
1 Ten Years A-Talking! Reflecting on the Role 2 of the EERA Council from the Perspective of 3 National Educational Research Associations

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8 ABSTRACT Drawing on their personal experiences, the authors reflect on the relationship between
9 the European Educational Research Association (EERA) Council and the National Educational
10 Research Associations (NERAs). The article will argue that while much of the work undertaken by the
11 EERA Council is hugely valuable, at times it can be difficult to see a causal link between discussions
12 and decisions at this level and changes in governance and practice at the level of national associations.
13 Having said that, it is hoped that the article will give an idea of issues that emerged and challenges that
14 might yet need to be faced in the EERA Council. These included the impact of changes in governance
15 structures on the way EERA interacts with NERAs and other constituent groups. In addition, there has
16 also been an ongoing debate around the definition of *European* in the context of educational research
17 and the connected challenges of the identification and operationalisation of a core set of values to
18 underpin this endeavour. Finally, the article explores the manner in which EERA Council as a
19 representative body of national associations helped shape the processes whereby the association
20 interacted with a range of external partners.

21 Introduction

22 The authors of this article have collectively spent over a decade as members of the European
23 Educational Research Association (EERA) Council. Joe O'Hara was the Irish representative from
24 2008 to 2013 and Gunilla Holm has been the Finnish representative since 2009. The reasons for the
25 extended period of their respective presence on Council are both prosaic and instructive. Both
26 represent comparatively small though active associations that operate in national contexts and have
27 undergone significant changes over the past decade. Ireland and Finland have seen educational
28 funding models change, have witnessed – albeit in divergent ways – the impact of external
29 evaluative systems such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) on
30 perceptions of quality in education, and have been forced to explore alternatives to current ways of
31 structuring basic educational provision. As educational research associations, the Educational
32 Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) and the Finnish Educational Research Association (FERA)
33 have sought to reflect on and, where possible, influence these changes, with mixed results.

34 Against this background, membership of EERA became an interesting – and in theory at least
35 – useful conduit for bringing a broader European perspective to the issues being addressed
36 nationally. In practice, however, ongoing reductions in funding for educational research, along
37 with the difficulties of maintaining membership in a period of significant financial upheaval coupled
38 with greater demands on the time of educational professionals, have seen both associations rely on
39 the same individuals to represent them for extended periods. In the context of this article, the

40 comparative length of service on Council has given both authors a particular perspective on the
41 role of National Educational Research Associations (NERAs) in EERA, the relationship between
42 NERAs and Council and the manner in which this has evolved in recent years. It has also allowed
43 them to critique the operation of EERA Council from a position of genuine understanding, as their
44 presence at 15 Council meetings totalling approximately 200 hours of discussion has at the very
45 least allowed them come to a sense of how Council sees itself, if not necessarily of how the rest of
46 EERA sees Council. From the outset readers should note that this article seeks to give an
47 impressionistic overview of some key issues that arose in the course of the last 5-6 years in the life
48 of the EERA Council. It does not pretend, nor seek, to be comprehensive; indeed, other Council
49 members might have a completely different set of memories and priorities. The article will explore
50 the relationship between Council, networks and NERAs. It is hoped that it will also give an idea of
51 issues that emerged and challenges that might yet need to be faced in the EERA Council. Finally,
52 the authors clearly view EERA Council as being the collective body of National Educational
53 Research Associations, and discussions of Council structures, activities and challenges in the
54 following pages should be viewed in this light.

55 **The Structure of EERA**

56 EERA has 31 national or regional member associations. Each association has its own representative
57 on the EERA Council. Additional members on the Council are the president, secretary-general,
58 treasurer, network representatives and the Emerging Researchers' Group representative. The
59 research is organised into 31 networks, with an additional non-thematic group, the Emerging
60 Researchers' Group (ERG). The annual EERA conference, the European Conference on
61 Educational Research (ECER), is organised thematically around the networks. The ERG organises
62 a preconference for emerging researchers. EERA also has its own journal, the *European Educational*
63 *Research Journal*.

