

ERAC-SFIC 1351/15

NOTE

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 23rd meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 8 December 2014

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Dan ANDRÉE (SE).

The Forum drew the following conclusions:

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda (CM 5178/14) was adopted with one change proposed by DE to include under AOB a presentation of a joint FR/DE proposal on international cooperation for the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016-17. There was also a request from FR to the Commission for an update on statistics on third country participation in the first Horizon 2020 calls for proposals. The Commission noted that initial data indicates a fall in the participation of third countries in Horizon 2020 but noted that it was too early to draw any conclusions at such early stage of the implementation of the Programme. It suggested to cover this point in March 2015 in the context of the success of the implementation of the Strategy on international R&I cooperation, including a discussion on other metrics than third country participation.

The Chair agreed to discuss the point on third country participation in the first Horizon 2020 calls at the next SFIC Steering Board in February 2015, with a view to have a discussion at the March 2015 plenary meeting .

The Chair recalled that the **summary conclusions** of the SFIC meeting of 23 September 2014 were approved by written procedure as set out in doc. 1363/14.

2. Election of the SFIC Vice-Chair

The Chair informed delegations that, taking into account the departure of Ms. Florence LELAIT (FR), the position of Vice-Chair became vacant on 31 October 2014. He thanked the FR delegation for its commitment to SFIC and requested to pass the best wishes from SFIC and its Chair to Ms. Florence LELAIT. The SFIC Secretariat launched the procedure for the election of the SFIC Vice-Chair on 12 November 2014 with a deadline for expressions of interest set for 28 November 2014. No nominations were received before the 8 December plenary meeting.

The Chair concluded that the deadline for nominations for the position of SFIC Vice-Chair will be extended until 15 January 2015. In the meantime, the Secretariat will take over the administrative role of coordinating the working groups until the position is fulfilled.

3. SFIC Work Programme 2015-2016

The Chair recalled the discussion on this issue at the last plenary on 23 September, based on the self-assessment exercise, the results of the strategic seminar in Stockholm and the draft outline for the Work Programme 2015-16. A draft Work Programme was prepared by the Chair and the Secretariat after the September plenary with the input received, and discussed at the Steering Board meeting on 6 November 2014. Taking into account the Steering Board comments, a new version was sent to delegations in view of the 8 December plenary.

AT suggested to include under point 3.1 (strategic advice) as well as 3.5 (networking and coordination) more enhanced cooperation with the Presidencies. DE and BE questioned the resources SFIC had (including financial ones as pointed out by FR) compared to the workload that the activities in the Work Programme represent, particularly new ones such as input to the ERA Roadmap or the development of specific toolboxes, which could be supported by a working group. SE welcomed having a specific group on the ERA Roadmap. DE and NL also highlighted the need to introduce more links between SFIC and Horizon 2020 in the Work Programme 2016-17, particularly as regards Challenge 6 (this was also supported by FR). PT requested more information on the resources available to work on the different items of the Work Programme, avoiding the proliferation of working groups. SI stated the Forum should explore the possibility of getting support from the CSA (Coordinated Support Actions).

FR questioned the timing of the Work Programme given the ongoing discussions about the governance of the ERA-related Groups and the liaison between SFIC and the other groups. FI also supported a stronger interaction with the other ERA Groups, as well as between the different bi-lateral and multi-lateral initiatives, and also advocated the use of social media for information sharing purposes. ES made an appeal for Member States to take their own responsibility when implementing ERA through the work of the ERA-related Groups (including also financial resources), and also expressed the view that ERA-related Groups should be subordinated to ERAC.

The Commission welcomed the draft Work Programme as they see it can bring a stronger role for SFIC. As regards the mismatch between the activities in the Work Programme and existing SFIC resources, the Commission suggested to focus on impact and on where SFIC can make a difference. The Commission would particularly welcome more focus on framework conditions, the innovation dimension and more exchange of good practices. The Commission (supported by ES) further pointed out the need to distinguish between the role of SFIC and the role of the Horizon 2020 Programme Committee and its configurations, recalling that the implementation of Horizon 2020 is beyond SFIC's remit. It also raised the issue of a conflict of interest raised by the possibility of using Horizon 2020 funds for SFIC's activities and advice.

The Chair gave the deadline of 15 December for delegations to provide comments on the SFIC Work Programme 2015-16 with the objective of approving the document via written procedure. A general reference to the use of SFIC working groups on the implementation section will replace references across the Work Programme text.

