

From the *Association for the Promotion* to the *Friends of ERA*

A brief history of the association

Before the establishment of the Academy of European Law

In the early 1970s, the oil and currency crises had brought the development of an integrated common market of the initially six member states of the European Economic Community, since 1973 expanded by the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, to a temporary standstill. The Single European Act, adopted in 1986 to overcome the so-called Euro-sclerosis, for the first time granted the Community, now grown to twelve member states, substantial extensions of its competences. On this basis, the European Commission under Jacques Delors launched a comprehensive legislative programme to complete the internal market by the end of 1992, which for the first time made legal practitioners in all Member States aware of the growing relevance of Community law for their work. The Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992, further expanded legislative powers of the Union and made clear that ever-increasing integration through legislation would continue and be deepened also after 1992.

Against this background, calls for a more effective and uniform application and enforcement of Community law in the member states were repeatedly heard in the European Parliament, which was directly elected for the first time in 1979. As early as 1990, the Parliament called on the Commission to promote the establishment of a European training centre for lawyers. In response to these calls, a working group of the *Gesellschaft für Rechtspolitik* (Society for Legal Policy), initiated by the then Minister of Justice of Rhineland-Palatinate, *Peter Caesar*, and MEPs *Horst Langes* and *Willi Rothley*, drew up proposals for a European Law Academy to be established in Trier. The conclusions of the group were inspired by *Peter-Christian Müller-Graff*, a European law scholar from the university of Trier.

In 1991, the European Parliament supported these proposals by a large majority in a report drafted by Dutch MEP *James Janssen van Raay*. With the participation of renowned experts in European law, including the President of the European Court of Justice, *Ole Due*, and other members of the Court, an *Association for the promotion of a European Law Academy* was founded on 2 November 1990 and entered in the register of associations at the *Amtsgericht* (local court) of Trier on 5 February 1991. Peter Caesar became the first chairman of the board, with Horst Langes and Willi Rothley as additional board members. The purpose of the association was to prepare for the establishment of the Academy of European Law (as it was then called) and to gain supporters from among all ‘*persons, institutions and bodies involved in Community law*’. Among the illustrious members of the founding period were – besides Ole Due – further members of the European Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance such as its President José Luís da Cruz Vilaça, David Edward, Ulrich Everling, Heinrich Kirschner, Carl-Otto Lenz, José Carlos de Carvalho Moitinho de Almeida or Manfred Zuleeg; then members of the European Parliament such as James Janssen van Raay or Manuel Medina Ortega; finally Dutch Minister of Justice Ernst Hirsch Ballin or German Federal Ministers Klaus Kinkel and Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger.

When the Academy of European Law Trier (ERA) was formally established as a non-profit public foundation on 22 June 1992, the association was one of four founding patrons alongside the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and the city of Trier. Until that point, the association had also assumed the tasks of the foundation to be established, in accordance with its statutes, in particular the sponsorship of all public events held in the run-up to the Academy's establishment in 1991 and 1992. First and foremost among these was the ceremonial opening of the Academy on 8 and 9 November 1991, for which more than 200 participants from all member states and the then accession countries Austria, Finland and Sweden came to Trier – three months before the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. This was followed by specialist conferences on topics that are still relevant today, such as asylum and immigration law, and seminars on the fundamentals of European law for members of the judiciaries of the new German states. Once the Academy was established in June 1992, the organisation of events was transferred to ERA.

Reorientation and projects from 1992 onwards

Once its original purpose had been achieved with the establishment of ERA, the association continued to exist and, as a member of ERA's Governing Board, actively participated in the development of ERA. In 1996, the association's third general meeting adopted a first amendment to the statutes with an adapted purpose. Since then, the association's name has been changed to *Verein zur Förderung der Europäischen Rechtsakademie Trier eV* (*Association for the Promotion of the Academy of European Law Trier*); the statutes now stated the purpose as the 'promotion' of the ERA and, more specifically, the support of the ERA Foundation in attracting 'member states of the European Union and other bodies and individuals to participate'. The association was also to promote the Academy's programme work, 'in particular through the provision of financial and material resources'.

At the same time, the association replaced its previous board, which was made up of active politicians, with *Peter Schmidhuber*, former European Union Budget Commissioner and now a member of the Executive Board of the Deutsche Bundesbank, as Chairman, *Alain Lamassoure*, then French Budget Minister, and *Lydie Wurth-Polfer*, Mayor of Luxembourg. This board was re-elected in 1999, 2003 and 2004. In addition, the director of the ERA became an *ex officio* member of the board. At the beginning of 2000, Peter Schmidhuber left the Bundesbank but continued to lead the association until 2009 and provided important impetus for its further development.