64 One of the more interesting challenges for any representative of an association attending
65 EERA Council for the first time is to work out what it is and how it operates. In theory it is simple;
66 the governance structure is explained as follows:

67 EERA is governed by the Council and the Executive Board. Council consists of the
68 representatives of the member associations and the co-opted council members – the Networks'
69 Representative on Council, the editor of EERJ and the Convenor of the Emerging Researchers'
70 Group. Since June 2010 Council has the power of the Annual Assembly.

71 The Executive Board consists of the President, the Treasurer and the Secretary General and shall
72 implement the Council resolutions and submit to the Council proposals concerning the
73 achievement of the association's purpose. (EERA, 2014)

74 The clarity provided here masks a degree of confusion around some key definitions. Take, for
75 example, the statement that 'Council consists of the representatives of the member associations' –
76 while in theory a comparatively straightforward observation, in practice it overlooks the reality
77 that there are a variety of different types of research associations represented – from what the
78 EERA website chooses to identify as 'General Educational Research Associations' (EERA, 2014), to
79 regional associations which represent different cultural and political viewpoints on provision within
80 national contexts, to tightly focused research associations focusing on one particular aspect of
81 educational provision. The practical result of this is that some countries are represented by multiple
82 associations, most being represented by one association and others being represented by
83 supranational organisations. While this multiplicity in representation types is not necessarily
84 problematic in theory, in practice it results in a situation where defining the 'association's purpose'
85 (EERA, 2014) can be a complex and at times contentious process. An additional complication is the
86 increasing size of Council. What began as group of 19 has now developed into a body where
87 upwards of 40 people can be present at each meeting (EERA, 2010, pp. 3-4).

88 To be fair, both Council and the wider association have recognised the difficulties posed by
89 this issue, and at the 2012 Annual General Assembly (AGA) a new set of criteria for membership
90 was agreed upon and entered into the Constitution (EERA, 2011). These criteria require, among
91 other things, that:

- 92 • Prospective members represent general educational research associations operating at a national
93 level;
- 94 • Where there is already representation at a national level, any new member seeks to create a
95 formal relationship with the national association which obliges them 'to work toward joint
96 membership under the umbrella of a national organisation for general educational research';
- 97 • The representative status of members of Council prior to 2012 remains unchanged.

98 The new requirements go some way to addressing the future needs of Council but there are still
99 significant legacy issues remaining. The differing representational levels and types of organisational
100 inputs lead to a range of often conflicting responses to emerging policy or structural decisions – and
101 some of the more pressing of these will be discussed later.

102 As the number of member associations is increasing another issue is emerging – namely, what
103 is meant by a *European* association? Should, for example, the member list of the Council of Europe
104 be used as tool for deciding what association is European or should the criterion be that the
105 country is geographically located in Europe? The authors would argue that it will become
106 necessary for EERA as a broad organisation and Council as a representative body to address this
107 issue as a matter of urgency. To date, and understandably, the argument as to European identity
108 has been one that has been dominated by geographic and technical criteria. While this mode of
109 definition has been useful, there are now broader questions that need to be addressed. For
110 example, can national associations from countries with autocratic or quasi-democratic political
111 cultures be accepted as members? And if not, how can EERA support independent educational
112 research in such countries? Does *European* stand for certain values like democracy, independence
113 and non-discrimination? Do the member associations have to stand for these values? We will return
114 to this issue at a later stage, addressing it in the context of particular challenges that emerged during
115 ECER 2013.

116 The sheer size of the Council meeting has also resulted in the emergence – by necessity – of a
117 range of ancillary structures, including the Executive, which, it could be argued, reduces the ability
118 of ordinary Council members to shape policy in the manner originally envisaged. This is not to
119 suggest that the Executive seeks to limit discussion, merely that by taking on a filtering function –
120 'submit to the Council proposals concerning the achievement of the association's purpose' – that it
121 guides the prioritisation of policy in a manner that did not exist prior to its creation. In reality the
122 creation of the Executive is probably the most significant change to have occurred during our time
123 on Council and to an extent its impact on the way NERAs engage with EERA is still evolving. In
124 the early part of our respective periods on Council a significant proportion of the discussion that
125 took place was procedural in nature, dealing with the minutiae of governance – much of which was
126 of little interest to many sitting around the table. While not wishing in any way to diminish the
127 importance of having strongly democratic and inclusive governance structure, the necessity of
128 micro-managing each decision and putting it to a vote of all members was hard to justify. It was
129 particularly problematic for new members who were often being asked to make decisions in areas
130 that required either specialist knowledge or a long history of engagement with EERA. The creation
131 of additional space at Council meetings has allowed NERAs to begin the process of considering
132 how EERA might shape discourse and discussion around key themes in educational research.
133 Arguably, neither the NERAs nor the Executive have found the mechanism to facilitate this in a
134 manner that will lead to significantly enhanced engagement at national levels; however, the
135 emergence of a range of focused discussions, presentations and other innovations has seen Council
136 at least begin the journey towards a new mode of operation in this area.