The Chair also agreed on the need to explore possible support for SFIC activities from the Policy Support Facility or the Horizon 2020 Work Programme.

4. European Research Area

– ERA Roadmap: SFIC's contribution to the ERA Roadmap

The Chair recalled the discussion at the last plenary on 23 September, in which SFIC discussed its potential contribution to the ERA Roadmap process and agreed to wait for the ERAC meeting in Venice in October in order to make a better-informed decision. The Chair informed delegations that, taking into account the ERAC meeting in Venice, it was decided to start a written procedure for a SFIC opinion on the ERA Roadmap for its adoption before the ERAC meeting on 3 December 2014. The SFIC Steering Board discussed a draft text of the opinion at its meeting on 6 November and the agreed text was sent to all delegations. The SFIC opinion on the ERA Roadmap was adopted via written procedure on 20 November and immediately transmitted to the Council Research Working Party, to the Commission and to ERAC.

The Chair highlighted that the final SFIC opinion is in line with the first draft text of the ERA Roadmap, as prepared by ERAC and sent to ERAC delegates on 26 November. SFIC, as requested by ERAC, can further contribute to the process and propose some recommendations for Top Action Priority 6 - International Cooperation. Any new comments should be sent to ERAC by 13 January. The revised draft roadmap will be discussed at the ERAC Steering Board meeting on 20 January 2015.

Delegations stressed the need to promote International Cooperation as the 6th ERA priority and at the same time streamline it in all other ERA priorities. They also stated that the high level objective of this priority was too general and that it was quite restrictive to have it all in one page. NO and PT indicated that the paper seems to assume that priorities are the same in all Member States and Associated Countries, and the language should be corrected in this regard.

The Chair asked delegations to send concise comments by 15 December and suggested the inclusion of all cross-cutting issues (including international cooperation) in the ERA Roadmap introduction. The SFIC Secretariat will liaise with DE to coordinate the inputs from SFIC to ERAC on the text for Top Action Priority 6.

– **ERA Governance: Review of the status, the mandate and the reporting lines of SFIC**

The Chair informed delegations about the extraordinary ERAC meeting of 7 November 2014 to discuss the ERA-related Groups and governance, where the Chair and Vice-Chair of SFIC were invited. It was decided that the seven ERA-related Groups should be aligned to the ERA priorities and that there should be stronger coordination. The mandates of the different Groups may therefore need to be reviewed. The ERAC Steering Board would also change as the Chairs of the ERA-related Groups would become members in order to coordinate activities, but a top-down approach would be avoided. The Steering Board would also continue to prepare the ERAC plenary meetings. ERAC delegates supported that the Commission continues to have the Chairmanship of ERAC and a Member State the Vice-Chairmanship. There will be another extraordinary ERAC meeting on 16 January 2015 to discuss the role, mandate and ways to improve the impact of ERAC's work. FR will prepare a discussion paper for this meeting. Taking into account this context, the Chair presented a proposal for a revised SFIC mandate which would, once approved by the Forum, serve as an input to the Research Working Party discussions on the ERA governance.

Delegations commented on the draft revised mandate and indicated their wish to include the link between SFIC and Horizon 2020 (NL, DE), although ES expressed the clear distinction between SFIC and the Horizon 2020 Programme Committee and cautioned against getting into specifics as regards SFIC's advice and its links to Horizon 2020. NO requested the inclusion of appropriate references to Associated Countries. The Chair, supported by ES, informed that it is the Council who will decide in 2015 on the mandates and reporting lines of the ERA-related Groups, including SFIC.

DE pointed out that SFIC should pay attention to the still ongoing discussion on a new structure of the ERA governance when discussing changes in the mandate.

The Chair asked delegations to send comments on the revised proposal for a SFIC mandate by 15 January 2015. The text will then be discussed by the SFIC Steering Board at its next meeting in February for adoption at the next plenary in March 2015. The revised mandate will subsequently be sent to the Research Working Party.

5. Strategy for international cooperation in R&I and the Multi-Annual Roadmaps process

– Presentation of draft SFIC opinion

The Chair informed delegations that DE, in cooperation with FR, has prepared a draft SFIC opinion on the international R&I cooperation strategy and the Multi-Annual Roadmaps (MARs) process, as agreed at the plenary on 23 September. DE stated that the paper aimed to encourage the Commission to continue actively the work on the MARs and give the right signal in terms the implementation of the Strategy on international R&I cooperation and in relation to R&I policy and activities with third countries.

