.

## 6. 10<sup>th</sup> EU framework programme for research and innovation (FP10)

Maria LEPTIN reported from her meeting with Commission Vice-President for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, Henna VIRKKUNEN, shortly before her parliamentary

hearing. She also informed the Scientific Council about a recent proposal by Christian EHLER, a member of the European Parliament, on behalf of the ITRE Committee. He had suggested allocating half of the next framework programme budget to the ERC and EIC and had called for a doubling of the research budget. Unit A1 reported that technical work on the FP10 proposal was ongoing, with the final proposal expected in about six months.

Maria LEPTIN informed the Scientific Council that during the 29 November Competitiveness Council meeting, Denmark had tabled a document supporting ERC independence and autonomy, which 22 member states had signed. The office of the President of the ERC reported that Maria LEPTIN had met with the Polish Deputy Ambassador who provided an overview of the Polish presidency priorities, which was to advance security in all dimensions. A debate on the future of research and innovation was planned for the March informal Competitiveness Council in Warsaw. The interim evaluation of Horizon Europe by the Commission was due in April. Cyprus had also been supportive of the ERC and preparations were being made for its presidency in 2026.

## **7. Research security**

The ERCEA reported on recent developments concerning research security. The Scientific Council discussed the matter acknowledging the complexity of the issues involved.

## **8. Update on lump sum implementation matters**

Maria LEPTIN addressed the remaining issues to be resolved regarding the lump sum model for financing ERC grants, specifically concerning additional funding and the portability of grants.

## **9. Operational issues**

The ERCEA presented an overview of the Consolidator Grant 2024 results. The call had a total budget of €677.9 million (€583.9 million call budget and €94 million additional funding). Results were shared by panel, progress of female applicants in the evaluation by domain, success rate by years since PhD, funded proposals by success rate of HI country, and by reapplicants and reapplying grantees. Preliminary data on Consolidator Grant 2025 pre-registrations was shared as well.

## **10. Update on the ongoing work on eligibility windows**

Maria LEPTIN recalled recent discussions of the Scientific Council regarding the eligibility windows for Starting and Consolidator Grants. A task force had been established to consider possible options, and a further update on its work would be presented at the February plenary meeting.

## **11. ERC Work Programme 2026**

Maria LEPTIN introduced strategic items for proposed changes to be included in the ERC Work Programme 2026, as well as editorial changes and support to new actions and IT services. The Scientific Council will continue its discussions on the Work Programme 2026 during the February 2025 plenary meeting.

## **12. Ethics review process**

The ERCEA and Tom HENZINGER provided an overview of the ethics review process of the ERC, carried out in three stages: pre-screening, screening, and assessment. A task force, consisting of Scientific Council members and ERCEA staff, had worked together and provided observations on the functioning of these processes. The Scientific Council discussed these observations, which were presented for further consideration.

### 13. Plan for the feedback-to-policy activities in 2025

The ERCEA presented the feedback to policy (F2P) framework, coordination and implementation, as well as external collaborations both within and outside DG RTD. The ERC publications for 2023-2024 and the ERCEA F2P plan for 2024, along with key considerations for 2025, were also discussed.

### 14. Closed session

The Scientific Council held a closed session.

## Friday 13 December 2024

### 15. Update from the ScC Standing Committees and Working Groups

- ***Standing Committee on Panels (CoP)***

Maria LEPTIN reported from recent discussions at CoP, including issues related to conflict of interest (CoI) rules for panel members and potential improvements in the mechanism for distributing applications.

- ***Standing Committee CoIME***

Eystein JANSEN reported from CoIME's activities, including recent cases discussed by the Committee.

- ***Standing Committee PRIME***

Jesper SVEJSTRUP reported on recent PRIME activities, providing insights into key opinions from external experts. He highlighted that the ERC was regarded as a world-leading funding agency, a status that allowed the ERC to adopt a new approach to measuring its performance. PRIME had decided to simplify the ERC Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Strategy. Further information would be provided to the Scientific Council at a future plenary meeting.

- ***WG on Widening European Participation***

Alice VALKÁROVÁ noted that there were no new developments to be reported since the update provided at the last plenary meeting.

