



# OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

## Global approach to R&I

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the  
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions  
on the Global Approach to Research and Innovation -  
Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world  
[COM(2021) 252 final]

INT/941

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## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC welcomes the EU's commitment to lead and to preserve openness in international research and innovation cooperation, while promoting a level playing field and reciprocity underpinned by fundamental values.
- 1.2 The EESC welcomes the conclusions of the "Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research", adopted at the Ministerial Conference on the European Research Area (ERA) in that city on 20 October 2020, as it represents a precondition for a dynamic research and innovation landscape which strives for the advancement of knowledge and the benefit of society. The EESC supports the adoption of these principles at international level in future.
- 1.3 The EESC deems it necessary to better involve civil society organisations in supporting EU institutions and Member States in developing extraordinary policies and special programmes (careers mobility, attracting/retaining researchers, and applied research and innovation results for the entrepreneurship culture of EU SMEs) capable of collecting EU value added that can in turn feed an ambitious European Research Area<sup>1</sup> for the next decade. This should in particular involve taking into account lessons learnt during the pandemic and the impact of climate change on societies and economies, as well as the need to ensure the full transfer of knowledge and technology through the digital transformation of research. The pandemic has brought to the fore cooperation in the field of health, where the focus must be on making health care available, working to improve and strengthen health in a timely manner, as well as cooperation between health professionals, where working together can find solutions to even the most complex health problems.
- 1.4 The EESC would like to point out the importance of strengthening the EU's leading role in supporting multilateral research and innovation partnerships to deliver new solutions to green, digital, health, social and innovation challenges, taking into consideration the current impact of COVID-19 on European health systems, societies, business communities and the wider global economy.
- 1.5 To contribute concretely with the objective of a stronger EU in the world, the EESC asks for civil society organisations to be included appropriately at EU and national level in the European Commission's work in the monitoring of actions, as set out in its Communication. With a view to the planned ERA forum for transition, the EESC suggests facilitating joint action with EU and national institutions through a preliminary Civil Society Knowledge Network Report, which would be delivered and discussed at an international conference held in 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> Presidency note to the Council – Renewing the European Research Area – how to prepare the roll out of an ambitious ERA fit for the next decade? and New European Research Area: Council adopts conclusions – press release, 1 December 2020.

## 2. **General comments**

- 2.1 The Global Approach to Research and Innovation (R&I) presents the Commission's perspective for Europe's strategy on international cooperation in research and innovation. The strategy also aims to strengthen partnerships to deliver new solutions to green, digital, health, social and innovation challenges.
- 2.2 The new strategy builds on two principal objectives. First, it aims for a research and innovation environment that is based on rules and values, and that is also open, in order to help researchers and innovators around the world work together in multilateral partnerships and find solutions to global challenges. Second, it aims to ensure reciprocity and a level playing field in international cooperation in research and innovation.
- 2.3 The new global approach should be implemented through:
- modulating EU bilateral cooperation in research and innovation to make it compatible with European interests and values and to strengthen the EU's open strategic autonomy;
  - mobilising science, technology and innovation to accelerate sustainable and inclusive development, and the transition to resilient, knowledge-based societies and economies in low and middle-income countries;
  - launching initiatives modelled on a Team Europe approach, which combines actions by the EU, financial institutions and Member States to maximise the effectiveness and impact of actions.
- 2.4 The Communication also serves as a guide to implementing the international dimension of the new EU programme for civil research and innovation, Horizon Europe, and its synergies with other EU programmes, in particular the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.

## 3. **Commitment to international openness and fundamental values in research and innovation**

- 3.1 To maintain leadership, the EU research and innovation programme has to remain open to the world. This means that participants from all over the world, regardless of their place of establishment or residence, should be able to participate in EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. Furthermore, respect and common understanding of values in research should be further promoted and implemented in all international partnerships.

