



Forth Informal Working Group Meeting on Research and Innovation under the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Panel on Research and Innovation
20-21 October 2022
Tbilisi, Georgia

Minutes

The fourth informal working group under the Eastern Partnership (EaP) R&I Panel took place on 20 and 21 October 2022 in Tbilisi, Georgia.

For **20 October 2022**, 56 participants registered for the meeting: 26 representatives from five (5) EaP countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), 4 representatives of EU Member States (Belgium, Germany, Latvia and Romania), three Civil Society Forum representatives, the European Commission (DG JRC, DG NEAR, DG RTD) and EEAS colleagues. The meeting took stock of the achievements of the EaP Partner countries regarding their participation in Horizon Europe, discussed the challenges in the implementation of the EaP post-2020 R&I priorities towards recovery, resilience and reforms, the progress in developing and implementing national plans and programmes with a view to supporting R&I reforms in the Partner countries. All participants recognised the role research and innovation co-operation plays as an instrument of diplomacy as well as sustainable economic recovery and growth, made even more pertinent in the context of the war of Russia against Ukraine.

Building on the achievements of the EaP Partner countries regarding their participation in Horizon 2020 and the conclusions of the first, second and third Informal Working Group Meetings on Research and Innovation which took place in April, July and October 2021, the event focused on four strategic directions: EaP priorities in Research and Innovation; participation of the five EaP Partner countries in Horizon Europe; integration of the EaP Partner countries in the European Research Area (ERA); evolutions on technology transfer and smart specialisation.

The event provided a good opportunity to debate the integration of the EaP Partner Countries into the European Research Area, exchange updates on the state of play in designing smart specialisation strategies and technology transfer work and discuss best practices for an enhanced participation in Horizon Europe. The EaP Partner countries acknowledged the achieved progress at national level and in structuring the cooperation both at bilateral and regional levels for the creation of a common knowledge and innovation space between the EU and the Partner countries and agreed that the development should be fostered, using scientific evidence to create knowledge-based jobs and attract investors to innovation driven by scientific progress in the EU and the EU neighborhood. All sides shared ideas how this co-operation could be further deepened.

The effective participation of civil societies of the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU has been recognised as crucial in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy in a constructive dialogue with the EU and the EaP decision-makers.

Considering the international dimension of the Horizon Europe Programme and the access of the EaP partner countries to the programmes and the Horizon Europe Association Agreements already concluded, the event built on the challenges identified at a national level, focusing on synergic efforts

in building stronger R&I ecosystems, thus increasing the EaP Partner countries participation in Horizon Europe.

Welcome remarks were addressed by Ruta Zarnauskaite, Head of Unit, DG R&I, European Commission, Catalin Gherman, Deputy Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Georgia and by Dr. Nunu Mitskevichi, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. In addition to EC Commission colleagues, EEAS (Julien Bourtembourg) and DG NEAR (Jeroen Willems) representatives took the floor to set the scene in view of the recent developments in the EaP Partner countries in a challenged regional environment stressing the EU support towards the region and Ukraine. The Eastern Partnership remains a valuable platform for cooperation on common challenges, improving the EU position in the region, strengthening regional cooperation among partners, and contributing to people-to-people contacts. The need to further build and implement the EaP Agenda as a platform for a regional resilience and a support for EU accession has been emphasised.

Important advancements were highlighted regarding EaP Partner countries' participation in Horizon Europe. The current state of play in Horizon Europe, the role of National Contact Points (NCP's), Euraxess, Marie-Sklodowska Curie Actions (MSCA), European Research Council (ERC), European Innovation Council (EIC), the latest news in the European Research Area (ERA) as a means of international cooperation were presented along with national experiences with the programme.

Representatives from the EaP Partner countries took the floor with insightful presentations on the current state of play in the development of national R&I ecosystems. Each speaker elaborated on the specific issues the Partner Countries have experienced in implementing R&I policies, challenges, and solutions they have identified in the implementation of the new post EaP 2020 R&I priorities.

The active role of the civil society in the EaP Partner countries was emphasised as well. Civil Society Forum representatives addressed several key problems deriving from the conflict in Ukraine with an insightful presentation, identifying problems and proposing tangible solutions.

Key Messages

1. **Ruta Zarnauskaite**, Head of Unit, Unit 04, DG R&I, European Commission, opened the meeting by welcoming participants - representatives of all five EaP Partner countries, as well as academia, EU Member States and EaP civil society. She proceeded by highlighting the meeting's challenging security backdrop, which was marked by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which affects not only Ukraine's territorial integrity and security but also the entire region.. Ms. Ruta Zarnauskaite emphasised that research has a significant diplomatic role to play because it aims to unite the brightest minds for the benefit of humanity. She continued by recalling that discussions are currently focused on identifying practical, concrete solutions for the implementation of the post -2020 priorities and targets announced in December 2021 at the EaP Summit in Brussels. EaP R&I national R&I ecosystem. She continued by emphasising that Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova are candidate states, and that Georgia has been granted an European Perspective and the European Union is ready to grant the status of a candidate country to Georgia once the twelve priorities specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application have been addressed. Furthermore, she stressed the importance of the Informal Working Group meetings under the EaP Panel for R&I in this context because, regardless of the progress made by one country or another towards EU

integration, regional cooperation between the countries and with the EU is essential for future growth and development. In conclusion, she praised the efforts made by Ukraine to deal with the situation and the significance of strengthening regional resilience.