Membership fees, investment interest and occasional donations increased the association's assets to DM69,267 by 30 September 1999. The fourth general meeting in October 1999 therefore discussed new proposals for future association activities. On the one hand, the members expressed their support for the idea (which was never implemented) of an *annual lecture* in Brussels or Trier, at which a prominent guest speaker would speak on an outstanding topic relating to European law or European politics. On the other hand, the meeting decided to prepare for the publication of a *quarterly journal on European law*, for which the association was to provide start-up funding of DM30,000. Under the new director of the ERA, *Wolfgang Heusel* (2000-2020), this project developed into the *ERA Forum* journal, still published by ERA today. It first appeared in spring 2000 and was largely financed by the Association of the Friends until 2007 and distributed free of charge to its members. Since 2007, ERA Forum has been published by the publisher *Springer* and is now widely read online around the world. Members of the Friends' Association have since been offered a significantly reduced subscription price.

In 2006/2007, the association sponsored the purchase of a work of art for the first time. Since moving into its own conference centre in 1998, ERA had regularly organised exhibitions of contemporary artists on its premises. In summer 2006, following a major exhibition of works by the Italian sculptor *Giovanni de Angelis* (Ischia), the opportunity arose to acquire one of his sculptures, the so-called *Big Leaf* (*La Grande Foglia*), created from Carrara marble. As ERA itself did not have the necessary funds, the board and then the general meeting agreed to the ERA director's proposal to finance the artwork with a grant from the Friends of ERA Association. The Big Leaf was initially installed in the ERA courtyard and later in the foyer.

In 2007, *Jettie Van Caenegem*, then Director General of the Belgian Foundation Against Cancer and former Chair of the European Association of In-House Lawyers, was elected as an additional member of the board, replacing Lydie Polfer. Peter Schmidhuber did not stand for re-election as chairman in 2009 and the general meeting elected the outgoing MEP *Manuel Medina Ortega* as his successor. When Manuel Medina Ortega stepped down as chair in 2015, Jettie Van Caenegem took over the position, which she still holds today. Medina Ortega and Alain Lamassoure remained on the board until 2021.

After membership numbers remained largely stable until 2007, the board and members decided in 2007 to take measures to 'revive' the association (Schmidhuber). Increased advertising at ERA events and the introduction of a page on the ERA website accessible only to association members led to a gradual increase. The new sub-site gave members free access to a membership directory with contact details and to the online documentation of all ERA events. As funding for the ERA Forum expired at the end of 2006, the 7th General Meeting in 2007 decided on four new areas of activity for the association: *Support for the ERA scholarship programme* (see below); *increasing ERA's endowment capital*; *expanding ERA's programme offerings*; and *promoting relations between association members*. The concept of a community of like-minded 'Friends of the ERA' became increasingly important for the association, which wished to offer them a space for networking as is commonplace for Anglo-Saxon-style alumni associations. The '*promotion of contacts between the members of the association*' (as again stipulated in a resolution of the 2011 general meeting) has since developed into one of the central purposes of the association's work. The launch of its own LinkedIn group in 2014 also served this purpose.

The additional field of activity launched by the association's board for ERA's capital procurement had the following background: Although ERA's management succeeded in winning all EU member states as patrons between 2000 and 2019, the foundation's capital did not increase significantly with individual co-donations of only €50,000. On the other hand, between 2007 and 2011, ERA was able to significantly expand its conference centre and finance most of the expansion work and the subsequent increase in its workforce through public subsidies. However, it hoped to raise private funds to expand its conference programme. Therefore, in 2009, 2011, and repeatedly until 2021, the association decided to campaign for an increase in ERA's endowment capital and to raise funds for the expansion of ERA's programme, or at least to support the use of professional fundraising. A special 'jubilee fund' was even set up in 2012 to mark ERA's 20th anniversary in order to raise such funds. In fact, the association's efforts did not result in any contributions to the ERA's endowment capital at any time, and only limited donations were made to the jubilee fund, which were used to support individual ERA activities.

Occasionally, the association also followed suggestions from its chair to hold its own public events alongside those of ERA. In 2009, for example, it organised a panel discussion in Munich following the 8th general meeting on the topic of *The EU between Nice and Lisbon* in honour of its outgoing chairman Peter Schmidhuber. The following year, in 2010, at the suggestion of his successor Manuel Medina Ortega, a conference was held in Barcelona on the topic of *Intellectual Property and the Information Society in the EU*.