- 3.2 Following up on *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*<sup>2</sup>, the EESC opinion on *A new European Research Area (ERA) for research and innovation*<sup>3</sup> underlines the need to incorporate the principle of scientific and ethical integrity into research ethics and integrity, so as to prevent losses in terms of human health, money, and scientific failure. The Communication emphasises the role of the EU protecting common fundamental values when addressing ethical challenges and ensuring human-centred technological innovation.
- 3.3 Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, ethical and integrity aspects of research, empirical foundations, gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness should be mainstreamed and integrated in international research cooperation. The EESC strongly agrees with the importance of gender balance and equality, youth empowerment and participation, inclusion and diversity in global research in innovation. An inclusive and supportive environment for research, without political interference, along with opportunities for research, should be advocated at all levels. The EESC welcomes the EC initiative to develop and promote guidelines on dealing with foreign interference that targets EU research organisations and higher education institutions.
- 3.4 The global aim of the EU is to make datasets FAIR: findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable within the concept of open data and open science.
- 3.5 It is important to provide core funding at the national level, ensuring an adequate level of investment in research and development that is able to achieve the goals set in the sector.
- 3.6 Science Diplomacy could help the EU to project soft power and pursue its economic interests and values more effectively, meeting demand and interest from partner countries and playing to the EU's strengths as a research and innovation powerhouse. The EESC is convinced that a constructive social and civic dialogue at all levels would contribute to successful science diplomacy in our communities.

#### 4. **New balance – Towards a level playing field and reciprocity in R&I**

- 4.1 Through its policies and programmes, the EU is a major catalyst for internationalisation in research and innovation. It is able to involve production systems too, and mobilises science, young researchers, interdisciplinary networks, technology and innovation to accelerate sustainable and inclusive development, on the one hand, and the transition to resilient, knowledge-based societies and economies in low and middle-income countries, on the other. The EESC stresses the importance of private and particularly public investments in science in

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<sup>2</sup> *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*, [www.allea.org](http://www.allea.org) [accessed 6 June 2021].

<sup>3</sup> EESC opinion on *A new European Research Area (ERA) for Research and Innovation*, [OJ C 220, 9.6.2021, p. 79](#).

order to keep up with other global powers in research and innovation and to protect human rights and fundamental values at the same time.

- 4.2 Other major science powers are now spending more on science than the EU as a percentage of gross domestic product. Geopolitical tensions are rising and human rights and fundamental values such as academic freedom are being challenged. Academic freedom is a backbone of higher education in the EU<sup>4</sup>, and it should be protected vis-à-vis third countries. In the light of recent events, the EESC welcomes and supports the appeal by European scholars<sup>5</sup> to seek immediate action to create expedited complementary legal pathways for researchers and scholars at risk, including scholars, students, and civil society actors from Afghanistan, especially women and ethnic and religious minorities.

## 5. Tackling global challenges together

- 5.1 The EESC fully supports putting a clear focus on the Just Twin Transition, i.e. the Digital Transition and the Green Deal, health and post-COVID-19 long-term recovery policies. Europe needs to cooperate across borders on a scale never seen before, to learn how to develop, jointly with other partners, innovative solutions to deliver just green and digital transitions in line with the sustainable development goals and to promote Europe's resilience, prosperity and competitiveness – particularly in favour of micro SMEs – and support economic and social well-being. While fostering the transition towards a more resilient European economy, an inclusive recovery leaving no European behind is essential in the process of moving towards a sustainable European economy whilst creating new opportunities for workers. Social innovation can also play an important role in those processes.
- 5.2 Reciprocal openness, the free exchange of ideas and the co-creation of solutions are essential to the pursuit and advancement of fundamental knowledge. These are key components of a vibrant innovation ecosystem, because openness in cooperation, which characterises EU action, is taking place in a transformed global environment.
- 5.3 The mobilisation of the world's researchers and innovators will be crucial to the well-being of citizens and of future generations. As seen in recent global pandemic, strengthening international cooperation on issues such as global health, helps us achieve breakthrough innovations. The EU should support its objectives of open strategic autonomy by, in parallel, modulating its bilateral cooperation with non-EU countries in certain areas<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://bmbf.bmbfcluster.de/files/DRP-EFR-Bonner\\_Erklaerung\\_EN\\_with%20signatures\\_M%C3%A4rz\\_2021.pdf](http://bmbf.bmbfcluster.de/files/DRP-EFR-Bonner_Erklaerung_EN_with%20signatures_M%C3%A4rz_2021.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2021/08/urgent-appeal-to-european-governments-and-eu-institutions-take-action-for-afghanistans-scholars-researchers-and-civil-society-actors/>.