2. **Catalin Gherman**, Deputy Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Georgia started by recalling the effectiveness of the previous group meetings. At the beginning he emphasised the importance of R&I for sustainable economic development and the fact that implementing R&I is important for building resilient societies in a post COVID-19 context. Mr. Gherman highlighted the achievements of Georgia in implementing R&I reforms, visible in the growing participation of Georgia in the Horizon Europe programme. Also, he mentioned the Horizon Office which can be an inspiration for other countries, as it helps boosting the participation in the Horizon Europe Programme. He concluded by recalling three thematic recommendations: the need to reinforce the links between science and industry; the need to boost the smart specialisation strategy; and the need to connect these strategies with other EU platforms.
3. **Dr Nunu Mitskevichi**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia took the floor highlighting the importance of science and innovation for peace in the challenged regional context. The Georgian commitment to reforms and the Association Agreements to Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe were emphasised. Also, the increased participation of Georgia to Horizon and COST were stressed and the fact that they offer identical opportunities to Georgia as to any other EU Member State. She concluded by reiterating the commitment to collaboration with the EU for future reforms.
4. **Julien Bourtembourg**, Deputy Head of Division for Regional Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation & OSCE in EEAS presented the current state of play in the multilateral life of EaP and presented the different geopolitical landscape generated since last year's EaP Summit. At the beginning, he highlighted the complex geopolitical context generated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and that the ongoing efforts are focused on responding to emergency needs and strengthening the Ukrainian resilience. He emphasised the decision of the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and to confirm Georgia's European perspective, stating that the place of these countries is in the EU. The new context generated the need for consultations about the future of EaP which resulted in a unanimous conclusion that the EaP continues to be relevant in the present context as it brings considerable added value in the region, while acknowledging that the framework needs to be adapted to the new realities. He emphasised that application for EU membership and the EaP and neighborhood policies are not mutually exclusive as they complement each other. In this vein, he emphasised the need to further boost national and regional resilience, while recalling the investment plan for post COVID-19 recovery. He concluded by highlighting that a joint agenda in Research and Innovation with a sound implementation of technology transfer and smart specialisation are key aspects for regional development.
5. **Jeroen Willems**, Deputy Head of Unit, DG NEAR C.2, European Commission stated at the beginning of his speech that these meetings demonstrate that progress is being done despite the hurdles. He emphasised the importance of R&I in the EU's political agenda, noting that only ten months ago, a commitment was made to raise each partner country's global innovation index score. This ambitious priority can only be met by boosting R&I investments, R&I gross expenditure, and by continuing to support essential policy reforms, notably R&I,

which requires cross-sector reforms because it brings together many sectors and stakeholders. Mr. Willems emphasised the importance of increasing EaP Partner countries' engagement in Horizon Europe.

In the second part of his speech, he presented programmes meant to bring together different stakeholders from public bodies, industry, and academia, being implemented in Armenia and Georgia which have shown promising results even from the first stages of implementation. The EaP Economic and Investment plan generated more than 2 billion EUR worth of investments one year since it has been launched. He concluded by stressing the importance to further develop and implement policies in the field of smart specialisation and technology transfer.

Session I: Eastern Partnership Priorities in Research and Innovation – state of implementation (the session was moderated by Kakha Khandolishvili, Head of International Relations and Strategic Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia).

6. **Kakha Khandolishvili**, Head of International Relations and Strategic Development Department, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia took the floor to present current developments in the implementation of R&I priorities in Georgia. At the beginning, he highlighted the problems the R&I ecosystem faces in Georgia: funding in R&I, linking science to business, human resources, the need to raise awareness regarding the use of research for business development, and others. Mr. Khandolishvili continued by emphasising the ambitious new strategy in Education and Science of Georgia, which foresees an increase of 1,5% in funding, and the increase of the capacity in Higher Education. The establishment of the Horizon Office and grant offices in all major universities were presented as part of the Georgian efforts to increase the participation in the programme. At the end of his presentation the efforts for launching a pilot project for a smart specialisation approach were highlighted.
7. **Sargis Hayotsyan**, chairman of the Science Committee, Republic of Armenia took the floor to present current developments in the implementation of R&I priorities in Armenia. At the beginning of the presentation the increase in research public spending in Armenia was emphasised, as there was an increase of 50%, namely 0, 14% of GDP. The national R&I priorities were built around renovation of the research infrastructure, allocations for research equipment, the increase of Armenia participation in research competitions, building human resources by increasing the participation of women in research, encouraging brain circulation and increasing the number of foreign researchers willing to conduct research in Armenia, increasing the number of young researchers. For increasing the participation of Armenia in Horizon Europe a special emphasis was given to the importance of the NPC network. At the end of his intervention, the solutions to increase the ranking in the global innovation index were mentioned.
8. **Dr. Esmira Alirzayeva**, Head of the Department of International Relations of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, took the floor to present current developments in the implementation of R&I priorities in Azerbaijan. A working Group on “Technology and Innovation” to improve the R&I ecosystem and a Subgroup on the “The improvement of