In October 2009, following the European Parliament elections, the association even organised a reception in the Parliament building in Brussels in cooperation with MEPs *Klaus-Heiner Lehne* and *Diana Wallis* introducing itself and ERA to the newly elected members of Parliament.

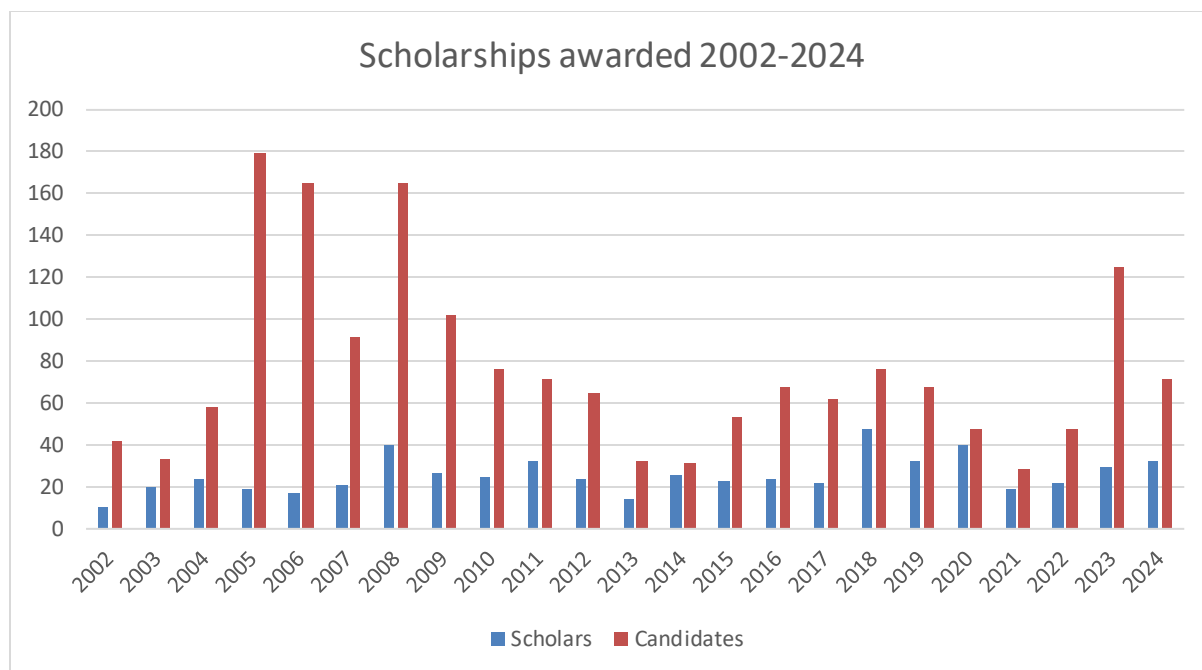
Special funding project: Peter Caesar Scholarships

The idea of a scholarship programme to promote the participation of law practitioners from the EU accession countries of Central and Eastern Europe was first launched by Peter Schmidhuber in autumn 2000. The proposal was first implemented by the ERA management in 2002 on the occasion of the Academy's tenth anniversary and continued in the following years as the '*Peter Caesar Programme*' in memory of the late founding chairman of the Friends Association, who had died in 1999. Until 2006, the programme was financed exclusively by third-party donations, mainly from regional business, and by funds from the ERA (in 2006, €12,500 from donations and €3,765 from ERA funds). After funding for the journal project expired in 2006, the association contributed to covering the programme costs for the first time in 2007 and bore the majority of these from 2008 onwards. Among the other sponsors, the Deutsche Bundesbank is particularly noteworthy, having made substantial donations from 2010 to 2018 and funded a total of twelve scholarships for participation in banking law conferences in 2017 and 2018. Similar targeted donations were made by the Zonta Club Trier in 2010 and 2012 (for female scholarship holders) and the Sebastian Cobler Foundation in 2017 (two scholarships for human rights seminars). Since 2020, the programme has been financed solely by the association.

The scholarship programme was never actively promoted by the association or by ERA, but was in high demand from the outset. In addition to demonstrating a qualified interest in the desired seminar topic, applicants were therefore required to demonstrate financial need in order to be awarded a scholarship. The average scholarship costs were usually around €1,000, with scholarship recipients generally expected to contribute to the costs of their participation.