<sup>6</sup> Integrating cooperation with EFTA countries, the Western Balkans, Turkey, countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy and the United Kingdom, deepening EU partnerships with Africa, Latin America and other regions etc.

- 5.4 In response to current global trends, the EU should lead by example, promoting rules-based multilateralism. The multilateral order needs to be reinvigorated to make it fit for purpose so that it can cope with global challenges, and respond to growing citizen demands for transparency, quality and inclusiveness. The EU should also promote the ambitious modernisation of key multilateral international institutions, pursuing a shared roadmap for reciprocal openness in research and innovation cooperation in order to facilitate a global response to global challenges and exchange best practices.
- 5.5 The EU should play a leading role as a setter of global sustainable standards and this should also be advanced through an increased role in international cooperation in "SME-friendly" pre-normative and standardisation research. The EESC also stresses the importance of SME support measures in all areas of intellectual property rights protection.
- 5.6 The EESC fully supports the action plan on intellectual property<sup>7</sup> as a very good and holistic approach to modernising the EU IP system. Launching the Unitary Patent System needs to be a main priority and will considerably enhance the competitiveness of EU companies.
- 5.7 Some countries are increasingly seeking technological leadership through discriminatory measures, and often use research and innovation as a tool for global influence and social control. The EU's prosperity and economic competitiveness, but also its ability to autonomously source and provide its citizens with crucial technologies and services that are safe and secure, needs to be reinforced. The EU should spearhead the development of new global norms, international standards and cooperation frameworks in areas such as digital, including artificial intelligence and other new technologies. The EU's democratic and regulatory strengths are assets to help build a better world, while its credibility as a peace actor and its security and defence structures can help support multilateral efforts to keep, sustain and build peace.
- 5.8 The EESC has been at the forefront of the debate on artificial intelligence (AI) since its first opinion on the subject in 2017<sup>8</sup> and has published a number of opinions on the subject over the past couple of years<sup>9</sup>. It has been advocating a "human-in-command" approach to AI, where humans both remain in command of AI in a technical sense, and retain the ability to decide if, when and how to use it in our society at large. Attention has also to be drawn to the impact of AI on jobs, the importance of finding the right balance between regulation, self-regulation and ethical guidance, and the impact of AI on consumers, among others. The EESC is

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7 [EESC opinion Action plan/intellectual property OJ C 286, 16.7.2021, p. 59](#)

8 [OJ C 288, 31.8.2017, p. 1](#)

9 [OJ C 440, 6.12.2018, p.1](#); [OJ C 440, 6.12.2018, p.51](#); [OJ C 240, 16.7.2019, p. 51](#); [OJ C 47, 11.2.2020, p. 64](#); [OJ C 364, 28.10.2020, p. 87](#)

currently in the process of drafting its formal opinion on the European Commission's proposal for an Artificial Intelligence Act<sup>10</sup>.

- 5.9 The EU's capacity to be a global actor is also ensured through consistency between the EU's external actions and internal policies in each Member State. A united and coherent EU voice is essential to stabilise our partnerships and alliances with third countries, support multilateral and regional organisations and negotiate a more interest-based approach to global public goods.

Brussels, 20 October 2021.

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The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

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<sup>10</sup> [INT/940 – Regulation on artificial intelligence](#) (adopted but not yet published in the OJ).