137 In addition to the way that Council structures its work, a second issue that has emerged in
138 recent years is the confirmation of English as the lingua franca of all EERA-related
139 communications. While there are many and varied practical reasons as to why this is so, it does
140 result in Council discussions favouring those who are confident expressing themselves in English.
141 At times this can lead to a situation where the articulation of complex national perspectives – one
142 of the original ideas of EERA (EERA, 2010, pp. 3-4) – does not happen to the extent that it might.
143 There have been attempts to address this, particularly through the introduction of formal inputs
144 from each national association on the context within which they work, but the broader issue of the
145 dominance of a particular language and associated worldview is one that remains problematic. The
146 authors would argue that this is an area that needs to be prioritised in future years. At a practical

147 level, consideration might be given to providing translation facilities for key discussions or,
148 accepting that this might not be feasible, to at least providing key policy documents in a range of
149 national languages. This suggestion might also have the added benefit of allowing NERAs to
150 disseminate key policy documents at a national level in a manner that would ensure greater
151 penetration across a range of educational communities. In addition to this, a more structured
152 approach to the way in which NERAs are encouraged to network might be considered. The
153 creation of regional and/or linguistically coherent sub-groups of NERAs might provide an
154 opportunity for pre- Council meeting discussions around key policy areas. Assuming that
155 discussions in these fora would be conducted in languages other than English, this structure might
156 allow for a more considered and indeed diverse range of views emerging and being presented at
157 Council.

158 By 2010 it became obvious that the status quo had become untenable, and following a period
159 of consultation the creation of the aforementioned Executive Board was proposed. Made up of the
160 president, treasurer and secretary-general, this body took an oversight role and was given the
161 power to streamline the decision-making process. In practice this resulted in many of the time-
162 consuming though important procedural issues being removed from the agenda of Council
163 meetings and, theoretically at least, freed up Council time for the discussion of broader strategic
164 issues. While this process was generally welcomed, there was a sense that something fundamental
165 had changed in terms of governance that went beyond the structural and procedural changes
166 outlined. Some of this may simply have been as a result of the need to become comfortable with
167 new structures and ways of working; however, there was also a sense that a highly consultative and
168 consensual body had perhaps chosen to prioritise efficiency over engagement. It should be
169 emphasised that this was not a universally held position, nor perhaps even a widely held one, but it
170 was raised at the time and for a period subsequently. While acknowledging this, the recent
171 successful management of Council business and the robust governance structure put in place have
172 perhaps vindicated the decision in the eyes of most.

173 **The Relationship between Networks and Council**

174 One of the more challenging areas for EERA and Council is the relationship between EERA and
175 ECER – and, by extension, between Council and networks. While there is a formal structure for
176 the inclusion of network issues, concerns and perspectives in all Council discussions through the
177 Office of Network Representative, at times there appears to be a disconnect between those on
178 Council and those in the networks. One possible reason for this might be the presence on Council
179 of representatives of associations who have little or no connection with networks. While many
180 Council members have been active in a number of networks, it is clear that some have only a
181 limited understanding of the role of the network in EERA. This has been recognised by Council
182 and there is an attempt at least to provide new members with an overview of the network
183 structure and how it impacts on the operation of EERA. Useful though this is, it cannot address the
184 issue of how the networks and Council actually interact.