Until 2012, scholarships were only awarded to applicants from EU member states that had joined since 2004 and from candidate countries or third countries. From 2013 onwards, needy applicants from the 'old' member states have also been eligible. Since 2022, the scholarships have focused on Ukrainians and legal practitioners from the Western Balkan states.

The number of participants in the scholarship programme has developed as follows:



Most scholarships (48) were awarded in 2018; the highest number of applications (179) was received in 2005.

Networking: The development of chapter activities

From the perspective of networking and strengthening ties between members, Peter Schmidhuber pointed out as early as 2007 that the considerable geographical and professional disparity among members in different countries made joint activities and meetings difficult. He therefore proposed the establishment of national '*chapters*' in each capital, which could organise annual meetings. Such meetings, starting in Brussels, could well be of a more social nature and could also be linked to ERA events on occasion.

The idea initially came to nothing, but was taken up again by the 2013 general meeting and led to first meetings in Brussels and in Luxembourg in 2014. At the suggestion of the 2015 general meeting, further chapter activities took place in Spain, Germany and Poland in 2016, with increasing attention being paid to avoiding competition with ERA events. Further national chapters with their own activities subsequently emerged in Portugal (2019), Italy (2019) and the United Kingdom (2022).

The individual chapters developed very differently. The Luxembourg chapter remained the most active, organising a total of 16 meetings since 2014 and also participating in three meetings of the German chapter. The activities of the Belgian chapter came to an end after the fourth Brussels meeting in 2016. In Poland, there was only one meeting in 2016. The UK chapter, which was only established in 2022, has already organised four online debates on mostly Brexit-related topics.

The events organised by the various chapters vary considerably in terms of type and subject matter. On the one hand, they often take the form of social gatherings combined with a tour and a good meal; on the other hand, they deal with challenging European legal or political issues with the participation of one or more guest speakers. Since the Covid pandemic, such discussion events have increasingly been offered online.

In 2017, the general meeting amended the statutes to create a formal basis for the establishment of national or regional chapters. The *Young Friends of ERA* group, which was formed in 2022, can also be regarded as a chapter of its own kind, providing special access to the association for legal practitioners with up to five years of professional experience, provided they were participants in an ERA event, in particular events aimed at young lawyers, scholarship holders or interns of the ERA. These young members pay a reduced minimum membership fee of only €10.

In 2022, the association conducted surveys in seven countries among its members and regular ERA participants about their wishes and expectations regarding existing and future activities, particularly those of existing or proposed national chapters (Austria, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom). The evaluation and implementation of the feedback is still ongoing.

Overview of the activities of the individual chapters

Belgium	4 events 2014-2016
Germany	9 events 2016-2025, of which 2 online
Italy	3 events 2019-2025
Luxembourg	16 events 2014-2024
Poland	1 event 2016
Portugal	6 events 2018-2025, of which 2 online
Spain	4 events 2016-2024, of which 1 online
United Kingdom	4 events 2022-2024, all online
Young Friends	2 events online, 2023-2024

New projects from 2020 onwards

In December 2020, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the association invited its members to an online photo exhibition entitled *ERARound the world*, in which ERA employees presented selected photographs that were originally intended to be shown as part of a traditional exhibition in Trier. Also in 2020, the creator of the *Big Leaf*, Giovanni de Angelis, and the ERA management agreed to create another work of art for the ERA courtyard. This work – *Philosophers in Dialogue* – represents three ancient thinkers and lawyers – Hypatia of Alexandria, Ausonius and Justinian – who may still be relevant to ERA and its work today. The project was presented to the association's members in another online meeting in 2021, and the bronze sculpture was inaugurated in the summer of 2022. In addition to private donations amounting to €12,000, the association covered €10,000 of the costs.

In 2019, with the support of the European Commission, ERA organised a competition for young lawyers in private practice for the first time. Soon after the idea arose of awarding a prize to the winners of this Young Lawyers Contest donated by the association. Since 2022, the association has been awarding cash prizes totalling €3,000 to the first and second-placed teams.

On 1 January 2021, *Jean-Philippe Rageade* succeeded Wolfgang Heusel as Director of ERA and thus as an *ex officio* member of the association's board. In October 2021, the 15th general meeting for the first time elected three further board members alongside chairwoman Jettie

Van Caenegem: *Wolfgang Heusel*, professor *Vanessa Knapp OBE*, and Estonian Supreme Court judge *Julia Laffranque*.

