

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

European Framework for Science Diplomacy

Reflections on the strategic importance of science diplomacy and its benefits, from the ERIC Forum perspective

The ERIC Forum welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the European Commission's Call for Evidence on the development of a new **European Framework for Science Diplomacy**. European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERICs) are an essential element of the European Research Area (ERA), delivering world-class scientific services and enabling access to cutting-edge technologies across a wide spectrum of scientific domains, while ensuring European research and innovation autonomy and sovereignty.

As of October 2025, the ERIC Forum brings together 30 of the 32 established ERICs to strengthen coordination and enhance collaboration among European research infrastructures. As member state-based organisations established under EU law and enjoying legal personality, ERICs operate in close collaboration with their respective Ministries and delegations. Furthermore, while aligning with the European Commission's priorities, ERICs also provide valuable input, including by means of consultations and fora. Although formal diplomatic activity lies with Member States and formal actions within ERICs depend on their respective General Assemblies or Boards' approval, ERICs already play an active role in science diplomacy. By virtue of their pan-European nature, ERICs transcend national boundaries and nurture robust international cooperation by enabling extensive cross-border collaboration between researchers and scientists across nations. This facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices, strengthens innovation capacity and ultimately enhances Europe's strategic standing in the global scientific and diplomatic landscape.

In this context, the ERIC Forum acknowledges the **strategic relevance** of science diplomacy and its **benefits**, in which this board plays a significant amplification role. We recognize its importance in fostering international collaboration, strengthening Europe's competitiveness, and contributing to the consolidation of its strategic interests and technological sovereignty. Therefore, the ERIC Forum welcomes the idea of a Council recommendation on science diplomacy and strongly supports the need to establish common guidelines and instruments that will help actors at the EU and Member States level align more effectively.

Main challenges in developing a Science Diplomacy action at EU and national level

Developing a science diplomacy action at EU and national levels faces significant structural and political challenges. It will operate within a **complex landscape** where responsibilities for foreign affairs, research and innovation are spread across multiple levels of governance and involve many actors. This diversity brings expertise but requires coordination and fine-tune among Member States and EU institutions. This future framework further needs to promote mutual understanding, and create space for joint action at the European level while respecting national competences. Another challenge is **safeguarding open**

science and research integrity amid increasing security-driven constraints – maintaining protections against misuse or unwanted knowledge transfer without undermining academic freedom. The ERIC Forum can inform these discussions through its experience in building and operating cross-border research infrastructures, where coordination, trust, and shared standards are key to successful collaboration.

Maximising impact through effective stakeholders' coordination

Effective coordination among all stakeholders will require mechanisms that connect existing structures while allowing new forms of harmonisation where needed. These should be **flexible, multi-level, and organised** around thematic priorities, linking EU services, national authorities, and research actors in all relevant scientific domains. Thematic spaces could be supported by an overarching science diplomacy forum to ensure coherence across the system and foster knowledge sharing across domains. To be successful, coordination efforts should align with European Research Infrastructures and build on all relevant EU and global initiatives such as the European Research Area and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This would provide a solid foundation for collaboration, capitalising on networks already experienced in cross-border cooperation and helping translate Europe's ambitions for science diplomacy into tangible actions that advance both EU policy priorities and broader international objectives.

Key recommendations and missing elements

Stronger coordination requires **clear priorities** and leadership within a shared European framework. Among the recommendations in the report *European Framework for Science Diplomacy – Recommendations of the EU Science Diplomacy Working Groups*, the ERIC Forum highlights Recommendation 1 on maximising the potential of research infrastructures for science diplomacy (Action 1.7), Recommendation 3 on addressing global challenges and managing global goods (Actions 3.1 and 3.2), and Recommendation 7 (Action 7.1 and 7.3) on creating and connecting science diplomacy communities and developing and funding programmes for refugee scholars and researchers at risk. In light of their long-standing experience, ERICs can contribute to all three areas through their dual role as implementers and enablers – implementing and promoting cooperation through their infrastructures and networks and informing policy by providing scientific expertise and evidence for evidence-based action.

While these recommendations provide a strong foundation, several important aspects should be further considered in the Council Recommendation. First, Recommendation 1 (Action 1.7) should be broadened to include **all relevant European research infrastructures**, which are essential for implementing and enabling science diplomacy in the EU and beyond. Second, although the report recognises the pivotal role that RIs will play in implementing the framework, **dedicated funding and organisational support** from Member States will be crucial to enable their effective participation. RIs typically operate with constrained budgets, which limits both their impact and the breadth of activities they can undertake—even in areas where they could significantly strengthen Europe's science diplomacy outreach, visibility, and engagement. Ensuring appropriate support and resources is therefore essential to position RIs at the core

of the Framework's implementation. Third, we recommend that action 1.7 begin in the short to medium term, rather than medium to long term, given the strategic importance of research infrastructures for its implementation.

Moreover, recommendation 3 could more clearly emphasise the importance of promoting the CARE principles and avoiding scientific colonialism, thereby maximising benefits for local communities and aligning with both EC values and those of our research infrastructures. For Action 7.3, we propose that the action should, in cooperation with the Member States, promote the simplification of bureaucratic procedures affecting the mobility of refugee scholars and researchers at risk (e.g., visa processes), to remove legal and administrative barriers and ensure more effective implementation of the funding programmes.

In addition, the recommendations could more clearly emphasize **cross-Ministerial and cross-sectoral collaboration** (including non-state actors), as this would also benefit interdisciplinary endeavours, such as the One Health approach, which connects human, animal, and environmental health and support the implementation of the European strategy for the life sciences. In this topic, it is important to engage with existing initiatives, in many cases funded by the European Commission, which have important knowledge to contribute. Lastly, the recommendations and the future framework should provide greater clarity on how the proposed actions will be translated into **practical implementation** across the different actors involved.

Together, these elements would make the future framework more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the challenges of research and policy implementation. Building a coherent European approach to science diplomacy will require shared priorities, strong coordination, flexibility in the approach, and sustained commitment. Existing international collaboration can help to provide key input from colleagues on the global stage. ERICs and the ERIC Forum, as their collective voice, remain committed to supporting the development and future implementation of this framework by mobilising their operational experience, international networks, and scientific expertise and ensuring that science diplomacy continues to advance Europe's values, global partnerships, and socio-economic impact.