

EUROPEAN UNION  
EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA  
AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE  
Strategic Forum for International  
S&T Cooperation

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Secretariat

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**NOTE**

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From: SFIC Secretariat  
To: SFIC Delegations  
Subject: SFIC Work Programme 2017-2018

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Delegations will find annexed to this Note the Work Programme 2017-2018 of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), as adopted by the SFIC plenary on 8 March 2017.

**SFIC WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18**

This document sets out the Work Programme of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) for the years 2017-2018.

**1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

SFIC is a strategic forum and a dedicated configuration of ERAC that facilitates the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of ERA, with a focus on the external dimension of the European Union's and Member States' research and innovation activities. Member States and the Commission are members of the Forum while countries associated to the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme have observer status. SFIC's objective is to facilitate the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of the European Research Area (ERA) by sharing information and by consulting between the partners with a view to identifying common priorities which could lead to coordinated or joint initiatives, and coordinating activities and positions vis-à-vis third countries and within international fora.

The rationale for such framework is provided by the Council conclusions concerning a European partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation of 2 December 2008<sup>1</sup>.

In the past years, SFIC has played an essential role in driving forward the EU-MS partnership on international S&T cooperation as well as in contributing to the external dimension of the ERA, as shown in its annual, and recently biennial, reports<sup>2</sup>, mainly by providing strategic advice to Commission, Council and ERAC, and committing to common priorities while developing joint EU/MS/AC - SFIC initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Doc. 16763/08

<sup>2</sup> Following ERAC-SFIC docs: 1354/10, 1353/11, 1353/12, 1354/13, 1353/14 and 1353/17.

## 2. STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

### 2.1 Structure: five priorities and areas of action

The SFIC Work Programme 2017-2018 is based on the previous and current SFIC work and it has been developed with the input from delegations, in particular from a workshop held on 8 February 2017 and debates at plenary and Steering Board level. With this background, the SFIC Work Programme 2017-2018 groups SFIC's seven main activities as contained in its mandate into **five areas of action**, each one with its specific activities:

- Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation;
- Contribution to the further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap;
- Cooperation with ERAC and other ERA-related groups;
- Joint strategic approaches and actions for international R&I cooperation;
- Pool and share relevant knowledge concerning third countries;
- Share and structure information and good practices on international R&I cooperation activities;
- Information exchange and networking.

This structure is taken over from the previous work programme, as it has proven to be a resilient structure for SFIC to attain its objectives. The priority areas reflect SFIC's strategic mission and balance ongoing SFIC initiatives with new activities, building on work already done and the current international context (e.g. Open to the World policy, the ERA Roadmap 2015-2020 as well as the national ERA roadmaps, the EU Commission's Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation, the INCO Service Facility experiences with international cooperation in the first half of Horizon 2020 and an assessment of SFIC's strengths and weaknesses).

Although many of the SFIC activities contribute to the implementation of the ERA Roadmap, and SFIC members and observers feel that the five areas of action overlap in many respects, the approach followed has been to keep specific activities (e.g. related to information sharing or best practice) under the particular specific heading.

## **2.2 Implementation**

With regard to the implementation of this Work Programme, SFIC will take into account the past, current and future context in its activities and actions. SFIC activities will be implemented on a voluntary basis following the principle of variable geometry.

SFIC will match the level of ambition with the resources available when implementing its Work Programme for 2017-2018. The added value of SFIC will be created by optimizing the use of national, European and global resources and avoiding duplication of activities and efforts.

The various SFIC activities may be supported by long or short term Working Groups, rapporteurs and/or correspondents, where appropriate and when decided by the Forum.

## **3. PRIORITIES AND AREAS OF ACTION**

### **3.1 Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation**

In 2017-18 SFIC will emphasise its unique position as an official advisory body composed of nominated national representatives for international cooperation by engaging more decisively in the debates on international cooperation at European and at national level.

SFIC will continue to be proactive with early strategic advice and evidence for policy formulation on international S&T cooperation and the external dimension of ERA. To enhance this role, SFIC will, where appropriate, submit opinions/advice to the Council and the Commission. SFIC will foster the uptake of this advice nationally and internationally through participation in appropriate events and fora.

The 'Toolbox' working Group's report on instruments for the implementation of international S&T cooperation agreements and other international S&T cooperation activities at EU and national level continues to be part of the strategic advice provided by SFIC. The INCO Service Facility for international S&T cooperation will be an important instrument to promote the output of this work.

