

ERAC-SFIC 1359/16

NOTE

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 29th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 15 June 2016

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Dan ANDRÉE (SFIC Chair, SE). Agenda point 3 was chaired by Ms. Iulia MIHAIL (SFIC Vice-Chair, RO).

The Forum drew the following conclusions:

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda (CM 2981/16) was adopted, including an AOB requested by the FR delegation on the mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020.

The Chair also took the opportunity to welcome new representatives to SFIC: Ms. Rozenn SAUNIER (FR), Mr. Marco ORLANDO (MT) and Mr. Mats JOHANSSON (SE).

The Chair recalled that the **summary conclusions** of the SFIC meeting of 2 March were approved by written procedure as set out in doc. 1353/16.

2. EU's international R&I cooperation

- Commission's "Open to the world" agenda
- 2nd Report on the implementation of the Commission's international R&I strategy

The Commission briefly introduced the document "Open Innovation, Open Science, Open to the world - A vision for Europe" highlighting the various ideas of Commissioner Moedas on the three Os. The Chair also informed delegations about his meeting with Moedas' cabinet members to discuss the SFIC opinion on Open to the World.

The Chair recalled the good cooperation with the Commission during the preparation and drafting of both the 2nd Report on the implementation of Commission's international R&I strategy and the Multi-Annual Roadmaps (MAR). Commission also announced that the report is meant to be published by 29 September, following an inter-service consultation during the summer. FR regretted that the latest version of MAR was not distributed to delegations before the plenary.

Delegations expressed their concerns on: the drop of participation from international partners in Horizon 2020, which could be better reflected in the Report (FR, FI, DK, SE and AT), and the use of the Global Research Area concept -to be better defined- (DE, FR, SE and ES). MT welcomed the report but pointed out that it lack reference to Mediterranean Initiatives such as ERA-NETs and the work carried out by the Mediterranean Region towards the PRIMA Initiative.

Commission to circulate the latest version of the MAR for delegations' information.

3. SFIC Working Groups

a) State of play of Working Groups by rapporteurs

– **Brazil: Update on WG work, including revision of mandate**

Ms. Tiina VIHMA-PUROVAARA (Brazil WG rapporteur, FI) presented the draft new mandate to the plenary, pointing out the main differences and additions compared to the previous mandate, and proposed an extension of the work of the WG until 15 June 2018.

The mandate of the Brazil WG was renewed until 15 June 2018.

– **Russia: Update on WG work, including revision of mandate**

The Vice-Chair recalled that the Russia WG worked intensively towards the adoption of the EU/MS/AC-Russia Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), which was adopted by the WG members and distributed to SFIC delegations. The plenary thanked the rapporteur of the WG, Mr. Klaus SCHINDEL (DE) for all his work. The SRIA is considered as the final deliverable of the WG. On behalf of the rapporteur Mr. Klaus SCHINDEL, Ms. Jana SCHNIEDERS (DE) thanked the members of the WG for their work. The Chair considered the tasks of the WG as "fulfilled" and encouraged delegations to continue working on Russia in various formats (e.g. workshop, ad hoc meetings, one-off activities, etc.) without the need of a formal WG.

The SFIC WG on Russia was discontinued, as no mandate was renewed. The SRIA is considered as the final deliverable of the WG.

– **USA: Update on WG work, including revision of mandate**

Ms. Jana SCHNIEDERS (DE) gave a presentation on the SFIC USA initiative, focusing on its achievements and challenges ahead, starting the discussion on whether SFIC should continue focussing its work on the USA, also announcing that the rapporteur, Ms. Claudia BERNARDING (DE) is not in a position to continue in this function. Delegations thanked DE and Ms BERNARDING for their contribution to the work of the WG. The Vice-Chair stressed that the mandate has expired, thus the WG is discontinued, although there are several opportunities to continue working with USA. FR pointed out that SFIC would continue working on and with the USA, although a formal WG structure would make cooperation more efficient. FI suggested taking the lead on a possible transition towards finding a new country that could lead the USA initiative.

The SFIC WG on USA was temporally suspended, as no mandate was renewed. However, SFIC delegations will continue discussions on future work on and with the USA and will explore the possibility of submitting a new mandate for a forthcoming plenary.