At the suggestion of the new ERA management and the new board, the 2023 general meeting decided to make ERA activities for the Western Balkan countries and for Ukraine, since 2022 under attack from Russia, a special focus of the association's support. Ukrainian applicants have been given preferential consideration under the scholarship programme since 2022. In addition, the association funded study visits to the ERA for judicial and legal trainers from these countries in 2023 and 2025.

Finally, as part of the ERA's 2022 anniversary congress, the association covered the costs of a guest lecture by Professor Christine Landfried, Hamburg, on the topic of '*A federal future for the European Union?*'.

Finances

In the first few years after ERA was established, the association's activities were limited to collecting modest donations which it allocated to ERA without any special conditions. Membership fees were not levied at first. At the time of the amendment to the statutes in 1996, the association's assets amounted to only DM3,810. The number of members at that time was 65. By October 1999, the number of members had increased to 174.

The 1996 statutes first introduced the principle of collecting membership fees on the basis of a fee schedule to be adopted by the board. The fee schedule adopted in the same year set an annual fee of DM100 for individuals and of DM500 for corporate members and provided for waiving the fees 'for special reasons'; in practice, this exception was usually applied when there was a special (political) interest in retaining the member concerned. In 1999, 126 of 174 members were required to pay membership fees.

Following the introduction of the Euro in 2002, the board adjusted the membership fees to €75 for individuals and €500 for corporate members as of 1 January 2004. From 2008 onwards, the board increased the contribution for newly joining corporate members to €1,000. At the same time, the contribution for young members under the age of 30 was reduced to €50. These regulations were also retained in the last amendment to the Regulation on membership contributions in 2018.

In order to make membership of the association more attractive, the Executive Board introduced a temporary membership fee waiver for participants in ERA events for a specified trial period in 2014. The concept was subsequently extended to users of the ERA's online services and remains in place today. No data on the impact of this change is available.

To mark the ERA's twentieth anniversary in 2012, the association set up a *Jubilee Fund* as a special fundraising tool to collect donations for three specific purposes: to *expand the scholarship programme*; to *promote ERA events at national or local level* whose direct costs cannot be covered elsewhere; and to *fund internships for national trainers* at ERA.

As a result, the jubilee fund raised money through targeted advertising campaigns, donations from speakers' fees and occasional fundraising dinners, such as at the 2012 anniversary congress with Competition Commissioner Joaquín Almunia in Trier or in 2013 on the occasion

of the 7th European Jurists' Forum in Barcelona. The amount of donations, which declined over the years, amounted to

€13,700 in 2012 (50 donations from law firms and individuals).

€13.871 in 2013

€11.810 in 2014

€8.920 in 2015 and

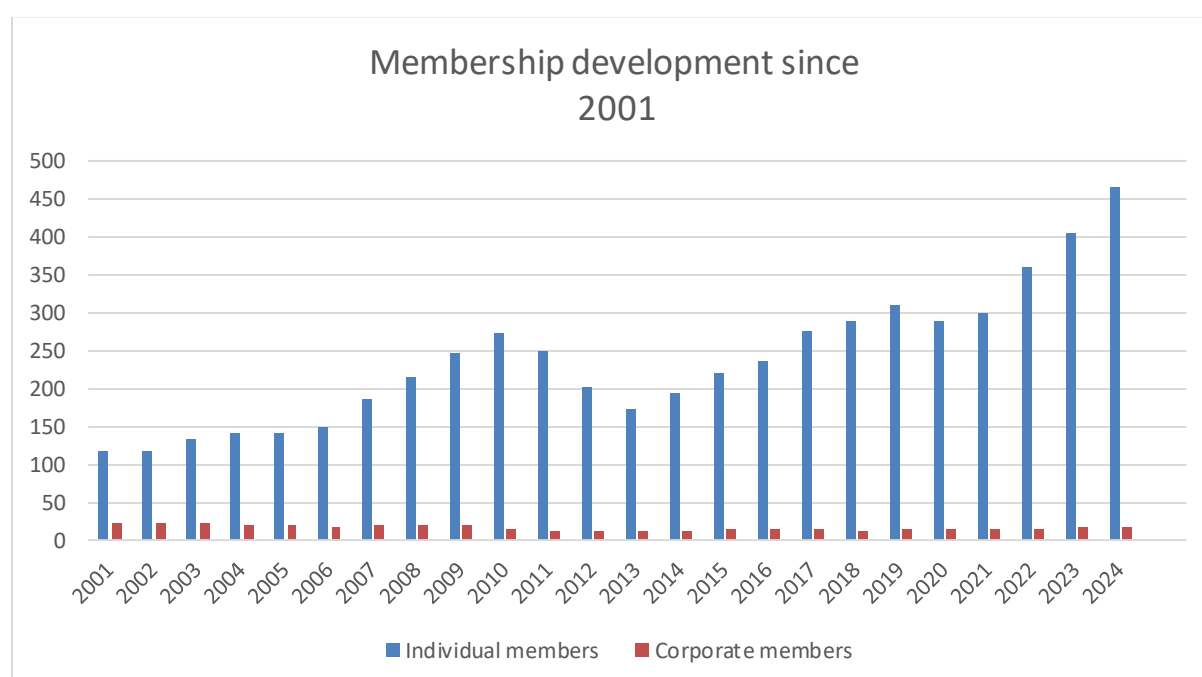
€2.775 in 2016.

