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LIMITE

ERAC-SFIC

WORKING PAPER

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WORKING DOCUMENT

From:	SFIC Secretariat
To:	ERAC (SFIC)
Subject:	2019 SFIC ANNUAL REPORT

Delegations will find in Annex the text of the SFIC Annual Report 2019, as agreed by written procedure.

This text will be submitted to ERAC as SFIC's contribution to the ERAC Annual Report 2019.

2019 ERAC ANNUAL REPORT

Priority 6:

SFIC is responsible for Priority 6 of the ERA Roadmap.

Key achievements supporting the implementation of the group's specific ERA priority

The SFIC Work Programme 2019-2020, adopted by SFIC at its plenary on 12 June 2019, groups SFIC's seven main activities as contained in its mandate are divided into **five priority areas of action**. The priority areas reflect SFIC's strategic mission, cover ongoing SFIC initiatives and new activities and build on work already done and the current international context. In 2019, networking with stakeholders was added as an activity in the second half of each year.

Concerning **Sharing and structuring information and good practices on international R&I cooperation activities**, the core role of SFIC, SFIC members and observers continued in 2019 to contribute to peer-learning activities and to the exchange of best practices, mainly via exchange of information between delegations (e.g. on a bilateral basis, within SFIC Working Groups, via systematic tour de table of international activities during SFIC plenary meeting). On 11 June 2019, a workshop was organised together with the Commission services on the international perspective of the Horizon Europe Cluster “Energy, Climate and Transport”. SFIC also continued to promote presentations during plenary meetings on EU and national STI strategies as well as on R&I cooperation activities and projects.

Moreover, following a workshop on Science Diplomacy on 3 October 2019, SFIC decided at its plenary meeting on 4 October to establish a Task Force on Science Diplomacy. The main working areas of this Task Force include the integration of Science Diplomacy aspects in Horizon Europe, the identification of key actors, networks and practices, enabling dialogue and collaboration between relevant communities, the EU institutions and the Member States and Associated Countries regarding Science Diplomacy and exchanging current practices of Science Diplomacy strategies or activities developed at national and regional level, including work on the ERA National Action Plans.

Furthermore, as networking with stakeholders was added in the SFIC Work Programme 2019-2020 with view of the ERAC recommendations, SFIC invited representatives of EARTO, EUREKA, European University Association (EUA), The League of European Research Universities (LERU) and Science Europe to its plenary on 18 December 2019. Each of the organisations made a presentation about their activities, focusing on the international dimension

of the ERA and the role of international cooperation in Horizon Europe.

In 2019, SFIC continued its focus on **the joint strategic approaches and actions for international R&I cooperation, including pooling and sharing relevant knowledge concerning 3rd countries**, and decided to establish Task Forces on Africa and China. The deliverables for the SFIC Africa Task Force in 2020 will be a workshop in March (took place on 3 March) and a strategic report to be adopted by SFIC in May, together with a SFIC Opinion. The SFIC China Task Force aims at establishing a more structured interface between MS and with Commission services, especially as the Commission is currently focussing on the R&I collaboration with China and on 18 December 2019 organised a meeting between the Member States (at Directors-General level) and stakeholders. SFIC launched a survey among Member States to frame the issue and learn more about the sensitivity of the topic in the different countries and presented the outcomes at the EU/MS China meeting and the SFIC Plenary, both on 18 December 2019, as well as at the ERAC Steering Board on 11 February 2020.

SFIC also continued to work intensively on **the development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap and the cooperation with ERAC and the ERA-related groups** in 2019. The SFIC ad hoc Working Group for a benchmarking exercise on strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I, established in September 2018, had the objective to carry out a benchmarking of national initiatives, frameworks, structures and roadmaps of EU Member States and Associated Countries for R&I cooperation with third countries. Its work consisted of the collection (via an online survey) and mapping out of the various approaches in the drafting of national roadmaps and strategies for international cooperation in R&I, the identification of priority countries for cooperation, the comparison of the different approaches and the identification of transferrable good practices and joint approaches where relevant. The mandate of the ad hoc Working Group was extended for 6 months in September 2019 in order for it to finalise its tasks. At the December 2019 SFIC plenary, the final report of the Benchmarking ad hoc Working Group (doc. [1359/19](#)) and the SFIC Opinion on International Research and Innovation Cooperation (doc. [1360/19](#)), based on the work carried out by the Benchmarking ad hoc Working Group, were adopted by SFIC. The SFIC Opinion highlights, inter alia, that in order to maintain the evidence basis to show common interests in key focus countries, the collection of relevant data on structures in and actions towards third countries should take place on a more regular basis and in a structured way, and also include relevant data from the Commission. This should be considered in connection with the request by SFIC to see the international cooperation activities of Member States and Associated Countries integrated into the EU Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO).