SFIC will continue to provide advice in an agile manner through a broader range of activities and products, emphasising its foresight element. SFIC will also address the identified weakness in externally communicating its activities and advice, as identified by its members and observers, by focussing on innovative and proactive communication approaches to stakeholders and other possible addressees, possibly with the help of the INCO Service Facility.

SFIC will provide timely strategic advice to Council and ERAC and will continuously search for synergies with other ERA groups. This means liaising and enhancing cooperation with Maltese, Estonian, Bulgarian and Austrian Presidencies, biennial reporting to the Council and yearly information to ERAC and other ERA groups about SFIC initiatives and activities. This may take the form of joint meetings or SFIC-led seminars with other ERA groups. SFIC will also strive to make its advice available in relevant areas outside the science and innovation domain, when it can add value (e.g. trade or economic policy).

SFIC will continue to give advice to the Commission in the process of developing and updating the Multi-Annual Roadmaps. Moreover, SFIC will engage with the Commission in the implementation of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps.

*Activities within the **Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation** priority may include:*

- Proposing advice/opinions to Council and Commission (e.g. ERA Progress Report, Multi-Annual Roadmaps, international cooperation activities within H2020 and FP9, input for Presidencies, other EU external policies and work ahead of summits/policy dialogues, etc.)*
- Exploring ways of providing advice proactively, including through other means besides written opinions*
- Fostering uptake of SFIC's advice nationally, also by strengthening the mutual advice capacity of SFIC through more exchanges within meetings and through events*
- Developing and promoting a toolbox for the implementation of international S&T agreements and other international S&T cooperation activities at EU and national level*
- Searching for synergies with ERA groups and proposing joint meetings/seminars*

### **3.2 Contribution to further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap and cooperation with ERAC and ERA-related groups**

SFIC will continue contributing to the implementation of the ERA Roadmap<sup>3</sup> in order to make full use of the external dimension of ERA and its potential for strengthening Europe's position in the world. SFIC activities will therefore be in line with the actions included in Priority 6 of the ERA Roadmap.

A strategic approach has been developed on how to strengthen and streamline the external dimension of ERA in line with the ERA Roadmap. In this context, SFIC will continue monitoring, mapping out and benchmarking national roadmaps for the implementation of priority 6 of the ERA roadmap and discuss experiences in implementing them.

The work on indicators for a better understanding of the objectives and the degree of implementation of internationalisation efforts will continue in close collaboration with the Commission. SFIC will also provide regular proactive input for the use of the INCO Service Facility in support of the strategic development of international cooperation in research and innovation (INCO SF). This work will emphasise the complementarity with existing or planned indicators covering various aspects of international cooperation in operation within Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission.

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<sup>3</sup> Doc. ERAC 1208/15

*Activities within the priority **Contribution to the further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap** may include:*

- Analysing opportunities to streamline the international dimension in other ERA priorities*
- Producing advice/opinions on good examples from national strategies for international R&I cooperation strategies*
- Engaging with ERA stakeholders and research organisations on joint approaches for international cooperation through various formats and at different levels*
- Considering new modes of cooperation and information exchange with other ERA group, in particular on the gender perspective in international STI cooperation with the Helsinki Group s*
- Exchanging on the development of national ERA roadmaps, in particular on priority 6*
- Contributing to the work on indicators for international S&T cooperation, drawing on planned or existing sets of indicators for international cooperation used in Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission*
- Developing a proposal for enhancing multilateral S&T cooperation approaches and mapping of S&T agreements at EU/MS level and related exchange of practices*

### **3.3 Joint strategic approaches and actions for international R&I cooperation, including pooling and sharing relevant knowledge concerning third countries**

SFIC will continue its ongoing work on the different geographic and thematic initiatives. Specifically, the SFIC Working Groups on Brazil and China will continue their work in line with the specific mandates adopted by the SFIC plenary and the respective activities highlighted therein. SFIC will also analyse on a case-by-case basis the need and added value for SFIC initiatives focused on other countries/regions than the ones previously mentioned. In doing so, SFIC will search for synergies with planned and already existing initiatives, e.g. with CELAC

SFIC will also explore the appropriateness to work on specific thematic areas within and across regions. In this context SFIC will undertake efforts to develop a joint understanding and a common language on key topical issues.

Moreover, the form of support for SFIC initiatives and actions (e.g. in the context of studies, mapping exercises and (expert) workshops) will be clarified, in particular by providing requests for policy support and coordination instruments offered in Horizon 2020. In addition, measures will be explored to address the resource challenge that SFIC faces as it currently operates.