Delegations welcomed the draft opinion and indicated the MARs were essential to the implementation of the external dimension of ERA (SE), stressing the link between the MARs, Horizon 2020 and Member States and the need to be early involved in the preparation/update of the MARs process (FR). Delegations also reminded the Commission to organise future workshops to follow up on the MARs process (FR). The Commission assured delegates that Member States would be systematically involved in the MARs follow-up and informed them that the next assessment will be done by mid-2016.

Moreover, the Commission suggested to have a standing agenda point at forthcoming SFIC plenary meetings, covering the calendar of JSTCCs to which delegations will be invited to provide input and share information about their bilateral activities. Furthermore, DE asked the Commission whether they were planning to take up the recommendations of the Advisory Group on international cooperation, which published a report in July 2014.

The Chair informed delegations that the Steering Board will take up the issue of when to input the MARs discussion and asked delegations to send comments on the draft opinion by 15 January 2015 to DE and to the Secretariat.

The Chair also announced its intention to explore the possibility to invite the Chair of the Advisory Group on international cooperation to the next SFIC plenary meeting.

6. State of play of Working Groups by rapporteurs

– **Brazil: Discussion on Brazil Roadmap and update on Working Group activities**

Ms. Tiina VIHMA-PUROVAARA (FI), the Brazil Working Group (WG) rapporteur, presented the draft Roadmap and gave an update on the activities of the WG, including the various Tour of Brazil events that took place over the autumn where both capitals and embassies were involved, which helped getting the involvement of companies in the events. One of the issues the WG put to the plenary is the development of indicators for measuring the success of the different country activities. The rapporteur also indicated the need for SFIC to discuss cross-cutting issues in all WGs and encouraged delegations to share information on their Brazil activities.

CH indicated its willingness to participate in the Brazil WG. SE stated that Brazil is a priority country for them but they were worried the WG had too many initiatives which require some prioritisation. FR supported organising a Destination Europe event in Brazil.

The Commission also confirmed that the work of the WG and Tour of Brazil events were gathering momentum.

As regards indicators, the Commission would suggest the WG to come up with a limited number of indicators (3-4) which are simple, measurable and manageable. It noted that a discussion on indicators should span all relationships with third countries and regions and may need to be addressed more generally rather than by individual country working groups. The Commission also indicated that the success of the Tour of Brazil events was based on their bottom-up approach as an initiative of the science counsellors network, their flexibility and SFIC's support. Furthermore, the Commission also announced its willingness to organise a Destination Europe event in Brazil in November 2015 in either Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo.

The Chair welcomed the idea of Destination Europe in Brazil and encouraged delegations to get involved. He also pointed to the need to look at other frameworks for cooperation such as EUREKA, COST, etc.

– **USA: Update on Working Group activities**

Mr. Alexander GRABLOWITZ (DE) gave an update on the WG activities and informed delegations of the 14-15 January 2015 EU-US Innovation Conference organised by the BILAT USA 2.0 in Brussels. He also asked SFIC for suggestions on how to increase cooperation with the Galway stakeholders group.

The Chair reported from the Destination Europe event in Atlanta where he participated. The event was attended by very senior researchers as well as many intermediators and was very successful. Ms. Mary KAVANNAGH (Commission) also gave an update on the Destination Europe initiative, and informed delegates that the next events in the USA will take place on 12 February 2015 in San José (California; back-to-back with the AAAS event), on 20 February 2015 in Boston (back-to-back with the MIT Career Fair) and in autumn 2015 in Chicago. The Commission also informed SFIC that the overall involvement of industry in the Blue Ocean initiative will be discussed in the coming months.

The USA Working Group was encouraged to continue its current work in line with its mandate.

– **Russia: Information on 22nd October workshop in Berlin**

The Chair congratulated Germany for the workshop which took place on 22 October 2014 in Berlin on “Internationalisation of the European Research Area: Towards a Common European Approach in STI Cooperation with Russia” which was well attended by 22 representatives from 9 countries plus the Commission. The summary of the workshop has been already distributed to SFIC delegates. The discussion stressed that it is crucial to address how to cooperate with Russia in the current context and develop the steps for further cooperation in 2015, with the idea of preparing a EU-MS/Russia Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) in the future. AT indicated its willingness to join the Russia WG.

The Commission agreed with delegations that enhanced cooperation with Russia based on the priorities of researchers should be continued, but the evolution will depend on political developments. The Commission also informed delegations about the scientific closing event for the EU-Russia Year of Science 2014, which took place on 25 November in Brussels.

The Russia Working Group was encouraged to continue its current work in line with its mandate.