international rating indicators of scientific publications (h-index)" were established. A Roadmap was adopted for the promotion of researchers' mobility, the increase of the ranking of scientific publications, and for improvement of language, IT and academic writing skills of young researchers. A programme for English language for young researchers was developed jointly with the US Embassy. The State Programme as well as ANAS joint PhD program continue to support the mobility of PhD students and the first students defended their thesis. It was also mentioned that the Ministry of Science and Education was established. An incubation and acceleration center "INNOLAND" has been created to support the realisation of innovative ideas and expand the startup movement. TEKNOFEST was organised to encourage students' involvement in innovation. Special attention is given to bilateral project calls. It was stressed that the participation in the Horizon Europe programme is a priority and the activity of the NCP network involving representatives from all relevant state and research organisations was mentioned.

9. **Adriana Cazacu Țigaie**, State Secretary, Ministry of Education and Research from the Republic of Moldova, presented the current developments in the implementation of R&I priorities in the Republic of Moldova. At the beginning of her intervention, the current security background of the region was presented, stressing that the country's proximity to Ukraine resulted in a hands-on commitment to helping Ukrainian refugees. More than 100.000 refugees are hosted in the country, and some of them are researchers. In this vein, she continued by stressing the importance of the EaP Panel and the informal Working Group meetings as an instrument for dialogue and partnership development. The reform in the R&I ecosystem of the Republic of Moldova is ambitious and it already has results. The participation in the Horizon Europe Programme is a priority for the Republic of Moldova and important steps are being taken to boost this participation. At the end of the presentation, she expressed the interest of the Republic of Moldova to host the next informal working group meeting at expert level under the EaP R&I Panel in Moldova.
10. **Dr. Igor Taranov**, Director-General, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, presented the current developments in the implementation of R&I priorities in Ukraine in the context of the war. At the beginning of his intervention the devastating effects of the war in the country, and on the R&I infrastructure were presented. The war severely affected the research infrastructure and human resources as many researchers left the country. The Ministry of Education and Science lost a considerable budgetary support as, due to the war, the budget for R&I was reduced by around 85%. In this context, an urgent need to find financial support for research was emphasised. In this vein, Mr. Taranov emphasised that R&I will play a considerable role in the reconstruction of Ukraine. Several mechanisms were put in place for researchers so that they can continue to conduct their research. Digitalisation plays an important role to help researchers find funding and ideas for projects. Before the war several laws and roadmaps were adopted for the implementation of the R&I reform. Two laws were drafted for Technology Transfer and Smart Specialisation, but due to the war their adoption took time. Despite the war, considerable efforts have been invested by Ukraine to continue cooperation with the European Commission and to increase participation in ERA and MSCA actions and a plan was prepared for the establishment of Horizon Office in Ukraine. He concluded by highlighting that R&I offers an important opportunity for Ukraine, as this was the case with the creation of digital platforms, as they helped to build skills and plans in safe conditions.