SFIC will continue to pursue close collaboration and exchange of information with relevant national and European/international activities and projects with a strong international focus.

*Activities within the **Joint EU/MS (AC) initiatives and actions** priority may include:*

- Development of each initiative by the respective SFIC Working Group via the activities highlighted in their mandates*
- Analysing the need for SFIC initiatives in other countries/regions as well as other thematic areas besides the existing ones*
- Contributing to the programming and formulating specific support requests to the INCO Service Facility for international cooperation in line with SFIC's mandate.*
- Collaborating and exchanging information with and about INCO projects and initiatives relevant to SFIC's mandate, e.g. via a representation of SFIC in SOMs, GSOs etc. and by cooperating on the EU Commission's multi-annual roadmaps*
- Debating on specific themes spanning several plenary meetings*
- Exploring the possibility to organize events/workshops in a way that allows a widening of participation from members and observers*
- Other initiatives/actions*

### **3.4 Sharing and structuring information and good practices on international R&I cooperation activities**

This is a core role of SFIC for its members and observers. For managing and sharing information effectively, SFIC members and observers will contribute to peer-learning activities and to the exchange of best practice, mainly via exchange of information between delegations (e.g. on a bilateral basis, within SFIC Working Groups, via contributions during SFIC plenary meeting). SFIC will also promote presentations during plenary meetings on EU/national STI strategies as well as on R&I cooperation activities and projects. This shall also serve to add a level of analysis to the sharing.



In addition, to address the need of having an overview of R&I international cooperation activities and information at the level of the EU and of Member States and Associated Countries, the possibilities for SFIC to establish or contribute with input from the Toolbox Working Group to an accessible online solution as an exchange framework will be explored.

SFIC will also reflect on and contribute to the monitoring of the external dimension of the ERA and the overall assessment of the international dimension of Horizon 2020, focusing on impacts of both international S&T cooperation policies and SFIC activities. The impact of SFIC activities may be measured, with the work being based on the implementation and delivery of the SFIC Working Groups' mandates.

Enhancing the visibility of the external dimension of ERA is essential. For this purpose SFIC will publish the results of SFIC's work and promote it widely, where appropriate and when agreed on by the SFIC plenary. Moreover, the SFIC Secretariat will continue providing its bi-weekly information e-mails with relevant documents and information to delegations.

*Activities within the **Best practice, information sharing and monitoring** priority may include:*

- Providing more room at SFIC plenaries for sharing of best practice and information on positive and negative experiences to encourage peer-learning*
- Allowing for space in SFIC plenaries or events to go beyond sharing and add an analytical level.*
- Following up on and measuring SFIC activities and their impact*
- Reflecting on and contributing to the monitoring of the international dimension of Horizon 2020*
- Leveraging on the available insights from the SFIC Toolbox Working Group as a best practices exchange framework*
- Organising events to foster the targeted exchange of information on specific issues/topics*
- Fostering information sharing by the SFIC Secretariat*

### 3.5 Networking and coordination

To assure the visibility and the effectiveness of SFIC's work, SFIC will implement cross-cutting and horizontal activities covering all other priority areas. In particular, SFIC delegates will endeavour to represent and present SFIC in international groups, fora and events, such as COST, JPIs, JTIs, KICs, EIT initiatives and SOMs. Where appropriate SFIC will explore measures to raise the awareness of its activities in other multilateral contexts (G20, OECD, Belmont Forum, etc.). SFIC members are encouraged to participate as 'SFIC ambassadors' and a more formal appointment for regional initiatives, such as the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean region, will be considered, with the purpose of exchanging information and having an up-to-date follow-up on initiatives in these areas.

SFIC will closely liaise with EU Council Presidencies and will invite and/or engage with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and other stakeholders to SFIC-organised events or SFIC meetings. This may also happen by promoting links with networks of stakeholders at EU and national level and involving them through consultations and workshops. Moreover, the use of social media and more interactive ways of working will be explored to increase the visibility, efficiency and effectiveness of SFIC's work.

SFIC delegates will endeavour to coordinate at national level on issues relevant to international R&I cooperation and the external dimension of ERA to facilitate a common (national) position in different fora and ERA-related groups. SFIC will work on strengthening the liaison with EU and MS/AC science counsellors in third countries. In this context the role of 'SFIC ambassadors' is particularly relevant.