– **China: Update on Working Group activities**

Mr. Olivier STEFFEN (FR), China WG rapporteur, gave an update on the activities of the group. The WG would like to organize a SFIC workshop in 2015 back-to-back with the EU-China summit either in Brussels or Beijing. However, FR does not have the resources to be fully responsible for the organisation of the event. AT, NL and PT indicated their willingness to assist with the organisation.

The Commission gave a positive feedback on the workshop proposal and indicated its readiness to help with its organisation and to mobilise the BILAT Dragon Star project in this regard. However, they noted that one Member State should take ownership of the coordination and organisation of the event.

The Commission suggested other possible dates for organising the workshop such as the closing event foreseen for the current Dragon Star project either in April or May 2015 in Brussels or any future Joint Steering Committee meetings. The new forthcoming BILAT project could also be used in the future for workshop preparations in terms of content and logistics.

The China Working Group was encouraged to continue its current work in line with its mandate.

7. Presentation by EUREKA

Ms. Sonja MERWAR, member of the EUREKA chairmanship team and Swiss High Level Representative, gave a presentation on the EUREKA role in relation to cooperation outside Europe as well as its planned and future initiatives. EUREKA is an inter-governmental framework funded in 1985 whose mission is to raise the productivity and competitiveness of European businesses through technology while boosting national economies on the international market. It currently has 41 full members and 3 associated countries: South Korea, Canada and South Africa. EUREKA has also contributed to current work on the development of the ERA Roadmap via ERAC. Furthermore, EUREKA's Eurostars project is a project under the 2nd pillar of Horizon 2020.

Delegations very much welcomed the presentation and provided information on how the EUREKA framework is used at national level for bilateral cooperation with third countries, while stressing the success of this initiative including the innovation dimension as well as the involvement of industry in international cooperation. In this context, the Commission commented that there seems to be a drop in the participation of third countries in the first calls for proposals for Horizon 2020 and that some third countries are reluctant to participate in what they see as a European programme where they have no say.

The Chair concluded that SFIC and EUREKA should continue to be in contact and liaise with each other, particularly as regards the development of the SFIC toolboxes and its overall involvement in ERA.

8. Good practices in Member States

Mr. Alexander GRABLOWITZ (DE) gave a presentation on Germany's Action Plan for international cooperation. The Action Plan is based on four priorities: 1) Strengthening research cooperation with global leaders; 2) International exploitation of innovation potentials; 3) Intensifying the cooperation with developing countries in education, research and development on a long-term basis; and 4) Assuming international responsibility and mastering global challenges. It also has three generic measures: presence abroad, international monitoring and promoting Germany as a location for Higher Education and R&I.

Delegations were very interested in the experience from DE and raised questions on the gap between the policy level and the university level, the analytical base for developing the Action Plan and whether there was a need to prioritize in terms of countries.

The Chair agreed with delegations on the usefulness of sharing good practices and concluded that SFIC should look into the potential organisation of a workshop in 2015 on how research institutions deal with international cooperation, as proposed by AT.

9. Standing information points

There were no standing information points.

10. Any Other Business

- **Easter Partnership:** The Commission informed delegations about the dedicated Panel dealing with Eastern Partnership countries to coordinate cooperation on R&I. The 1st meeting took place in November 2013 and a joint Roadmap was published in September 2014 focusing on three challenges: health, climate change and energy. The next Panel meeting will take place in March 2015. The Commission also informed delegates that Moldova has been associated to Horizon 2020 since January 2014, negotiations with Ukraine have been successfully completed and Georgia has also issued a formal request for its association. The SE delegation suggested that countries participating in regional initiatives such as this one could act as SFIC correspondents for these regions.

- **Joint DE/FR proposal on international cooperation for Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016-17:** The DE and FR delegations presented their joint proposal for international cooperation activities in view of the discussions on the Horizon 2020 Work Programme for 2016-17. DE and FR encouraged SFIC delegations to network within their own Ministries in order to have a consolidated proposal for Challenge 6 that could be supported at forthcoming Programme Committee discussions. AT supported the joint DE/FR proposal.

The Chair clarified that SFIC can disseminate information and documents as well as encourage contacts between (national) Programme Committee participants without interfering with the actual work of the Horizon 2020 Programme Committee. The Secretariat was asked to distribute the joint DE/FR proposal.

- **Next plenary meeting:** the Chair informed delegations that the next SFIC plenary is due to take place on Wednesday **4 March 2015** (and not on 5 March as previously announced).