11. **Sintija Bernava** and **Ivan Kulchytskyy**, **EaP Civil Society Forum**, presented the next stage in the EaP R&I activities: a view from the Civil Society Forum (CSF). At the beginning of their intervention the heartbreaking situation in Ukraine was presented, highlighting the devastating impact of the war over the R&I. In this vein, they emphasised that academic and scientific freedom were under attack and threatened individual scientists, higher education, science systems and infrastructures. A need for a mid- to long-term recovery and modernisation plans was identified; a financial support for relocated researchers; better conditions for them to continue the research, and mechanisms of assistance and support from the higher education and science sector were also mentioned. At the end of the presentation a series of recommendations were set forward such as: the need to make recommendations more specific and concrete and to clearly outline how to implement them; the need to support cooperation between education, science, business, government and civil society; awareness raising on how to involve civil society organisations in the development of effective strategies in R&I were highlighted.
12. **Tigran Arzumanyan**, Director of the SIPAC Foundation for the Republic of Armenia, pointed out that there is a great need to raise awareness about the priorities in R&I among all decision-makers. He stressed the importance of networking programmes as they brought new ideas to the implementation of projects. Concluding, he proposed small networking projects which can involve all EaP Partner countries.
13. **Dr. Tofiq Babayev**, Director of the Regional Innovative Technology Academy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and NCP for Digital, Industry and Space, stressed that the level of participation of EaP countries in Horizon Europe is not satisfactory. It was suggested adding a relevant CSA-type HORIZON EUROPE Call aiming to increase the joint activities of the EaP researchers. The topic may be on one of the five R&I missions of the EU, or post-2020 R&I priorities: Climate — neutral and smart cities; adaptation to climate change, including social transformations; agriculture; or in the areas of digital transformation or digital economy.
14. In conclusion, **Ruta Zarnauskaite**, emphasised the need of raising awareness of science as a policy area, as the pandemic has demonstrated, that only science may provide timely solutions to new challenges. Countries will progress more slowly without R&I investments. She also emphasised the importance of sharing success stories. In this line, she stressed the value of collaboration because it multiplies the results, especially in the very competitive Horizon Europe Programme, which is based on excellence of science.
15. In conclusion of the panel an initiative was proposed by a representative of the Republic of Moldova delegation to form an informal working group of researchers from the EaP Partner countries and EU Member States and beyond, to share best practices on drafting and submitting Horizon Europe project proposal.

Session II: EaP countries and Horizon Europe: How to increase participation in the programme? (the session was moderated by Silvia BOJINOVA, ENP Team Leader, Unit Horizon Europe Association, DG R&I, European Commission)

16. **Kalina Tsvetanova**, Policy Officer, Unit G3 Common Strategic Planning & Programming Service, DG R&I, European Commission presented the Strategic plans and work programmes under Horizon Europe. At the beginning of her intervention, the structure of the Horizon Europe Programme was presented, with the three pillars: pillar I: Excellent Science, pillar II: Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness, pillar III: Innovative Europe and the Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area part. The Horizon Europe strategic plan 2021-2024 linking EU policy priorities to research and innovation was outlined. In this vein, the four key strategic orientations for R&I support were presented and the co-design process for the preparation of the strategic plan 2021-2024, particularly with the general public and stakeholders, highlighted. Ms. Tsvetanova emphasised that the Strategic Plan covers a 4-year period from 2021 to 2024 and prepares the content of the 'main' work programmes 2021-2022 and 2023-2024. The strategic planning process for 2025-2027 was officially launched during the Annual R&I Days at the end of September 2022 and is expected to be finalised in Q1 2024.
17. **Silvia Bojinova**, ENP Team Leader, DG R&I, European Commission presented lessons learned from the EaP Partner countries participation in calls under the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022. At the beginning of her presentation Ms. Bojinova highlighted some substantial arguments in favor of the R&I importance for the EU-EaP agenda. Economic resilience, growth, competitiveness, greening, digitalisation, political approximation of economies and people and ecosystem integration were some of the arguments presented in favor of developing substantial R&I policies for the EaP Partner countries and the region in general. In this vein, she emphasised, while using the European Union example in facts and figures, how R&I can positively impact every national economy. She continued by highlighting the political process before and the after the EaP Summit in December 2021 and mentioned the ambitious EU Economic and Investment plan of €2.3 billion to support the post COVID-19 socio-economic recovery. Ms. Bojinova highlighted the post 2020 Priorities for R&I such as the increase of each partner country's Global Innovation Index score by 3 points. In the second part of her intervention, she presented an analysis of the EaP Partner countries participation in Horizon Europe, while sharing statistics reflecting the state of play of participation until 12.10.2022, 142 participations receiving 19.3 million Euros of a direct EU contribution.
18. **Niccolò Querci**, Policy Officer, DG R&I, Unit G3 Common Strategic Planning & Programming Service", European Commission presented the role of National Contact Points in the EaP Partner Countries. In this intervention, the Horizon Europe NCP System was presented, with its components and the way they interact. In this vein, the Horizon Europe NCP Horizontal Support call was extensively presented. With a budget of 4 million EUR the call - coordination and support type of action - was opened in June 2022 until November 8, 2022. He presented the expected outcomes of the call: a boost for newcomer NCP's, significant increase of the performance of NCPs, simplification of the potential applicants' access to Horizon Europe, maintenance of the Horizon Europe NCP Portal as a stable entry point during the whole duration of the programme.
19. **Slaven Misljencevic**, Policy officer, DG RTD, European Commission presented the Effective Use of Euraxess – Mobility of researchers. In his intervention he emphasised on the importance of the platform as it is addressed to researchers seeking to work in another country. The platform provides information and contacts concerning jobs, funding and the specific conditions of work and life the researcher will face in the new country. Currently there are 43 European Countries and 9 worldwide hubs participating in Euraxess. All have national

coordinators and several local contact points, and their national portals as well. Georgia and Armenia are among these countries. The contact points were meant to have a world coverage with presence in America, Asia, or Africa. On the day of the presentation the situation was as follows: more than 20000 registered organisations, more than 60.000 researchers using the platform, more than 80.000 job opportunities, and more than 17 million views on the web page yearly. Mr. Misljencevic presented the Georgia portal and the information it offers.