185 Without seeming to over-dramatise the issue, this appears to us to be at the heart of the
186 debate as to the identity of EERA. For many, the dominant entity in EERA is their network, and
187 the most important structure linking them to networks is ECER rather than Council, Executive or,
188 indeed, their NERA. Individuals identify with their network in an EERA context and their network
189 organises their formal interaction – both personal and professional – at ECER. The governing
190 structure of EERA is somewhat distant in this way of viewing the organisation and the important
191 element remains the desire to interact with colleagues from a similar disciplinary background.
192 From a NERA perspective it is arguable that many network members have no real idea as to who
193 represents them on Council, and far less as to what this representation means in practice. Council
194 has been aware of this and a special delegate meeting was held in Berlin in March 2013 to address
195 this question. While there were a number of useful outcomes to this meeting there still remains at
196 the heart the question of how to link individuals with a disciplinary interest to a set of national and
197 sectoral organisations that meet a number of times a year to discuss issues of governance and,
198 when possible, of strategic interest.

199 The challenge for Council here is a substantial one. While there is an understanding that the
200 relationship between it and the networks needs to change to become more collaborative and
201 integrated, there is also a sensitivity to the enormous amount of work – both historic and ongoing
202 – that has been undertaken by networks over the years. While some national representatives on
203 Council might seek to be more directive – for example, in areas of network governance,
204 transparency and reporting structures – there is also an understanding that networks have grown
205 organically led by voluntary elected link convenors, have their own cultures and, for the most part,
206 serve their members in a fashion that adds to the quality and quantity of educational research being
207 undertaken in a wide range of disciplinary fields. In this context an attempt to impose greater
208 oversight might be seen as being counterproductive. Having said that, if EERA Council is to
209 continue to address issues in a coherent manner, greater oversight is perhaps inescapable.

210 **Speaking to Ourselves**

211 Perhaps the greatest impact of the decision to move to an Executive was to give more time at
212 Council meetings to explore issues beyond the procedural. While there were a number of
213 innovations introduced – including strategy discussions, thematic group work, etc. – from the
214 perspective of the creation of an understanding of educational research at a European level
215 arguably the most important was the decision to request a short presentation from each
216 representative on the state of educational research in their country. As is perhaps to be expected,
217 this process highlighted both commonalities and particularities; however, there were some
218 interesting trends that may inform future discussions at Council level.

219 At what might be considered the most prosaic although essential level, the presentations
220 threw up an almost universal set of organisational issues that impacted on all associations, from the
221 smallest to the largest. These included: the challenges of maintaining membership numbers in a
222 period of economic difficulty; the recruitment of new members from postgraduate students
223 undertaking research in education; the hosting of conferences – whether national or thematic – that
224 allowed researchers to engage in a meaningful dialogue with each other and the wider community;
225 the maintenance of the relevance of the organisation in the face of a changing education landscape;
226 and the provision of outlets for educational research that were not only systemically impactful but
227 also allowed for the diversity of this research to reach as wide an audience as possible. Different
228 associations chose to address these challenges in different ways – and here the comparative size and
229 wealth of the organisations clearly had an impact; however, it was both enlightening and reassuring
230 from the perspective of Council members to see echoes of their own struggles in the experience of
231 others.

232 This point of organisational size and the role it played in addressing the issues raised at a
233 procedural level was an interesting one. It became clear that one particular advantage offered by a
234 large membership base was the ability to easily organise members into sub-groups around relevant
235 thematic areas. These interest groups offered associations an opportunity to enhance the
236 disciplinary focus of particular sets of discussions while at the same time creating a larger shared
237 space where discrete discussions might be shared. As well as being interesting in an organisational
238 way there was also a sense that the experiences of these associations might offer some useful
239 pathways for further discussion for EERA as a whole as to how the association might deal with the
240 challenge – discussed earlier – of linking networks to Council and Council members in a more
241 meaningful manner. Unsurprisingly, no particular template emerged; however, the process of
242 engaging and developing a shared understanding of the challenges involved did enhance the
243 capacity of Council to examine the issue from an informed perspective – something that a body
244 such as Council should strive for at all times.

