

NOTE

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 24th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 4 March 2015

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

The Forum drew the following conclusions:

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda (CM 1608/15) was adopted after a presentation from the Chair on the different inter-relations between the various agenda points for the plenary meeting and their rationale. The following AOBs were added to the agenda: South-Africa (requested by SE), Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference 5+5 in March 2015 (requested by ES), state-of-play on India (requested by BE), Western Balkans steering platform (requested by AT) and a report on the recent ISTC meeting in Brussels (requested by the Chair).

The Chair recalled that the **summary conclusions** of the SFIC meeting of 8 December 2014 were approved by written procedure as set out in doc. 1351/15.

The Chair recalled that the **SFIC opinion on the Report on the implementation of the Strategy for international R&I cooperation** of Commission was adopted by written procedure on 27 January 2015, as set out in doc. 1352/15.

The Chair recalled that the **SFIC Work Programme 2015-16** was approved by written procedure on 12 February 2015, as set out in doc. 1353/15.

2. Election of the SFIC Vice-Chair

The Chair outlined the specific procedure for the election of the SFIC Vice-Chair, as indicated in an e-mail sent to all delegations by the SFIC Secretariat prior to the meeting. After describing the procedure, the Chair indicated that two candidacies had been received, those of Iulia MIHAIL (RO) and Alexander GRABLOWITZ (DE). Before the vote, the two candidates made an oral intervention and presented their views. Afterwards, the vote took place with the participation of 22 SFIC Members, all of them present in the meeting. Ms. Iulia MIHAIL (RO) received 12 votes and Mr. Alexander GRABLOWITZ (DE) received 10 votes. Two members of the SFIC Secretariat ensured that all procedures were properly followed during the election process.

Following the vote, Ms. Iulia MIHAIL (RO) was elected SFIC Vice-Chair for a period of 2 years, with her mandate starting on 4 March 2015.

3. Implementation of the EU Strategy on international R&I cooperation – structured policy coordination - Exchange of views

The Chair recalled the various discussions at previous plenary meetings in which both Commission and SFIC delegations were aiming for a more open and transparent approach vis-à-vis JSTCC meetings and bi-lateral dialogues by SFIC Members, and welcomed the Commission's proposal to have a strategic discussion on ways to improve structured policy coordination. The discussion was framed by a background paper prepared by the Commission with two main strands for the debate:

- Strand 1: A SFIC standing agenda point dealing with bi-lateral and bi-regional policy dialogues undertaken by the Commission, Member States and Associated Countries;
- Strand 2: An operational approach towards enabling SFIC to propose activities in support of policy dialogues.

Ms. Cristina RUSSO (Commission), highlighted the relevance of such discussion with SFIC and stressed both the importance for Member States/Associated Countries to share information on their bilateral S&T agreements and major activities and the need to find a system for Member States' contribution to JSTCC meetings. Moreover, she pointed out the key role of SFIC to identify some actions and activities for international cooperation that could be supported by the Policy Support Facility (under Societal Challenge 6).

On **strand 1**, delegations welcomed the Commission proposal of having more structured policy coordination in line with SFIC's primary role towards a strategic partnership between Member States /Associated Countries and the Commission. Both Member States and Commission pleaded for more information exchange and reciprocity on agendas, dates and content of the respective EU- and national- third country meetings. PT and DE raised the idea of taking the Multi-Annual Roadmaps into account as well as useful results of INCO projects. Both DE and Commission noted that it may be challenging to base iterations on meeting agendas since these are not always available in good time prior to meetings and, at least for half of the meetings, they are prepared by the third country. The Commission also proposed to focus discussions within SFIC on two levels: 1) priority setting for cooperation and 2) coordination on relationships with the third country.

In addition, the Commission pleaded for a real exchange on all bilateral relationships and major activities rather than a single focus on EU S&T agreements.

The Chair concluded the discussion on strand 1 by stating that information exchanged should be kept at policy and strategic level and proposed to collect the data from Member States on their bilateral dialogues. In this respect, preparation for the upcoming JSTCC meeting with India, China and Russia during the 9 June 2015 plenary will be considered as a pilot for this case. The preparatory JSTCC discussion could then be fine-tuned during the 29 September 2015 plenary meeting. The SFIC Secretariat was requested to send information on the preparatory process.

On **strand 2**, the Commission announced that the new ‘Service Facility in support of the strategic development of international cooperation in research and innovation’ as proposed for the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016/17 would deliver services along four strands: analysis/studies, logistical support, communication activities and support to NCPs; the Commission would be open to receiving requests from SFIC and input from Member States on what are the perceived needs that fall within the scope of the potential activities of the Facility and could be addressed by it. Some delegations requested more information to be able to better evaluate the new Commission's approach. FR and DE strongly supported the Commission’s approach to involve SFIC more intensely in making proposals for activities to be undertaken by the Service Facility as it may include some support measures that had been touched upon in the position paper prepared by some Member States in early 2015 (circulated to SFIC delegates as well as to Programme Committee - Societal Challenge 6 configuration). DE suggested the creation of a SFIC Working Group for the structuring of policy dialogues for designing the process of SFIC involvement in the Service Facility as well as for identifying the themes and needs so that continuous support for the dialogues, SOMs/GSOs meetings and SFIC country initiatives is guaranteed through this new facility.