20. **Marija Fedotovaite**, Policy Officer, DG EAC C.2, European Commission presented how to make a better use of Marie-Skłodowska Curie Actions in Horizon Europe. In her intervention the role of the Marie-Skłodowska Curie Actions in Horizon Europe and the budget allocated to the action were explained. In this vein, Ms. Fedotovaite presented the 4 main actions emphasising how organisations and researchers from EaP Partner countries could benefit from them. In total over 15 million EUR were awarded to EaP organisations during Horizon 2020 while most participations were in RISE. The MSCA actions offers a great deal of opportunities for EaP Partner countries and EaP countries should also fully capitalise on these opportunities by a wide and targeted promotion. As part of the EU's response to the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, a new dedicated fellowship scheme — **MSCA4Ukraine** was presented. **MSCA4Ukraine** provides support to displaced researchers from Ukraine. This support will enable displaced researchers to continue their work at academic and non-academic organisations in EU Member States and Horizon Europe Associated Countries, while maintaining their connections to research and innovation communities in Ukraine. The programme is opened to academic and non-academic organisations. Takeaways and useful information on how to increase participation in MSCA were as well highlighted.
21. **Dr. Giuliano Scalzi**, Synergy grant call co-coordinator, European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA), unit B.2 Call and Project Follow-up Coordination Unit, presented “European Research Council – how to make a better use of its funding instruments”. In his intervention the ERC was presented, its aims and addressability. The programme is open to individual researchers from all over the world in the fields of life sciences, physical sciences and engineering, social sciences and humanities and different grant schemes encourage cutting edge research at different career levels. The programme has a substantial budgetary allocation in Horizon Europe: 16 billion EUR. In this vein, he emphasised the advantages for applying for the grant while taking into account that it is a highly competitive programme and the success rate reflects that. The situation of signed grant agreements by EaP nationals was presented: Georgia 2, Ukraine 21, Armenia 1, Moldova 1, and totaling 25. Among these, 1 was funded in Ukraine, while the other grant agreements are signed by EaP nationals abroad. The steps to be taken into consideration for successful project proposals were presented. An ongoing reform according to the DORA principles adopted by the Scientific Council generated a need for reviews in the funding strategy. At the end of the presentation the ERD Widening Participation policy was highlighted along with specific recommendations for increasing the success rate. Mr. Scalzi concluded by emphasising that the EaP participating countries must encourage researchers to keep trying as it is a highly competitive programme based on excellence, but reapplicants who already received feedback from ERC evaluations are more successful.
22. **Eric-Olivier PALLU**, Policy Officer, EISMEA, EIC presented “Opportunities offered by the European Innovation Council for Investment in Research and Innovation to foster economic growth and jobs”. At the beginning of his intervention a brief history of the EIC was presented,

highlighting that, with a 10 billion EUR budget, it is Europe's most ambitious innovative initiative. The programme was presented as unique in the world and it combined research on emerging technologies with Accelerator for startups, SMEs and scaleups. The fund was centered on innovation and was designed to be flexible and proactive with a considerable impact over the European innovation ecosystem. In this vein, he mentioned that it is the largest VC deep-tech investor in Europe (over €3 billion). The programme has the objective to boost European role in innovation at the global stage. The experience from the EIC pilot phase in Horizon 2020 was important to adjust the fund. Under Horizon Europe a new Governance structure was developed: EIC Board & President, EIC and SME Executive Agency, EIC Fund, and European Commission. The main EIC funding instruments presented were: Pathfinder, Transition and Accelerator. He concluded by presenting the co-invest and exit strategies and the EIC Seals of Excellence awarded in 2021-2022.