245 In addition to the organisational challenges facing member associations there were other,
246 perhaps more strategic, issues that impacted on large numbers, if not all members. One area of
247 concern to quite a number of the associations presenting was the emerging culture of the
248 measurement of the quality of educational research and the increasing tendency to introduce
249 criteria that were viewed as being contrary to traditional understandings of the role and function of
250 education in a given social context. For example, the elevation of economic relevance and practical
251 'usefulness' of research to the level of key criteria in the judging of educational quality was seen as

252 being particularly problematic in a number of national contexts. A discrete, although connected,
253 challenge was the increased use of quality proxies relating to publications and in particular the
254 emergence of private ranking bodies such as ISI Web of Knowledge and SCOPUS as key arbiters of
255 quality. This development had impacted on most if not all members to some extent and had a
256 significant impact on an increasing number of NERAs. The challenges posed by this movement
257 have been articulated in other spheres and the discussions at Council echoed many of the common
258 ones, including, but not limited to, the narrowing of publishing options, the prioritisation of certain
259 types of research over and above others, the disincentive to publish in formats other than journal
260 articles – and the particular impact that this might have in certain national contexts if the trend
261 were to become more pronounced – and the increasing dominance of the English language
262 medium in all of the measurement indices used.

263 The latter point was one that was of particular interest to a large number of member
264 associations and was one that had been raised in a number of different contexts in recent years. A
265 number of Council members explicitly highlighted the pressure to publish in English language
266 journals as being a particular challenge and emphasised the potential this had to narrow the range
267 and relevance of research being undertaken at a local, regional and national level. In practice it
268 appears that competence in English has become a gateway to both individual career progression
269 and judgements of institutional quality in a number of countries. This is viewed as being a
270 worrying development in a variety of contexts and one that has the potential to impact on both the
271 diversity of research being undertaken and the range of voices represented at a European level.
272 This process – as mentioned earlier – can be seen as being mirrored at Council level, with English
273 becoming solidified as the formal language of discussion and decision at meetings. In practice this
274 does offer native speakers something of an advantage in these settings and this is a theme that has
275 been raised at different times over recent years. It is noteworthy, though, that none of the current
276 or incoming office holders on Council are from a native English-speaking background, and this
277 may offer a way into a broader discussion of how EERA can represent a range of diverse
278 educational research traditions and cultures in a period where the drive towards homogeneity is
279 becoming more pronounced at both policy and publication level.

280 A final but significant challenge for virtually all associations presenting at Council is the
281 reduction in research funding that has been experienced in recent years. In some cases this is as a
282 result of scarcity of resources at a national level; in other cases it is due to a substantial reduction in
283 global amounts available to research in higher education. There was a perception that the social
284 sciences in general and education in particular suffered substantially more cuts than other academic
285 areas, and some evidence was alluded to. While it is possible to see a situation developing in future
286 years where these types of cuts might be reversed, the identification of a second strand of funding
287 reduction was considered to be of genuine concern in a range of associations' presentations.
288 Essentially this was seen as being a new approach to funding educational research, which sought to
289 link funding to specific measurable outcomes which were often seen as having a utilitarian focus.
290 While not necessarily a novel approach to funding – indeed, it is one that has dominated European
291 funding models since the 1990s – it was seen as being potentially problematic when applied across
292 the wide range of research areas in education. A further concern was the explicit link made in a
293 number of national contexts between the measurement culture emerging around educational
294 research, the status of that research and the capacity to access funds in order to continue research
295 across the whole range of educational subjects. The discussions that took place at Council around
296 this area were in depth and complex and to an extent can be seen as having a direct impact on what
297 was perhaps the most significant innovation of recent years - the decision by Council to lobby the
298 European Commission directly as part of a concerted campaign to influence the shape and function
299 of the Horizon 2020 programme. It is to this campaign that we will now turn, using it as an
300 exemplar of how the changes at Council provided EERA with an opportunity to change the way in
301 which it sought to engage with key stakeholders in European research.

