

Challenging Europe's Research: Rationales for the European Research Area

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Abstract

During the past year the European Commission and its Member States have been seeking to re-invigorate the European Research Area (ERA), a concept first put forward eight years ago. Though never clearly defined, ERA described a bundle of measures seen to make Europe's research system more efficient and effective. It was significant in moving beyond the long-running Framework Programme, now in 7th incarnation, to encompass the other 95% of the research system. Achievement to date has been mixed at best – with the headline objective of raising research spending to 3% of GDP by 2010 having little or no effect, hence the re-launch.

The presentation will present an alternative vision of the ERA based on the work of an Expert Panel chaired by the author which was mandated to examine the rationale for ERA.^{1,2} The guiding principle adopted by the Panel was that the core objective should be to maximise the value contributed by research, today and into the future, to Europe's economic, social and environmental goals. The research system cannot be treated in isolation from its critical linkages with innovation, education and the wider thrust of EU policies and aspirations.

For research to achieve the necessary political support and buy-in from citizens a radically new approach must be adopted. Three key areas of action are needed. First, Europe's research system must respond to a series of 'grand challenges'. Second, Europe must become more research-friendly. This requires major reforms for many types of institution and the policies that support them. It also means that the ERA should extend to private as well as public research. Third, Europe's strategic and applied research must be re-orientated at a pan-European level to support the full range of policies that member states have agreed. This involves the Framework Programme and national programmes – coordinated through ERA-NET schemes and other instruments – engaging much more effectively with policy needs in areas such as the environment, transport, energy, agriculture and health.

¹ Era Expert Group, Challenging Europe's Research: Rationales for the European Research Area

http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/eg7-era-rationales-final-report_en.pdf

² Georghiou L, Europe's research system must change, *Nature* Vol 452/24 April 2008

The report has received a positive response from Ministers and the key recommendations are now being pursued through the production of an ERA-Vision.