23. **Matthias WURCH**, Global Service Facility in support of International Cooperation in Research and Innovation, presented the new Proposal Writing Camps and Expert Consultations on preparing Horizon Europe applications, regarding the support the European Commission offers to the EaP researchers and innovators. The aim is to facilitate a successful participation of the EU Eastern Partnership countries (EaP) in the EU's Framework Programmes for research and innovation (R&I) and the European Research Area (ERA), with a duration of 40 months, starting in October/November 2022. The new post-2020 priorities relevant for R&I in the EaP countries were presented, and information on monitoring and reporting was offered, together with the relevant timeline for activities. The Proposal Writing Camps should take place annually in each of the 5 EaP Partner countries, with 15 Camps organized in 40 months. Expert Consultations and Proposal Writing Sessions should be organised in addition, virtually or physically. 180 Expert Consultations are estimated to take place, and they aim to provide support in the way of preparing proposals, identifying suitable partners in the EU, putting forward the researcher's or lab's expertise, through hands-on practical training and scheduled consultations/coaching for selected participants from each country.
24. **Anna SEIP**, Policy Officer, unit A.2, DG RTD, European Commission, presented an introduction to "New ERA for Research and Innovation – 20 actions for implementation". She explained the new vision and objectives for ERA and setting the policy framework, shared between the Pact for research and innovation in Europe, the ERA Policy Agenda, ERA Governance and ERA Monitoring. The 20 actions are set for the period 2022-2024, along four priority areas: Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge, Together for twin green and digital transition, and increasing society's participation in ERA, Amplifying access to research and innovation excellence across the union, Advancing concerted R&I investments and reforms; their objective is to contribute to the priority areas for joint actions defined in the Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe). From within these actions, the following were presented in more detail as examples: Action 3. Reform of the research assessment system, Action 10. Empower higher education institutions, Action 14. Bring science closer to society, Action 16. EU-wide access to excellence, Action 19. ERA monitoring mechanism. The ERA monitoring process was also presented. Based on the Council conclusions on the future governance of ERA, Member States have expressed their commitments to the actions. As the process of requesting EU Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholder organisations to commit the actions of the ERA Policy agenda has been finalised, most actions reached the critical mass of political support, which gives the green light to move the implementation phase forward.

25. **Sargis Hayotsyan**, chairman of the Science Committee, took the floor to present current developments in ERA Integration and international cooperation in Armenia. In January 2020 the Roadmap for integration into ERA was adopted by a ministerial decree defining 5 priorities. In the “aftermath” of COVID and the war in 2020, in 2021 the Government Action programme 2021-2026 was adopted and approved by the Parliament. The targets included in the Action programme for R&D were: infrastructures for competitive research; increase of competitive research personnel and involvement of young researchers; efficient legislation of the R&D field; efficient public funding and governance of R&D. To implement these targets an increase of budgetary funds towards R&I was approved. In order to boost participation in 2020-2022, 3 grant programmess were launched, similar to ERC. In order to increase the number of women in research in 2020 a special call was launched aimed at empowering women as research managers. To support modernisation of the research infrastructure a funding programme was developed, but the infrastructure still remains fragmented and thus the effectiveness of public funding was not satisfactory leaving room for further policy mechanisms. Measures to increase the attractivity of the research profession were developed with an increase of salaries, mobility programmes. At the end of the presentation an emphasis was put on the fact that Armenia is an associated country to Horizon Europe and that efforts were undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Armenia to increase participation in the programme.
26. **Aliona Onofrei**, Ministry of Education, and Research of the Republic of Moldova outlined the progress in implementing the Framework Conditions for Research & Innovation and integration into the European Research Area (ERA). At the beginning she recalled the legal and policy transformations undergone by the Republic of Moldova to reform the national R&I ecosystem. Measures were taken for raising the participation of public and business in research policy and in 2022, new types of projects were introduced. In order to close the gap between research and business new conditions were established - for technology transfer projects and innovation projects - to have a partnership with the private sector. Moldova’s participation in Horizon Europe was an important step in developing R&I, and several priority areas were established. Future plans for a New Strategy for Research and Innovation 2030 were put in place. The commitment of the Republic of Moldova to develop the R&I ecosystem was synergically driven towards the elaboration of the new National Programme for Research and Innovation for the years 2024-2027. On 9 March 2020, the Minister of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova requested the support of the Policy Support Facility (PSF) under Horizon 2020 in relation to three topics: the development and effective use of research infrastructure, review of the research funding system, and strengthening the links between research and business and industry. The stated expected outcome was related to the development of the R&I ecosystem, and to the increased participation in the Horizon Europe programme.
27. **Dr. Igor Taranov**, Director -General of the Directorate for Science and Innovations, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine presented the country’s challenges in R&I while facing the war. He emphasised that Ukraine suffered significant losses in staff, infrastructure, functioning scheme, and conditions to carry out scientific and research activities. Still, advancements were made. The Roadmap for Ukraine's Scientific and Innovative System Integration into the European Research Area (ERA-UA) was approved on February 10, 2021, with 6 priority areas. Ukraine reached 40% of the indicators in the roadmap. Likewise, the

Agreement between the European Union and European Atomic Energy Community and Ukraine on the participation of Ukraine in Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and the Research and Training Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (2021-2025) complementing Horizon Europe was signed in Kyiv, on 12 October, 2021. On July 15, 2021, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the Law on the Ratification of the Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union on the renewal of the Agreement between Ukraine and the European Community on Scientific and Technological Cooperation. On 9 June 2022 the Horizon Europe Association Agreement with Ukraine entered into force. Ukrainian organisations are currently implementing 104 projects within the Horizon 2020 Programme, and 19 in Horizon Europe. He mentioned that the National Plan on Open Science was approved by the Government on 8 October 2022 with 6 strategic tasks. On 30 March, Ukraine became the 39th full member of the COST Association. He concluded by emphasizing the effects of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

