

**NOTE**

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From:	SFIC Secretariat
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Summary conclusions of the 34th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 29 September 2017

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The SFIC Vice-Chair (Tiina Vihma-Purovaara, FI) presided the meeting in the absence of the Chair.

**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted without modification.

**2. Tour de table of national and Commission activities**

Member States and Associated Countries informed about core developments and major events in their countries.

The Estonian delegation pointed out that the impact and value of research and innovation as well as the coherence and openness of EU research and innovation partnerships had been tabled as priority issues in its Council Presidency programme, and that a specific reference to international cooperation might be made in the conclusions to be adopted by the Competitiveness Council in December.

The Commission provided updates on international scientific cooperation, notably with Korea and the Western Balkan countries.

### **3. SFIC opinion(s)**

#### Gender aspects in international cooperation

The SFIC rapporteur (Austria) presented the draft report (doc. WK 10103/2017 REV 1) summarising the results of the survey carried out between April and June 2017 among government representatives and funding agencies with the aim to explore the current situation on national and organisational level regarding a gender perspective for international cooperation in STI. She invited delegations to provide their feedback and comments by 25 October 2017 in order to finalise the report and adopt it at the next SFIC Plenary meeting on 8 December 2017.

Moreover, the rapporteur informed about her intention to prepare on that basis a draft opinion to be discussed at the next SFIC Plenary meeting. She suggested that the final results (SFIC report and opinion) should then be followed up jointly with the recently created ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation, in order to provide an input for the preparation of the 9th multiannual framework programme for research.

Delegations generally welcomed the results of the survey which, from their point of view, correctly reflected the current difficulties in including gender issues in international STI cooperation and showed the importance of developing joint guidelines on gender aspects.

### **4. Service Facility**

Delegations discussed with the Commission the state of play on the draft requests to the INCO Service Facility submitted in April 2017 (doc. WK 4711/2017). The Commission reported about the commitments made so far. Some Member States asked the Commission to provide regular written information on the follow-up given to the service requests in order to be able to promote the requested activities among stakeholders and to avoid duplication with similar actions at national level. The Commission promised to improve the information flow and to reflect on the format for providing regular updates.

Furthermore, the Commission presented a proposal for draft SFIC guidelines for the submission and endorsement of service requests (doc. WK 10112/2017). It explained that the proposed procedure would not only establish a standard structure, clear responsibilities and objective criteria for the introduction of service requests, their endorsement by SFIC and their implementation by the Commission, but would at the same time increase flexibility and speed up the whole process.

After an exchange of views, SFIC adopted the guidelines for the submission and endorsement of service requests for the Service Facility in Support of the EU Strategy for International Cooperation in Research and Innovation, as set out in doc. WK 10112/2017. They will be completed by a template for service requests that will be provided by the Commission and will be circulated to SFIC members.

The German delegation presented three new proposals for service requests:

- The proposed service request for a foresight study on the Global Research Area (doc. WK 10110/2017) was endorsed by SFIC and can now be published as a working paper and forwarded to the Commission.
- The proposed service request relating to indicators for international cooperation (doc. WK 10109/2017), according to the Commission, does not respect all the criteria and received an unfavourable opinion, since different sets of indicators had already been developed in other fora and there was not sufficient evidence of non-duplication and a workable strategy for exploitation/use notably within a future revision of the overall European Research Area monitoring framework. The German delegation may provide additional justifications for this service request and SFIC will come back to the proposal at the next Plenary meeting on 8 December 2017.
- As regards the proposed service request to support the Danube Region Policy Dialogue (doc. WK 10105/2017) the Commission reminded of the activities of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and suggested to first clarify if it could not be organised under the EUSDR. Alternatively, the service might be considered as a sub-item under the running service of the Western Balkans Platform. A separate service request would therefore become obsolete. The German delegation will reflect on this and SFIC will come back to the proposal at the next Plenary meeting on 8 December 2017.

## **5. The future of SFIC working groups**

The Vice-Chair explained her working paper (doc. WK 10115/2017) summarising the discussion at the working session on 8 June 2017 and developing four different options for a future approach on SFIC working groups.

Many delegations expressed their preference for option 3 (not to renew the mandates of the current groups, and to create thematic or geographical groups on an *ad hoc* basis) or option 4 (not to renew the mandates of the current groups, and to mandate new groups only in specific cases and for dedicated short spans of time while, in general, topics should be dealt with during the Plenaries or in dedicated workshops) and subsequently agreed not to renew the mandates of the existing working groups.

Delegations underlined that working groups, if really needed, should have a clear mandate, achievable objectives and a realistic workload, and that a permanent existence of working groups should be avoided.

The Vice-Chair committed to develop, on the basis of the positions expressed by delegations, a draft set of conditions to be met for the establishment of working groups. This draft would allow SFIC to discuss, at the next Plenary meeting on 8 December 2017, which kind of working groups could be established in the coming years.

## **6. State of play of working groups**

### Toolbox Working Group

The SFIC rapporteur (Norway) gave an update on the Working Group's activities and invited SFIC members to participate in a workshop that will be organised on 7 December 2017 in Brussels.

Some delegations raised questions about the compatibility of the Working Group's ideas with the Research and Innovation Observatory initiated by the Commission's Joint Research Centre.

The Commission suggested to strengthen the links between existing Commission websites of international research and innovation cooperation and the Member States' national repositories of research and innovation developments at country and EU levels.

SFIC will have an exchange of views on the results of the workshop and the way forward at its next Plenary meeting on 8 December 2017.

## **7. Presentations**

### COST - international cooperation

Representatives of the COST Association presented an overview of the COST framework that supports trans-national cooperation among researchers, engineers and scholars across Europe. They explained the principles for the participation in COST and the functioning of COST actions as well as their financing.

Several delegations welcomed the efforts by COST and asked for more information, notably about the financial rules to be respected, but also about the conditions for COST membership and for the participation of partner countries. Delegations expressed their wish to be regularly informed about the activities of COST.

## **8. EU-Africa High Level Policy Dialogue on science, technology and innovation in preparation of the EU-Africa Summit 2017**

The Commission presented its activities in the context of the EU-Africa High Level Policy Dialogue on science, technology and innovation that had been launched in 2011. The Commission emphasized that the Dialogue so far had concentrated on food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture as well as on climate change and sustainable energy. The next discussion round would take place on 17-18 October 2017 in Brussels and would prepare a proposal for an EU-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership on climate change and sustainable energy to be endorsed by the EU-Africa Summit scheduled in November 2017 in Abidjan.

A number of delegations expressed their interest in being regularly informed about the concrete activities and the major milestones achieved in the EU-Africa cooperation. They supported the Commission's efforts and called for creating a strategic partnership that could have a real impact.

## 9. Any other business

Delegations asked to include items on the EUREKA network, on the European research and innovation centres in Brazil, China and the United States, and on the potential benefits resulting from science diplomacy under the societal challenge 6 of Horizon 2020 on the agenda of the next SFIC Plenary meeting on 8 December 2017.

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