The art auction held in the anniversary year 2017 ultimately generated a net income of €7,297 in favour of the jubilee fund. The funds collected primarily benefited the ERA scholarship programme; only once (in 2014) were they used to cover the costs of simultaneous interpreting at a seminar for Lithuanian legal practitioners in Vilnius. At no time were donations to the anniversary fund used to finance an internship at ERA.

Following the example of the jubilee fund, now faded into the background, the 15th general meeting in 2023 decided to establish a Fund for the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova (*Western Balkans Fund*). The agreed objectives were familiar – a *scholarship programme* for legal practitioners from the countries mentioned; the *financing of study visits* to ERA for trainers from the judiciary and the legal profession; and the *promotion of ERA events* in these countries. In fact, regardless of the funds collected for the Western Balkans Fund, the association has funded several projects from all three objectives since 2023.

Membership development

Membership numbers suffered an initial slump, particularly among corporate members, following the introduction of compulsory membership fees in 1996. Nevertheless, sustained consolidation at a low level was achieved thereafter, with the number of corporate members peaking at 23 in 2003, a level that has not been reached again since. The number of individual members increased significantly after advertising measures among ERA participants from 2007 onwards, but then declined again and only began to rise steadily from 2013 onwards. The highest level of individual members was reached in 2024 with 467, of which 47 were *Young Friends*.



Boards of the Association since its establishment

1990-1996	Minister Peter Caesar (chair) Horst Langes MEP, Willi Rothley MEP
1996-2007	Peter Schmidhuber, Member of the Board of <i>Deutsche Bundesbank</i> (chair) Alain Lamassoure, Budget minister of the French Republic Lydie Wurth-Polfer, Mayor of the City of Luxembourg
2007-2009	Peter Schmidhuber (chair) Alain Lamassoure MEP Jettie Van Caenegem, Director General of the Belgian Foundation against Cancer
2009-2015	Manuel Medina Ortega MEP (chair) Alain Lamassoure MEP Jettie Van Caenegem
2015-2021	Jettie Van Caenegem (chair) Alain Lamassoure MEP Manuel Medina Ortega
2021-today	Jettie Van Caenegem (chair) Wolfgang Heusel, Vanessa Knapp, Julia Laffranque

Director of ERA (as of 1996 *ex officio* member of the Board)

1992-1999	Peter Caesar (Deputy Director Ernst Merz)
2000-2020	Wolfgang Heusel
Since 2021	Jean-Philippe Rageade

General meetings

1990	2.11.	Founding meeting (Trier)
1992	2.6.	2 nd General meeting (Trier)
1996	2.2.	3 rd General meeting (Trier)
1999	29.10.	4 th General meeting (Trier)
2003	9.4.	5 th General meeting (Trier)
2004	2.12.	6 th General meeting (Trier)
2007	27.9.	7 th General meeting (Trier)
2009	16.3.	8 th General meeting (München)
2011	25.3.	9 th General meeting (Trier)
2013	18.4.	10 th General meeting (Barcelona)
2015	27.5.	11 th General meeting (Brüssel)
2017	19.1.	12 th General meeting (Brüssel)
2019	6.3.	13 th General meeting (Luxemburg)
2021	8.10.	14 th General meeting (Trier)
2023	15.9.	15 th General meeting (Trier)
2025	13.6.	16 th General meeting (Trier)

Dr. Wolfgang Heusel
August 2025