28. **Ilham Humbatov**, Director of Quality Assurance Department, Education Quality Assurance Agency under the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and NCP on ERC and COST, took the floor to share the experience from Azerbaijan. It was mentioned that an institutional reform was initiated, and the Ministry of Education was reorganised into the Ministry of Science and Education, which currently shares the mandate over science with the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. The main idea is to bring education and science together and optimise funding and governance of science. The Azerbaijan Science Foundation for research funding was established. Working group on increasing the citations of Azerbaijani research community and state programmes for student and doctoral mobility and establishment of double diplomas were put in place. It was noted that international on R&I cooperation was established with the EU and bilateral research projects are implemented with different EU and EaP countries. The need for more active work from the NCP network was emphasised, increased success on COST Action was noted.
29. **Georgia**. Georgia submitted its comments on ERA participation. It was stressed that some improvements were a further integration of Georgia into ERA is needed. Special attention should be given to improving open science policy in Georgia and the need for an EU input was emphasised. In conclusion the importance of the Horizon Office in Georgia was outlined. Furthermore, Georgia emphasised that reducing the gap between research and business was a priority, and that no major effort had been done to develop this relationship in the last 30 years. The need for additional EU support in Smart Specialisation and technology transfer was underlined.
30. **Manuel GONZALEZ EVANGELISTA**, Economic and Policy Analyst, B3 - Territorial Development Unit, DG JRC, European Commission. Joint Research Centre (JRC) cooperation activities with EaP Partner countries; support in Smart Specialisation (S3) Strategy. At the beginning of the presentation, the state of play of Smart Specialisation in Eastern Partnership countries was presented, as well as their progress within the S3 Framework. JRC is currently offering support to the EU Enlargement and Neighborhood Region in 4 streams: capacity building, targeted expert support, methodological support and guidance, as well as knowledge based cooperation. JRC aims to become a Knowledge Hub for EU Enlargement and Neighborhood Region offering region-wide analyses, reports per economy, guidebooks, massive online open course, and IT tools: the STI cooperation network. The presentation then continued with highlights from the newest report, focusing on the economic, innovative, scientific and

technological potential in the region, and concluded with the road JRC, Smart Specialisation and EaP have ahead, in terms of continuing the methodological support, the next perspectives for new EU candidate countries, Ukraine Recovery Plan, the implementation of S3 and into the national policies in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as engagement with more EaP Partner countries.

31. **Alessandro Fazio**, Head of Sector, unit I.4, JRC, European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC) presented the cooperation activities with EaP Partner countries in Technology Transfer. At the beginning he presented the JRC study on TT in the Eastern Partnership countries and EU Southern Neighborhood carried out in the period 2019 – 2020 by an Expert Group on Technology Transfer. The key objective was to inform policy makers and future programming experts by identifying innovation-related subjects and fields requiring EU support and assistance in the Eastern and Southern neighboring countries. From the study two reports were developed: a Country specific and a benchmarking report. The results of the study identified gaps in the ecosystems of EaP Partner countries such as inconsistent legislation inhibiting TT/innovation in some countries (e.g. Ukraine), reliance on (insufficient) public funding, low absorption capacity of R&I of industry and others. Also, some promising trends were identified: government adoption of measures supporting innovation/TT, growing spin-off and start-up ecosystems, positive trends for scientific publications and H index. At the end of the presentation Mr. Fazio highlighted some recommendations: the need to simplify legislations and ensure enforceability of IPR, incentives for researchers' entrepreneurship; maintain national investments in research and TTOs; Development of TT skills; Regional and international cooperation; Strengthening scientific collaboration in non-ICT related sciences.
32. **Armenia** expressed its intention to implement a strategy on Smart Specialisation, but as the implementation required multiple stakeholders from different fields, the process of implementation was put on hold. At present the focus is on the strategy on science. Technology transfer is a priority for the Government of Armenia. There is a project for a Technology Transfer Office.
33. **Dr. Rufat Efendiyev**, Head of Science Department of the Azerbaijan National Anti-Doping Agency and NCP on JRC, took the floor to share the experience from Azerbaijan. The importance of Smart Specialisation and Technology transfer for economic development and recovery in a post COVID-19 world was emphasised. Taking into account the importance of digital, sustainable, and environmental, especially climate change criteria for S3, it was considered appropriate to develop at national level strategies for innovative management of: Atmospheric emissions (CO₂); Caspian Sea; and Water Resources. In general, in smart specialisation the energy sector of Azerbaijan presents a great importance and further cooperation is needed.
34. Representatives of the Republic of Moldova emphasised the need to further implement Smart Specialisation and Technology Transfer as advancements were made to close the gap between industry and research. In the end the fact that research is not an expenditure for a country but an investment for smart growth has been highlighted.