The Benchmarking Working Group had close links with the Mutual Learning Exercise (MLE) on national strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in Research & Innovation that was launched by the Commission in 2019. A preliminary version of the draft report of the ad hoc Working Group was presented and discussed during the second country visit of the MLE, and the MLE experts provided useful feedback that was consequently taken into consideration in the draft report.

Relating to the monitoring of the National ERA Action Plans (NAPs) and as requested by ERAC in December 2018, SFIC set up a monitoring mechanism conceived as a self-assessment tool by adapting the tool used by GPC. The SFIC progress tool is intended to show how the entire ERA priority 6 is progressing. The tool was circulated to SFIC in the form of a living document, which should be updated when new or revised NAPs become available. The updated data will enable SFIC to contribute to the ERAC report on the monitoring of the ERA Priorities.

In the context of the ERAC Action Plan, SFIC organized a strategic workshop on the future of SFIC on 6 March 2019, back-to-back to the SFIC plenary on 7 March. This was a follow-up to the discussions that started in SFIC in 2018 on ideas for improving its organisation (i.a. through a strengthened steering board, the possible introduction of 'sentinel task forces' focusing on topical issues, correspondents with other ERA related groups, new meeting formats etc.). The workshop focused on discussions on the revision of the mandate of SFIC, the organisation of SFIC meetings, the governance of SFIC, its communication/visibility, and topics of interest that should be part of the future SFIC work programme. These discussions were based on the results of an internal online survey launched in early 2019 and took into account the ERAC Action Plan recommendations. As a result of this workshop and the discussions at the SFIC plenary, SFIC agreed that its mandate covers ERA Priority 6 to a large extent and that the SFIC activities are mostly in line with its mandate. The elements in the mandate could be restructured thematically in the framework of a future revision of the mandate, but the main points were still considered valid at this stage. SFIC therefore agreed that engaging in the time-consuming process of changing the mandate (that has to be adopted by the Council) was not essential for the sake of wording. At its plenary on 12 June, SFIC adopted a document reflecting this agreement. This document (WK 10301/19) was submitted to ERAC for information. Moreover, SFIC also adopted a one-pager on its impact and submitted this document (WK 10302/19) to ERAC for information.

Still in the context of the ERAC Action Plan, SFIC agreed at its plenary on 7 March to establish a Task Force on SFIC communication and visibility. At the SFIC plenary meeting on 4 October

2019, the Chair of the ERAC Standing Working Group on Open Science and Innovation (SWG OSI) and the coordinator of the action in the ERAC Action Plan related to communication and visibility reported on the work done at SWG OSI and ERAC level. The final report of the SFIC Task Force on communication and visibility (doc. [1358/19](#)) was adopted by SFIC at its 18 December plenary, and consequently submitted to ERAC for information. At the December plenary, SFIC also took note of the SFIC presentation prepared by the Task Force. The idea is that SFIC delegations can use this presentation to present the Forum's activities in other ERA-related groups, at national level and in other international bodies.

Short text to be included in the Executive summary (*max. 10 lines*)

SFIC plays an important role in driving forward the EU-Member States/Associated Countries partnership on international S&T cooperation as well as in contributing to the external dimension of the ERA, mainly by providing strategic advice to the Commission, the Council and the Member States. In 2019, SFIC adopted a report on the Benchmarking exercise on strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I and a SFIC Opinion on International Research and Innovation Cooperation (docs. [1359/19](#) and [1360/19](#)), established Task Forces on Africa, China, Science Diplomacy and SFIC communication and visibility, adopted a report on SFIC communication and visibility (doc. [1358/19](#)), developed a SFIC progress tool to monitor the progress of the ERA Priority 6 in the National ERA Action Plans and intensified the networking with ERA-stakeholders.