The Chair concluded on strand 2 with the need to find a process for structured coordination and stressed the need to agree on criteria first. The possibility of creating an ad-hoc Working Group will be explored and discussed at the next SFIC Steering Board.

4. Indicators for international cooperation and related data – Exchange of views

Mr. Konstantinos GLINOS (Commission) presented different sets of indicators and data related to international cooperation, mainly linked to the international R&I cooperation strategy, as follow-up to the discussions on indicators which already took place in the context of SFIC as well as to the SFIC seminar organised by SE/Vinnova on 22 September 2014 on indicators for international cooperation. The Commission has been focusing so far on 3 sets of indicators dealing with: (1) Progress on the implementation of the EU strategy on R&I international cooperation; (2) the global dimension of ERA (ERA Monitoring Mechanism); and (3) the ex-post assessment of Horizon 2020, in order to understand the dynamic evolution of cooperation with third countries over time and to capture the "real" cooperation (not only administrative participation) stimulated by Horizon 2020.

Delegations welcomed the presentation by the Commission but also considered it necessary to have indicators capturing the innovation dimension (DE, ES, FI, PT) and enquired about third country participation in Horizon 2020. The Commission provided data on the participation in first calls of Horizon 2020, which confirmed the significant drop on third country participation in Horizon 2020 but recalled the early nature of data and figures. It noted that data was only partial in that it referred to only a limited number of calls, while it provided clarifications regarding the possible causes of this apparent drop. Some delegations expressed their concerns due to this apparent drop and suggested not to await the Horizon 2020 mid-term review but to conduct an analysis in due time.

Following a suggestion by the Commission, the Chair concluded by inviting the Commission to present indicators and data for FP7 as background for future SFIC discussions on indicators during the next plenary meeting on 9 June 2015.

5. ERA governance: Review of the status, the mandate and the reporting lines of SFIC – Discussion on SFIC's input to Council: potential SFIC opinion

The Chair gave an outline of the previous discussions on ERA governance in the context of both ERAC and SFIC and, based on input from the SFIC Steering Board on 5 February 2015, presented a draft SFIC opinion on the ERA governance for discussion. No changes were made to the draft opinion.

The Chair concluded that SFIC adopted its opinion on "ERA governance: Review of the status, the mandate and the reporting lines of SFIC" as SFIC's input to the Council Research Working Party. The SFIC Secretariat was requested to transmit the opinion accordingly.

6. SFIC Annual Report 2014 – Exchange of views

The Chair presented the first draft of the SFIC Annual Report 2014, which was based on input from rapporteurs, the SFIC Steering Board on 5 February 2015 as well as the SFIC Secretariat. No changes were made to the draft report.

The Chair concluded that SFIC adopted its SFIC Annual Report 2014 and the Report will be submitted to the Council and the Commission.

7. State of play of Working Groups (WG) by rapporteurs

a) USA: Update on WG activities

Mr. Alexander GRABLOWITZ (DE) gave an update on the WG activities and informed delegations of the EU-US innovation conference organised by the BILAT USA 2.0 in January 2015 in Brussels, the SFIC relations with the Galway stakeholder group and the forthcoming G7 meeting of research ministers focusing on ocean and marine litter.

DE proposed two workshops one on entrepreneurial universities and one on ocean literacy during the second half of 2015 and encouraged volunteers to participate. The possibility of conducting the second workshop together with the Blue Growth CSA projects on ocean literacy will be sought.

The Chair also informed delegations about the Destination Europe event on 12 February 2015 in San José (California; back-to-back with the AAAS event).

The USA WG was encouraged to continue its current work in line with its mandate. The Commission will provide information on other Destination Europe events in writing.

b) China: Update on WG activities

Mr. Olivier STEFFEN (FR), China WG rapporteur, gave an update on the activities of the group. In close cooperation with the Commission, Member States will be invited to the EU-China S&T Forum that will be organised in Brussels on 28 April by the Commission-funded Dragon Star project. In particular, MS representatives coordinated by the SFIC China Group rapporteur will present bilateral cooperation with China in a session on Sustainable Urbanisation. Representatives from the JPI Urban Europe, the ERA-Net Smart Cities and Communities, the Commission and Chinese interlocutors will also be involved. In addition, an informal meeting between SFIC and representatives of the JPI Urban Europe will take place on 27 April 2015 in Brussels. The Chair informed that the mandate of the China WG expires on 19 May 2015.

