Executive Summary of the 39th PRACE aisbl Council Meeting Minutes

The 39th meeting of the PRACE aisbl Council took place as a videoconference via Zoom on 25 February 2021.

Janne Ignatius gave a report from the latest High Level Coordination Meeting about collaboration between EuroHPC JU and PRACE. Thomas Lippert stressed that we need to position PRACE in order to secure the key element of "excellence". Janne Ignatius and Serge Bogaerts insisted PRACE had worked hard on its valuable peer review process. Lee Margetts agreed with the concerns from a scientific point of view, but in terms of politics and industry, said that PRACE could offer input from the Industrial Advisory Committee (IAC) to EuroHPC. Philippe Lavocat said that the opportunity for commercial access must be considered. Claus-Axel Müller said that INFRAG will be asked to endorse the Access Policy, and said we should not forget PRACE got the mandate to implement a process based on Scientific Excellence only. Thomas Schulthess said it must be a political decision to favour some areas. In each of these corridors, the same rule of Excellence and Transparent Peer Review can apply. Janez Povh said PRACE's role is still very vague. Luigi Del Debbio fully understands the need for political decisions for corridors, but said that within the corridors we need transparency around political and scientific decisions, remarking that the distinction between the two should not be blurred, using peer review to justify political decisions. Matej Praprotnik mentioned that actions to disentangle political and scientific decisions had been taken. Mark Parsons recommended putting in place a session on industry use of HPC. If PRACE does not engage, it will just be side-lined. Thomas Lippert urged Janne Ignatius and colleagues to act within the mentioned corridors. Sergi Girona said that we have to follow the process of governance. Janne Ignatius summarised that for Access policy, PRACE will stick to excellence and transparency, but it is totally fine to define corridors for special topics. Then, it is important to talk to GB members and substitutes, as it is crucial to have a strong voice.

Serge Bogaerts gave a presentation on the collaboration agreement between EuroHPC and PRACE. Payment of experts has not yet been addressed. Janez Povh said he liked the idea of PRACE running the different calls, but pointed out that the draft policy does not mention PRACE, and that PRACE should support all EuroHPC calls with all transparency criteria. Janne Ignatius mentioned that when it comes to pay-per-use industrial access, it is not clear that PRACE has added value – it could be handled by another body. Thomas Schulthess did not think it relevant for PRACE to manage all calls, saying it should not sign up for things against its principles. Janne Ignatius said that everyone in PRACE stands behind the criterion of Excellence in Science.

Regarding PRACE services for EuroHPC, the latest version of the EuroHPC JU Access Policy was discussed. Claus-Axel Müller of INFRAG said INFRAG is independent, and questioned whether the document is EuroHPC or PRACE. If it is EuroHPC, then PRACE will not approve the document. Sergi Girona said that Scientific Excellence is not mentioned in the right way and the access for industry is still too much like a draft. Claus-Axel Müller mentioned that in the current version the Governing Board has to decide on each proposal, which is an absolute show-stopper. Janne Ignatius said that PRACE has worked with the JU office and the PRACE Working Group to improve the access policy. Various other details of the document were also discussed. It was eventually decided that Serge Bogaerts would draft a letter for EuroHPC GB concerning the EuroHPC access policy by Friday 26 February 2021.

Philippe Lavocat gave a short presentation on the proposed knowledge services for EuroHPC. Laura Grigori asked how the forward-looking software projects were selected, expressing surprise that Gromacs, which 80% of proposals use, was not included. Maria Grazia Giuffreda clarified that NB-LIB involves Gromacs team members. Filip Stanek said that we need to provide more input to libraries to support exascale scalability of codes and not traditional codes.

In an update from the Industrial Advisory Committee (IAC), Janne Ignatius commented on the role of EuroHPC, saying that the IAC and SSC would oversee access segment. Mark Parsons said that PRACE needs to be careful, as the EC would like to sell also time to industry.

In the update from the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC), Matej Praprotnik reported on the current situation of the Covid-19 fast track call, which is still open. A joint XSEDE-PRACE webinar attracts scientists on both sides and stimulates cooperation and exchange of knowledge. A paper on the Covid-19 fast track call was submitted to Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS). In other news, two members of the SSC have arrived at the end of their current mandate in the given committee. Christian Holm agrees to sign on for a second term while Silvia Picozzi, due to other commitment, will not. As Matej Praprotnik's term as SSC Chair is coming to an end, the SSC nominates Laura Grigori, current SSC Vice-Chair, as new SSC Chair, and Nathalie Reuter as new SSC Vice-Chair. Laura Grigori also replaces Matej Praprotnik on the PRACE Board of Directors. Janne Ignatius congratulated Laura Grigori as new SSC Chair and thanked Matej Praprotnik profoundly for the excellent work in chairing the SSC over the past year, mentioning the exceptional and intense nature of the year due to COVID-19. Finally, Lynn Kamerlin was proposed by the SSC as a new member of the Access Committee (AC).

The Transition Plan to a Liaison and Support Group (LSG) is ongoing with all previously appointed BoD members on duty and sharing the responsibilities according to the plan. The involvement of new members of the forthcoming LSG will gradually be implemented when these persons are identified. The target date of adoption of the new structure is 1 April 2021.

Given the status of the Covid-19 pandemic in Belgium and the corresponding measures taken by the government, full telework is still mandatory in Belgium and therefore to all PRACE aisbl staff members. The development of the new peer review tool is progressing according to plan. With regards to communication activities, Janne Ignatius mentioned that the success stories from the COVID-19 projects have been nicely presented on the PRACE website.

In view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions, EHPCSW 2021 / PRACEdays21 will be fully digital. OFCORES was selected to supply the digital event platform after a call for tender. The PRACEdays21 Call for Posters received 13 applications, and all were accepted by the Poster Selection Committee. The PRACE Ada Lovelace Award for HPC 2021 received 5 nominations and the Selection Committee will take a final decision in begin of February 2021. A dedicated keynote and parallel track on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) will be included in the programme. Media Agreements have been signed with Insight Media and Scientific Computing World.