

Executive summary of the 38th PRACE aisbl Council Meeting

The 38th meeting of the PRACE aisbl Council took place as a videoconference via Zoom on 17th June 2020. All decisions made at the 37th Council Meeting were approved. Janne Ignatius warmly welcomed back Serge Bogaerts from extended leave. He thanked all for their “incredible” efforts during his absence.

With regard to new PRACE member countries Josip Knezović attended this Council meeting as an observer from Croatia, while Latvia has started the process of joining PRACE. The decision is now at Ministry level. Meanwhile, Bulgaria will now be represented by the NCHDC consortium, made up of nine universities and research organisations which manage the coordination and provision of HPC services to the country’s academic community, using the “Avitohol” supercomputer, owned by IICT-BAS. Prof. Galia Angelova stated that the decision taken by the Bulgarian Ministry to join PRACE was immediate, and the membership fee will be covered by her institute. The council approved the change of Bulgarian membership.

Gunnar Bøe requested that the action proposed at the 28th Council meeting, to develop a plan to staff the office so that the EC projects to come can be managed by PRACE AISBL, should be removed from the action list and presented in future in a different form. Florian Berberich agreed and indicated that it should be discussed in relation to PRACE 3. The action will be duly removed.

Claus-Axel Müller confirmed that the promotion in the INFRAG for the need of increased effort in user support and software development had been done. Florian Berberich added that a paper would be prepared next year. The communication about the need for increased user support and software development for exascale, proposed at the 35th Council, is still in progress but will be ready soon.

The discussion about the collaboration between PRACE and EuroHPC JU started with Anders Dam Jensen emphasising the need for collaboration between the small team at the newly independent EuroHPC JU and PRACE in order to reach common goals. He emphasised that their agenda is to bring tasks forward together with all the actors active in HPC and that EuroHPC JU cannot deviate from regulations, but there is scope to pull our resources together.

Issues raised from the floor included the focus on quantum computing when other approaches could be more realistic, the trust EuroHPC has in PRACE to continue providing computing time on big machines, the need for a more heterogeneous architecture for the EuroHPC systems and, as we move towards exascale, how work on codes to get a larger portion on accelerators, mainly GPU, is a central task. The importance of educating young people was also raised as being crucial and that PRACE and the JU should be going in the same direction. Anders Dam Jensen emphasised the trust the JU has in PRACE, the work currently being done on regulations that will drive the agenda and that an agreement between PRACE and the JU is close and he is optimistic it will be achieved soon.

In relation to governance and finance, it was acknowledged that there is some work to be done but there is a solid foundation on which to work. There is already an agreement for PRACE to help EuroHPC with services in 2021, so funding and contract discussions are needed at the start of 2022. Matej Praprotnik stated how scientific expertise is heard and respected in PRACE and this leads to success in the review process and provides the best results. He hopes this can continue in EuroHPC. Janne Ignatius emphasised that SSC is independent, representing scientists from the whole of Europe, which is a major factor for the success of PRACE, together with IAC. Keeping the central role of SSC and IAC for PRACE will be important.

In relation to the peer review process, Luigi del Debbio stated that this requires a lot of time and effort and many scientists. In response, Janne Ignatius proposed that Luigi joins the working group on access policy, which he agreed to do, also suggesting the Vice Chair of the AC also join.

Industrial access was also discussed, with Anders Dam Jensen pointing out that this was something PRACE should not focus on, but something the EC was driving EuroHPC to provide. Mark Parsons stated that not all HPC providers are able to sell computer time to industry due to regulations. Lee Margretts added that it was the scientists and their expertise that was attractive to industry so a model of industrial subscription works best and this is what is missing at EuroHPC. He added that in Europe, we need to stimulate the creation of services offered by commercial bodies for industry.

The PRACE Ada Lovelace Award for HPC 2021 was raised. Philippe Segers stated that finding candidates was difficult and he asked partners to look in their centres to identify possible candidates.

In relation to the extension of the PRACE 2 programme, it was agreed that the extension to Call 23 was needed as the EuroHPC systems are late and so the focus turned to funding matters. Existing funds were outlined together with membership fees for 2021. Members indicated whether they would be paying the full amount or a reduced fee and whether this was confirmed. Richard Gunn raised an issue for the UK in relation to Brexit, but the conclusion by Janne Ignatius was that the sums to be raised looked good. Voting then approved the updated PRACE 2 membership fee.

In terms of the budget for 2021, this was prepared by Florian Berberich in the absence of Serge Bogaerts and was approved by FORAC and the BoD. It was clarified that the budget is only a draft. It was calculated that the PRACE 2 budget would be completely used and there would be nothing left. Council approved the membership fee of €51 000 and approved the draft budget as presented, with the option to amend as necessary. A proposal that the BoD can use reserve funds for standard operations while waiting for the collection of membership fees, to avoid using credit, was made.

When discussing the future, it was agreed that it was important for PRACE to be fully transparent with the JU and it was important for the JU to attend Council meetings as observers. Agreement has to be reached on the responsibility for selection of AC members and that it would still be important to maintain the peer review process for allocating resources, even in big strategic projects.

Thomas Eickermann reported on the project PRACE-6IP, which now has Veronica Teodor as its new project manager. The project was affected by the pandemic, with most of the training transformed to remote events and some were cancelled. The Summer of HPC was also a virtual event, which enabled double the number of participants. All-hands meetings also became virtual. A collaboration agreement with CERN-SKA-GEANT was signed, focusing on activities like training, workflows authentication activities and benchmarking of their applications. Florian Berberich also reported on PRACE involvement in the CASTIEL project, which has involved training activities, sharing information with industry and more general dissemination work.

The transition plan proposed by the SWG following the liaison and support discussion in the previous Council was presented by Oriol Pineda. The Council also approved the terms of reference for the Liaison and Support Group (LSG).

It was reported that the development of the new peer review tool is progressing well. Meanwhile, 63 eligible proposals were submitted in the 21st PRACE Call for Proposals for Project Access and 51 were awarded. In addition, 3 multi-year projects from call 19 were submitted to the AC for mid-term assessment. Seven proposals lead by a PI from industry were submitted to the Industry Track and four were allocated a total of 162,8 million core hours. Meanwhile, three proposals will receive additional HLST support.

Florian Berberich reported on the proposal for PRACE seminars to start next year supporting scientists to write effective proposals and present new technologies. He also presented updates on PRACE communications activity over the year, outlining the impact of the pandemic, while the Council also approved PRACE joining EOSC as an observer.