EARTO Inputs for the EC Communication on European Research Area (ERA)

27 July 2020

EARTO has for many years been one of the key RD&I actors participating actively in the ERA Stakeholders' platform who jointly committed to further working in partnership in achieving the European Research Area (ERA)[1]. Accordingly, EARTO members very much appreciate the efforts of the EU Institutions to further deepen the ERA and look forward to jointly implement a new ERA for Research and Innovation.

As input to the European Commission's future Communication on a new ERA for Research and Innovation, EARTO developed the following four recommendations for an effective post-2020 RD&I policy in Europe:

1. **Boost public investment in RD&I as key driver of prosperous and sustainable growth, recognising that Europe's technological capabilities and sovereignty will be the decisive strategic factor to build Europe's future.**

2. **Foster cross-border RD&I collaboration as the solution to jointly face the global societal & industrial challenges of today, especially through the pillar II of Horizon Europe.**

3. **Support a European RD&I ecosystem approach boosting technology co-creation and (large & small) industry's development and uptake of innovative products and services, including developing a European strategy on technology infrastructures.**

4. **Ensure the right framework conditions to stimulate and spread knowledge and technology co-creation in Europe and prevent the creation of unwanted regulatory barriers hampering European innovation capacity.**

For more details on those recommendations, please refer to EARTO Recommendations. To support the implementation of those recommendations, the ERA Communication should take the opportunity to:

- **Reaffirm strong targets** in **terms of public RD&I investments at EU level ensuring strong commitments of the Member States** in national spendings (i.e. EU 3% target of GDP investment in R&D), supported by the various EU instruments at hand like Horizon Europe public-private partnerships, future European alliances, IPCEI, etc.

- **Refocus the European Research Area towards developing a strong European industrial base and technological sovereignty**, where SMEs and midcap companies play a key role, often being "the hidden champions", with sustainable company management and strong corporate social responsibility. Addressing the technology development and diffusion challenges is essential to boost SMEs' productivity and growth.

- **Create a European Strategy on Technology Infrastructures.** EARTO very much welcomes the EC SWD on Technology Infrastructures and is looking forward to the next steps. A strategic approach is needed to ensure that we pave the way to have the technology infrastructures required in Europe to answer technology needs and support European industry to develop their innovation capacity and business transformation.

- **Adopt an ecosystem approach for EU RD&I policy making, boosting collaboration and co-creation, giving RTOs a clear mandate to drive the development of Europe's innovation hubs along key industrial value chains, as highlighted in the EC report on Strengthening Strategic Value Chains.** Strengthening the synergies between the different EU policies related to innovation (Industrial, RD&I, Regional, etc.) and creating alignment between the existing European national and regional strategies on innovation hubs (incl. Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe programme), would be essential, also in widening countries. Strengthening of consistent mixed-funding schemes at European, national and regional levels for those hubs would also be very valuable in achieving the industry transition across the EU. Such schemes should also support innovation hubs' orchestration activities.

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[1] See 2013 and 2015 ERA SHOs joint statements of commitment.

- **Ensure that the EU instruments proposed to tackle Europe's current innovation divide will effectively be implemented**: Especially the Interregional Innovation Investments (Component 5) and the provision proposed by the European Commission enabling Members States and regions to transfer up to 5% of their Cohesion Funds to other EU programmes, such as Horizon Europe, are key advancements that need to become realities in the next MFF. Those new instruments will allow interested national and regional governments to further develop their applied RD&I capacity, especially in many of the less RD&I intensive European regions. Over the last 20 years, the EARTO network has offered its support to the Member States and regions across Europe interested in learning more about the RTO model. The EARTO network will continue to support any local, regional and national government interested in developing such applied RD&I capacity with a European perspective.

- **Foster a balanced approach between Open Science and Intellectual Property (IP) policies. IP's crucial role in innovation and in fostering knowledge co-creation needs to be further recognised.** EU policy makers should take great care to balance the envisaged benefits from "openness" for society at large against the proven needs of the existing technology marketplace, the latter requiring a clear competitive edge as well as clear return on its investments in innovation activities, where collaborative research plays a crucial role. EU policy makers should support a strictly bottom-up growth of Open Science, preserving scientific freedom, knowledge co-creation and technology transfer, while further developing a policy that provides effective incentives and support to researchers to efficiently disseminate and exploit their research results and encourage their translation into the commercial world, particularly through patent filing to ensure greater impact (e.g. incentives to researchers, review of the reward system for scientific careers).

- **Set a strategy to develop the skills for the future using all stakeholders:** When moving closer to market, the need for specialised and highly skilled personnel and know-how is high. RTOs are a valuable source of highly skilled and specialised human capital and know how, creating bridges between the many different disciplines and expertise necessary to solve societal and industrial challenges. So far, the ERA has focused mainly on academia-business relationships, often forgetting essential actors necessary for a well-functioning innovation ecosystem. RTOs support and facilitate the mobility of researchers between the actors within RD&I ecosystems. Developing the skills of the future will require to enlarge the EU mobility instruments' thinking and involved other stakeholders, linking such instruments to an innovation ecosystems and hubs' approach. Here the EC could **develop specific support for the training and transfer of skills from RTOs to industry, essential for industry's technology uptake within innovation hubs, especially for SMEs.** This could be intensified under Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions, by focussing some of its projects to RTOs-industry connections. The EC could also **target the evolution and development of interdisciplinary talent for innovation and entrepreneurship done by RTOs in the European lifelong learning programmes.** RTOs train professionals with T-shaped profile, capable to co-create and collaborate with experts in other areas and innovate across disciplines: such capabilities should be further exploited.

EARTO and its experts remain ready to further discuss with the EU Institutions on how to further develop an impactful new ERA for Research and Innovation.

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