302 **Speaking to Others**

303 There have been a number of attempts over recent years to re-position EERA in an increasingly
304 globalised policy and practice environment. The ongoing discussions with the European

305 Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) around issues of collaboration at
306 Special Interest Group (SIG)/network level as well as at governance level are a good example of
307 this. These conversations have ebbed and flowed with changes in strategic imperatives and, indeed,
308 personnel on both sides, impacting on them to a greater or lesser extent. Much the same could be
309 said around EERA's interaction with the World Educational Research Association (WERA).
310 Ignoring for a moment the wider discussion around the function and need for an organisation such
311 as WERA, the commitment of EERA to bring a diverse perspective to global discussions on
312 educational research and, as importantly, to facilitate other viewpoints through its strategic support
313 of different national and regional associations in WERA is important. Membership of WERA also
314 provided NERAs with an opportunity to examine their own commitment to engagement beyond
315 their national borders. At a practical level this saw some NERAs view EERA as a collective body
316 that could represent them at a 'world' level, which resulted in them choosing not to join WERA as
317 individual associations. For this, group discussions around WERA took on an additional
318 importance as they provided NERAs with an opportunity to bring a collective European voice to
319 the world stage.

320 Important though the above issues were and continue to be, arguably the campaign to
321 address what were perceived as being significant deficiencies in the conceptualisation, structure and
322 implementation of the Horizon 2020 programme from the perspective of social science research in
323 general and educational research in particular marked a significant change in EERA's engagement
324 with the wider research community. While it would be untrue to suggest that the association had
325 failed to engage with researchers beyond education or that it was silent when changes in how
326 educational research was funded were proposed at national and European level, this particular
327 campaign around Horizon 2020 saw a qualitative change occur in the type and range of
328 engagement. At the heart of the engagement was the decision by EERA Council to work in
329 partnership with other interested research organisations in the general social science space and
330 beyond under the umbrella of the European Alliance of Social Science and Humanities (EASSH).
331 This ad hoc body sought to marshal the substantial community of social science and humanities
332 researchers in Europe to campaign against the explicit downgrading of this branch of research in
333 the Horizon 2020 programme. Initially focusing on the gathering of signatures through an e-
334 petition, the campaign sought to influence, at a political as well as policy level, decision makers in
335 Europe.

336 Targeting the structure of Horizon 2020, it proposed the creation of a dedicated **SOCIAL**
337 **SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES** (SSH) strand and the allocation of substantial funding in this area.
338 In parallel to this was a series of bilateral communications with the Commissioner, the
339 Commission and national governments. Engagement at the national level was channelled through
340 national associations that sought to bring pressure to bear where appropriate and relevant. Council
341 also worked with networks to shape this agenda and to provide alternative routes for influencing
342 policy makers at a national and transnational level. While ultimately unsuccessful, the process did
343 see EERA move into an advocacy role in a way that marked something of a transition from the
344 past. The long-term impact of this decision may be difficult to judge at this juncture but the
345 continued engagement with both funding bodies and the EASSH appears to be significant. The
346 publication of 'EERA's Agenda for Horizon 2020' in September 2013 (EERA, 2013) not only
347 provides a summary of the position of EERA in relation to Horizon but also articulates in a very
348 concise fashion a set of principles around which to further engage with external agencies when
349 addressing issues such as this in the future.

350 While much of what has been outlined above appears to be relatively uncontroversial, the
351 decision to engage in a process of lobbying and engagement at a political level was seen as being
352 problematic by a significant number of member associations. This was not necessarily due to a
353 disagreement with the ends being sought but rather was a result of long-standing organisational,
354 and at times cultural, understandings as to what is appropriate activity for a research association.
355 For some members of EERA Council, researchers should engage with research and other
356 researchers and stay away from political entanglements. For others, the requirement to engage at a
357 political level is both a core part of their self-definition as educators as well as a necessity in a
358 changing research environment. Discussions around these points enlivened Council meetings for
359 the period leading up to and during the campaign, and while the decisions made clearly came down
360 on one side of the argument vis-à-vis the other, the underpinning tensions remained, and could

361 perhaps be seen emerging in a pointed disagreement around political engagement that occurred at
362 the Istanbul Conference and which will be addressed below.