– **China: Update on WG work, including revision of mandate**

Mr. Olivier STEFFEN (China WG rapporteur, FR) presented the draft new mandate to the plenary, pointing out the main differences and additions compared to the previous mandate (e.g. the launch of the 13th Chinese 5-year plan, the reform of public R&I funding and the dedicated S&T strategy to be published by MOST), and proposed an extension of the work of the WG until 15 June 2017.

The mandate of the China WG was renewed until 15 June 2017. The plenary also agreed to introduce a reference to the Policy Service Facility in the mandate, mirroring the similar reference proposed in the Brazil WG mandate.

– **Toolbox: Update on WG work**

Mr. KJELLEMO (Toolbox WG rapporteur, NO) gave an oral update on the work of the WG, debriefing about the recent meetings of the WG and announcing that a survey/questionnaire will be distributed to delegations either before or after the summer break, with its links to the Policy Service Facility (with input from Commission being needed for the final formulation of the questionnaire). SFIC delegations were encouraged to answer the questionnaire.

Questionnaire to be submitted to SFIC delegations, when ready.

b) Discussion on the strategic focus of Working Groups

SFIC delegations had a brainstorming session on the strategic focus of WGs and whether groups should have a more thematic or regional approach. Delegations were open to the idea of considering thematic issues (e.g. G7, gender, FP9) as part of SFIC's work, although specific topics were highlighted by some: science diplomacy (BE, FR and UK), as well as Open to the World and its link to Open Science (PT) or the G7 (DE). Other countries (FR, FI and DE) were also open to thematic work but would encourage a less informal approach (e.g. workshop or short-term activities as in the case of South Africa). Regarding such short-term activities, Iran could be a topic of interest (DE).

SFIC delegations to send in any specific ideas on thematic focus to the SFIC Secretariat.

4. State of play on bi-regional STI cooperation dialogues

a) Joint funding scheme between European and Southeast Asian countries

Ms. Sarah KRAUS (DE) presented the South-East Asia- Europe Joint Funding Scheme (JFS), an instrument to pool resources on a multilateral level to support collaborative research and innovation projects. The funding is meant to be distributed based on the principle of a “virtual common pot”, with public legal RTD entities, higher education institutions and/or SMEs/industry being the main target beneficiaries. The duration of this funding is expected for 3 years.

The Chair encouraged delegations to study the Terms of Reference for the JFS (planned to be sent out by the end of June) and to consider joining the Scheme. FR pointed out that the question of the JFS should be tackled as part of a larger context, since similar schemes (multilateral funding initiatives without EU top-up) are envisaged in other regions (e.g. CELAC, Africa) and countries (e.g. India, Japan).

SFIC delegations agreed to continue monitoring and discussing this process. The Commission announced that the Policy Service Facility is meant to have the possibility of supporting the secretariat for this type of initiative.

b) Exchange of experiences between SFIC delegations on recent bi-regional dialogues and potential strategic involvement of SFIC

The Chair informed delegations that certain SFIC members exchanged their experiences on regional initiatives and their participation in SOMs and other high-level policy dialogues during the last SFIC Steering Board on 3 May, with the aim of having a discussion at plenary level on whether, how and to what extent SFIC should add value and contribute to bi-regional policy dialogues. The Chair also stressed the importance of SFIC delegates being in close contact with colleagues dealing with SOM or bi-regional dialogues.

The Chair proposed various consecutive steps for the preparation of SOMs/bi-regional dialogues: 1) an exchange of views ahead of a bi-regional dialogue; 2) SFIC delegates to liaise with national delegates attending the meetings; and 3) feedback from each dialogue. DE and FI stressed that they generally welcome a stronger involvement of Member States into the SOMs/bi-regional dialogues, and FI also stressed the importance of networking and of decisions taking place during the high-level meeting itself. SE put emphasis on the feedback issue while considering, jointly with FR, the High-Level Policy Dialogue EU-Africa as a good practice.