Seminars and workshops on priority areas, countries and themes will be used as instruments to achieve progress in any of the five priority areas of this Work Programme.

*Activities within the **Networking and coordination** priority may include:*

- Engaging with EEAS and other stakeholders in SFIC work/events*
- Developing the 'SFIC ambassador' role, including supporting material, such as standard presentations etc. and promotion of their participation in relevant international events and fora*
- Promoting coordination at national level*
- Fostering increased links with EU/MS science counsellors by sharing information on events and substance*
- Proposing workshops and seminars*
- Acting as an advisory and analytical forum for other international cooperation formats*

#### **4. REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION**

The biennial SFIC activity reports to the Council and the Commission will take stock of the state-of-implementation of this Work Programme and the progress made in the different priority areas and themes.

SFIC will also annually inform the European Research Area Committee (ERAC) about its activities, in particular concerning the implementation of the ERA Roadmap.

The Annex attached to this Work Programme gives a Work Plan overview for 2017 and 2018, taking into account the different activities to be carried out during this period.

**ANNEX: WORK PLAN OF ACTIVITIES 2015-2016**

<b>Priority / Area of Action</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b><i>Strategic advice on international S&amp;T cooperation</i></b>	<i>Propose advice/opinions to Council and Commission (e.g. on Multi-Annual Roadmaps, international cooperation activities within H2020 and FP9, input for Presidencies, other EU external policies and work ahead of summits/policy dialogues, etc.)</i>	X	X
	<i>Foster uptake of SFIC's advice nationally</i>	X	X
	<i>Finalise and promote the toolbox for the implementation of international S&amp;T agreements and other international S&amp;T cooperation activities at EU and national level</i>	X	X
	<i>Search for synergies with ERA groups and propose joint meetings/seminars</i>	X	X
	<i>Engaging with Commission in the further development and implementation of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps process</i>	X	X
<b><i>Contribution to further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap</i></b>	<i>Continue the monitoring of Member States/Associated Countries ERA priority 6 roadmaps</i>	X	X
	<i>Produce advice/opinions on good examples of national strategies for international R&amp;I cooperation strategies</i>	X	X
	<i>Engage with ERA stakeholders and research organisations on joint approaches for international cooperation</i>	X	X
	<i>Contribute to the work on indicators for international S&amp;T cooperation in the context of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism and the R&amp;I Observatory, drawing on planned or existing sets of indicators for international cooperation used in Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission.</i>	X	X

	<i>Developing a proposal for enhancing multilateral S&amp;T cooperation approaches and mapping of S&amp;T agreements at EU/MS level and related exchange of practices</i>	X	X
	<i>Liaising with the Helsinki Group the work regarding a gender perspective for international cooperation in STI</i>	X	
	<i>Liaising with Commission and proposing activities in support of policy dialogues (in the framework of the future INCO Service Facility)</i>	X	X
	<i>Address ERA Roadmap Priority 6: Develop and implement appropriate joint strategic approaches and actions for international STI cooperation based on national priorities</i>	X	X
<b><i>Joint EU/MS (AC) initiatives and actions</i></b>	<i>Development of each initiative by the respective SFIC Working Group via the activities highlighted in their mandates</i>	X	X
	<i>Analyse the appropriateness and need for SFIC initiatives in other countries/regions than the existing ones or initiatives (workshops etc. ) on a specific thematic area</i>	X	X
	<i>Formulate requests for the INCO Service Facility in support of SFIC projects</i>	X	X
	<i>Collaborate and exchange information with and about INCO-projects targeting SFIC initiatives and Working Groups</i>	X	X
	<i>Other initiatives/actions</i>	X	X

<b><i>Best practice, information sharing and monitoring</i></b>	<i>Foster peer-learning activities and presentation of best practices at SFIC plenaries</i>	X	X
	<i>Follow-up and measurement of SFIC activities and their impact</i>		X
	<i>Reflect on and contribute to the monitoring of the international dimension of Horizon 2020</i>	X	X
	<i>Publication of the results of SFIC input/events in appropriate channels</i>	X	X
	<i>Information sharing by the SFIC Secretariat</i>	X	X
<b><i>Networking and coordination</i></b>	<i>Engagement with EEAS and other stakeholders in SFIC work/events</i>	X	X
	<i>SFIC ambassadors to represent SFIC in international fora and events</i>	X	X
	<i>Promotion of coordination at national level</i>	X	X
	<i>Links with EU/MS science counsellors</i>	X	X
	<i>Workshops and seminars</i>	X	X