The China WG was encouraged to continue its current work in line with its mandate. The WG was asked to reflect on any possible updates to its mandate: A formal decision on the mandate and its renewal will be taken at the 9 June 2015 plenary.

c) **Common principles: Presentation by Commission on EU level input to common principles debate and decision on final deliverables and future of the WG**

Ms. Julia LEWIS (UK), Common principles WG rapporteur, gave an overview of the activities carried out so far by the group, including: the scoping paper discussed at the SFIC plenary in December 2013, the presentation by Mr. Paul Boyle (President of Science Europe) in February 2014, as well as the plenary discussion based on a questionnaire on common principles to all SFIC in May 2014. The Chair highlighted the need to report back to Council, as the work on common principles is a direct request from Council. The Commission suggested to address the issue of common principles on an ad-hoc basis.

The Common principles WG will submit a draft opinion on common principles for the conduct of international R&I cooperation to the next plenary on 9 June 2015. A formal decision on the possible non-extension of the mandate of the WG will also be taken at the next plenary.

8. Standing information points

The Chair indicated that the following Standing Information Points had been sent to delegations:

- An update on the work and activities of the Brazil WG;
- A Statement by SFIC delegations on the Work Programme 2016-17 in relation to H2020 - Societal Challenge 6, and a related background document;
- The conclusions of the last SFIC Steering Board on 5 February 2015.

No comments from delegations were received.

9. Any Other Business

- **Russia: State-of-play of EU-Russia S&T cooperation (information by Commission):** The Commission informed delegations about the overall state-of-play of EU-Russia S&T cooperation and indicated that two coordination/support actions projects (of a more political nature) were rejected and not funded due to the overall EU-Russia political context. However, the Commission also informed that all scientific cooperation and all working-level dialogue is to be continued. The Forum took note of the information given by the Commission and some delegations expressed their concern vis-à-vis the Commission's decision on rejecting funding for some projects. The Commission took note of such concerns.

The Chair concluded that there is no need for any changes in the mandate of the WG.

- **Planned activity related to the 'toolbox' (information by SE and NO):** NO and SE provided information on the future work on the 'toolbox', which will be based on an open process with broad participation focusing on a practical guide to international cooperation for all SFIC Members and Observers. This activity is meant to complement the activity related to dialogues ahead of JSTCC meetings.

Information on the activity and its process will be sent to all delegations by e-mail.

- **Activity on South Africa:** SE presented a template for an information exchange tool based on a questionnaire to MS/AC focused on the various cooperation mechanisms between MS/AC and South Africa in the framework of cooperation agreements.

SE to update the template of the questionnaire based on written comments by delegations and results to be presented at the next plenary on 9 June 2015.

- **Results of the workshop on "International Research Marketing and Research Communication" (information by DE):** DE briefly explained the results of the workshop as well as next steps (a first draft of a conceptual approach for the brand "Europe" and a follow-up workshop). The Commission also informed delegations that they have finalized a study on European liaison offices in third countries and will forward the study to SFIC.

The study on European liaison offices in third countries will be distributed to SFIC via the usual channels.

- **India - State of play:** BE requested an up-to-date information on India and the work of the Group of Senior Officials (GSO). The Commission informed that a GSO meeting is scheduled for September 2015. DE pointed out that, if Commission anticipates senior level participation from EU Member States, more details on current status of work and desired decisions from the GSO should be communicated in a timely manner, and the respective GSO Working Group should be convened as soon as possible.

An agenda point on India will be included in the next SFIC plenary on 9 June 2015. Commission will provide any appropriate related information in writing beforehand.

- **Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference 5+5 in March 2015:** ES informed about the Ministerial conference on STI and education in the context of the 5+5 dialogue, which will take place on 23-24 March 2015 in Madrid with the aim at adopting a roadmap with actions for the next two years.

ES will report on the results of the conference at the next plenary.

- **Western Balkans platform:** AT informed about the related INCO-Net which has finished its activity but whose mandate is still valid. AT suggested they could provide the platform but needs some resources for meetings and logistics. The message was put forward to and received by the Commission.

- **ISTC meeting:** the Chair informed delegations about his attendance to the meeting of the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) which took place on 25 February 2015 in Brussels.

- **Indicators discussion in ERAC:** the Chair updated delegations on the discussion in ERAC on indicators for the monitoring of the ERA Roadmap. The indicators will not be ready with the rest of the Roadmap and will be adopted under the LU Presidency. The AT delegation suggested that SFIC should provide input to ERAC on this issue based on SFIC's work on indicators.

- **Next plenary meeting:** the Chair informed delegations that the next SFIC plenary is due to take place on Tuesday **9 June 2015**.