The exchanges on 20 October brought forward the following key takeaways and operational conclusions:

1. Research and development is in the service of **peace and recovery in the post crisis context**. Starting from the COVID- 19 pandemic and looking at the devastating effects of the war in Ukraine science contributes to regional stability and resilience, and helps to find solutions to natural, technological as well as societal challenges while ensuring economic growth of the countries. The EU side reminded and encouraged a wider use of the support instruments available to help EaP participants to prepare and participate in Horizon Europe.
2. EaP Partner countries reaffirmed their commitment to work closely on implementing all commitments from **the December 2021 Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit**, while considering the new realities at the geopolitical level, and most notably the context of the Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine, which calls for adaptations in our joint work in research and innovation.
3. The EaP regional cooperation remains key and complementary to the bilateral cooperation between the EU and each EaP Partner country in order to reinforce alignment on key policies as well as a means of support in the path towards EU membership for three of the EaP Partners. **Inclusiveness** of the EaP is critical in maximising the potential of the Partner countries individually and collectively.
4. In their pursuit of a closer integration with the European Union all Eastern Partnership countries need to deepen their engagement in the new framework for the **European Research Area** aiming to contribute at building a stronger, quality driven and impactful **European research and innovation ecosystems** and the dedicated **multilateral dialogue in Marseille** on principles and values for international cooperation in research and innovation.
5. **Regional cooperation** needs to be strengthened at all levels from governmental to academia to business. Ideas are emerging on how to further work on this group in further informal set-ups (possible coordination structures per cluster/thematic area) both in order to build a regional cooperation as well as to create consortia to participate in Horizon Europe. Furthermore, the need to strengthen matchmaking for doing projects together was raised and may need to be addressed at a next Working Group/Panel meeting.
6. The EaP Partner countries recognised the importance to align all actors at **cross-government** level, to strongly embed research and innovation in overall economic and social policies in order to create strong R&D ecosystems and optimise the results.
7. Evidence was presented of increased national budgetary funding for R&I while bringing more companies, research institutions together into the shared knowledge and innovation as the drivers of **growth and prosperity**. Further increase would be most useful.

8. The EU continues with the methodological support in developing the **smart specialisation strategies (S3)** and hopes that the EaP Partner countries will soon advance in this process. As a next step the implementation of the S3 will have to be carefully designed and followed.
9. The EU presented the current state of play of EaP partners' participation in the Programme (142 participations already secured counting with 104 grant agreements under preparation) with more than 19 million EUR obtained from Horizon Europe. This is a reassuring start into the new Programme and promising in terms of reaching the target of 700 participations from EaP partners by the end of the Programme.
10. All EaP Partners took note of the new **Proposal Writing Camps** and **Expert Consultations** aiming to support researchers and innovators in all EaP Partner countries when preparing project proposals under Horizon Europe. A new training package will be launched very soon aiming to strengthen the enhanced participation of the EaP Partner countries in Horizon Europe (HE) by offering the possibility to train and inform potential applicants from the EaP countries on successful project proposals drafting and providing expert consultations on upcoming HE calls in particular under the Work Programme 2023-2024.
11. The EaP Partner countries acknowledged the achieved progress to structure the cooperation both at bilateral and regional levels for the creation of a **common knowledge and innovation space** between the EU and the Partner countries and agreed that the development should be fostered, using scientific evidence to create knowledge-based jobs and attract investors to innovative businesses in the EU and the neighborhood.
12. The effective participation of **civil societies** of Eastern Partnership and the EU is crucial in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy in a constructive dialogue with the EU and EaP decision-makers.
13. The EaP partners took note of the Republic of Moldova proposal to host next year's informal Working group meeting at expert level in Chişinău and the creation of an **informal group of researchers in the Eastern Partnership** to take stock of the information about accumulated experience, project ideas and evaluators.

On **21 October 2022** a visit to Georgia Innovation Technology Agency (GITA) was organised structured in several activities. The GITA Technology Park presented their programmes and actions implemented such as hardware StartUP, Infrastructure lab, Steam & ICT Education, Pilot Integrated Regional Development Programme 2020-2022 and Innovative competitions. The panel on "Academia-Business cooperation for synergies in the knowledge triangle - a view from Georgia" gathered business sector and academia representatives. The discussions focused in closing the gap between the business sector and academia, inter-sectorial cooperation links and the need for long term cooperation in research and development. Colleagues from the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency

(EISMEA) provided a contribution to an European Innovation Council (EIC) info event tailor made to the Georgian innovation ecosystems gathering small and medium enterprises and researchers. The last presentation at GITA covered the HE National Office of Georgia. Building on the highlights of the first day, the establishment of the office embodies the success of the R&I reforms undergone in Georgia. It brings together interested stakeholders like governmental bodies, NCP networks, universities, Research associations with the purpose to increase Georgia participation in Horizon Europe. The day was concluded with a visit to the Eliava Institute of Bacteriophages, Microbiology and Virology.