The DE delegation underlined the potential in founding a European-CELAC Interest Group for bi-regional STI cooperation in succession to the bi-regional dialogue between the European and CELAC states and distributed a paper on it.

5. Administrative procedures

a) Election of the SFIC Chair

The election was postponed to the next plenary on 14 October 2016, as no candidacies for the position of SFIC Chair were received by the SFIC Secretariat. The FR delegation expressed its interest in submitting the candidacy of Ms. Rozenn SAUNIER in the near future, and asked the current Chair, Mr. Dan ANDRÉE (SE) to prolong his mandate until the next plenary meeting. DE also supported this transition approach.

The election of the SFIC Chair was postponed until 14 October 2016, with the prolongation of the current Chair's mandate until then approved by the plenary, and the interest by the FR delegation on submitting a candidacy being noted. The SFIC Secretariat will re-launch the procedure, when appropriate, after the summer break.

b) Work Programme 2017-18 in relation to ERA Roadmap

The Chair informed delegations that the ERAC Steering Board, with the presence of all Chairs of the ERA-related groups, has asked the various groups to submit to its next meeting on 28 June 2016 a draft Work Programme for 2016-17. The Chair presented the background document including the various tentative SFIC activities linked to the ERA Roadmap for 2015-2017, based on the current Work Programme, and without pre-empting the discussions on the future SFIC Work Programme 2017-18.

The SFIC plenary agreed to forward the draft SFIC Work Programme 2015-17 on ERA Roadmap, without amendments, to the ERAC Steering Board on 28 June 2016.

6. Structured policy coordination - Strand 2 - Policy Service Facility

The Chair recalled both the formal and informal discussions had in the context of SFIC in relation to the forthcoming Policy Service Facility on international cooperation planned by the Commission, including the identification of three priorities.

Ms. Anca GHINESCU (RO) presented an updated version of the background paper discussed at previous plenaries, further developing the key priorities previously identified. The Chair stressed the importance of the "type of contribution" SFIC should give to the Commission (e.g. template, selection, format and potential ranking) in order to standardise the practice.

Mr. Cristopher GAUCI (Commission) announced that the signature of the contract for the Policy Service Facility will take place by the end of September, therefore the first requests to contractors are planned from October 2016.

The SFIC plenary agreed that the first priority chosen by SFIC is the development of a composite indicator for international R&I cooperation. Further, the Rapporteur will contact relevant officials in the Commission concerning the main topics in the background paper. Next plenary in October 2016 will serve to fine-tune the request and its particular activities.

7. Standing Information Points

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

1. Conclusions of the SFIC Steering Board on 3 May 2016, in view of the preparation of the plenary;
2. RISE expert group on "Open to the World";
3. Commission's mission to Iran.

Delegations enquired for more information concerning point 2 above (RISE). The SFIC Secretariat sent additional information on RISE (link to electronic website) after the meeting. A future follow-up on point 3 (Iran) was requested by FI.

8. AOB

- ***Cooperation with Helsinki Group:*** The Chair asked delegations to propose volunteers for a rapporteur to liaise with the Helsinki Group and respond to the Council request to consider developing joint guidelines on a gender perspective for international STI cooperation.

SFIC delegations requested to propose nominations for a rapporteur to liaise with the Helsinki Group with deadline on **29 June 2016**.

- ***G7 Science Ministers meeting:*** The DE delegation debriefed SFIC delegations about the G7 Science Ministers meeting in Japan on 15-17 May 2016. The SFIC Secretariat distributed information in writing on that meeting after the SFIC plenary.

SFIC Secretariat to send G7 information to SFIC delegations, as distributed to the Council Research Working Party.

- ***Mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020:*** SFIC delegations acknowledge the need for starting a brainstorming exercise on both the mid-term evaluation of Horizon 2020 as well as the future Framework Programme, in order to feed into the respective processes on the Commission's side. FR suggested the possibility of drafting a SFIC opinion for these purposes.

Next SFIC Steering Board to follow-up on this issue.

- ***Next meetings:*** the Chair informed delegations that the next SFIC plenary will take place on **Friday 14 October 2016**. The next SFIC Steering Board will take place in September 2016 (tentative date already scheduled for **13 September 2016**).