363 **Challenging Conversations**

364 One of the most impressive aspects of any analysis of EERA is the longevity and flexibility of the
365 association. There have of course been challenges, but it is worth noting that from the perspective
366 of those working on Council at least, these challenges have been addressed in a collegial and
367 positive manner. While acknowledging this, there are a number of issues that could prove
368 problematic in future years that both Council and the broader EERA community might wish to
369 address. Some of these are obvious, and have been referenced in this short review. Issues such as
370 the size and make-up of Council, the relationship between Council, networks and associations, the
371 ever-changing nature of educational research and the external pressures seeking to mould research
372 to particular agendas are obvious. There are other, less obvious challenges, and it is to one of these
373 that we will turn by way of conclusion.

374 In the course of the 2013 European Conference on Educational Research in Istanbul delegates
375 were faced with a situation of political instability and street protest. Some delegates were caught up
376 in the protests as a result of the location of their hotels, while most attended the conference and did
377 not see much of the protests. There was, however, quite a fractious debate at the Council meeting
378 held in the immediate aftermath of the conference which in essence sought to explore the extent to
379 which it was appropriate for an organisation such as EERA to move beyond educational research to
380 a direct engagement with the political and social realities facing members and member
381 associations. For many at this meeting this issue was seen as being a defining one and was seen as
382 raising the fundamental question as to the function and purpose of EERA. A number of delegates
383 felt it was impossible to engage with educational research in a vacuum, arguing that it was
384 fundamentally a political process, whether this was acknowledged or not. This comes to the
385 forefront especially when EERA brings ECER, with thousands of participants and thereby also
386 economic contributions, to a place where, for example, freedom of expression is suppressed. In this
387 context the idea of acting – to quote one of the delegates – as a quasi- ‘Olympic committee claiming
388 that we just do education and that education has nothing to do with politics’ was considered to be
389 an untenable position. Drawing from their own history of social and political liberalism in the area
390 of free speech, Council members argued strongly for the moral imperative underpinning
391 educational research and **suggesting SUGGESTED** that any attempt to remove EERA from this
392 space would be a betrayal of a core function of education in any society.

393 Arguing equally as forcefully from the opposing position, members of a number of
394 associations warned of the danger of EERA involving itself in internal political and cultural
395 struggles which, almost by definition, were complex, contested and controversial. This position, far
396 from suggesting that there was no moral imperative underpinning educational research, indicated
397 that there were a number of important issues that needed to be addressed and suggested that in
398 addition to the already identified area of free speech, the necessity to respect cultural and political
399 diversity were key elements of any functioning pan-European organisation. One obvious
400 undercurrent in the discussion as it progressed was the danger of straying into the territory of
401 cultural imperialism.

402 Given the limitations placed on the discussion by the Council format, the conversation ended
403 with a compromise decision to allow the president to frame a response which would go some way
404 to addressing the issue without making a definitive judgment. While useful procedurally, it did not
405 really address the core issues raised, and to an extent they remain unexplored in any real sense. We
406 would argue that in coming months and years EERA may have to examine in a structured, honest
407 and open manner the core values underpinning the organisation. While the issue of political
408 engagement in a time of social conflict was the one that initiated the discussion in Istanbul it is
409 arguable that other situations, and here the decision to engage in political lobbying around Horizon
410 2020 comes to the fore again, will force the association to explore who it is and what it stands for. A
411 review of the Constitution of EERA provides many interesting insights. While there is a statement
412 relating to charitable status, an acknowledgement of the German tax code and an outline of the
413 rights and responsibilities of members, there is no mention of the values underpinning the

414 association. This is not to be critical of EERA. The Constitution as designed met the needs for an
415 association which was seeking to streamline its procedures in a way that would allow it to face the
416 challenges posed by a rapidly expanding membership and a changeable financial context. The real
417 issue now, however, is to decide whether the association needs to move beyond issues related to
418 procedures and governance to ones of values, principles and engagement in a formal sense.

419 **Conclusion**

420 Among the challenges facing EERA in coming years, the issue of engagement may be one of the
421 more compelling, or it may fade as a priority as other problems become more pressing. To an
422 extent, all a review such as this can do is offer a snapshot of where EERA is now from the
423 perspective of national associations and suggest areas where attention might be needed in future
424 years. In either event, the necessity to consider what EERA is for as it faces its second 20 years will
425 be an ever-present reality but one, we are sure, EERA will address with sensitivity, consideration
426 and a few good dinners!

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