- ***WG on Innovation***

Sylvie LORENTE reported on the activities of the Innovation WG, including a recent meeting with Špela STRES, a representative of the EIC Board, and planned communication activities for ERC PoC projects.

- ***WG on Gender and Diversity (GDWG)***

Geneviève ALMOUZNI presented updates from the GDWG. She noted a recent very good presentation on the WG's activities to the ERC National Contact Points (NCPs) delivered by Tom HENZINGER. She reported on discussions of the WG about gender-based violence as a possible reason for extending the ERC eligibility window, increasing visibility of underrepresented communities, and updating the ERC website page on Gender and Diversity.

- ***WG on Open Science***

Nicola SPALDIN reported on recent activities of the Open Science WG, focusing on two main discussion points, Digital Services Act and Open Research Europe (ORE).

## **16. ERC external communication strategy and update on communication activities**

The ERCEA reported on recent communication activities, including the successful outcomes of the Synergy Grant call and highlighting an unprecedented presence in the media. The ERC appeared in over 1.096 media articles, a record for all ERC call result campaigns, and achieved a 137% increase compared to 2023, with more than 1.5 billion impressions. There was significant coverage by national media in Italy, outlets from widening countries such as Greece, Hungary, and Poland, as well as prominent regional outlets in Germany. On the ERC website, the press release for the 2024 call received 22.000 views, compared to 16.000 for the 2023 call, reflecting a 37% increase. Similarly, project examples garnered 7.600 views for 2024, up 40% from 5.400 in 2023. The ERCEA also reported on the Public Engagement with Research Award (PERA) training and ceremony held on 24 October, part of the ERC Science Engagement Day. The event attracted 230 attendees in person and 160 online, with speeches from the President of the ERC, Maria LEPTIN, Scientific Council member Luke O'NEILL, and science presenter Emma OSBORNE. Six prizes of €10.000 were awarded, with recipients hailing from Germany (2), France (2), Ireland, and the UK.

The ERCEA outlined the ERC external communication strategy for 2025, which was to explain the value of frontier research, provide information on funding, and promote public engagement. Key audiences included potential ERC applicants, grantees, universities, policymakers, journalists, and members of the public. The Scientific Council agreed with the proposed objectives and target audiences.

## **17. Any other business**

### ***-Scientific Council plenary meeting in Durham in June 2025***

Harriet BULKELEY informed the Scientific Council members of the general framework she had been planning for the Durham plenary meeting, including meetings with the scientific community (also with ERC grantees), lab visits and social activities.

### ***-Allocation of additional (R0) credits***

Maria LEPTIN informed the Scientific Council of remaining funds from the additional (R0) credits, which needed to be allocated. The Scientific Council decided to allocate €800.000 to PoC, which would allow to fund five more grants.

### ***-Other meetings in 2025 with ERC participation***

Maria LEPTIN noted a number of invitations she had received for meetings in 2025 and asked whether Scientific Council members could represent the ERC as she would be unavailable. Those included a STOA Committee of the European Parliament event on academic freedom on 5 February, a ceremonial session at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna on 16 May, for which Tom HENZINGER volunteered, and a GITEX event in Berlin on 21-23 May.

### ***-New Scientific Council members in 2025***

Maria LEPTIN informed the Scientific Council members that two new members would join in January 2025 and a third one in spring. Nicola SPALDIN highlighted that the Identification Committee selecting Scientific Council members should consider diversity of the appointed members more broadly (beyond gender). Maria LEPTIN acknowledged the comment and noted that she would transmit it to the chair of the Identification Committee.

## **18. Meeting with Marc Lemaître, Director-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD)**

Maria LEPTIN welcomed Marc LEMAÎTRE, Director-General for Research and Innovation, to the meeting. She began by addressing key topics related to the next framework programme. The Scientific Council and the Director-General also discussed operational issues, including the ethics review process, the lump sum model for granting, collaboration between the ERC and the EIC, research security matters, and developments related to artificial intelligence. The Scientific Council and the Director-General had a productive exchange on these topics.