

EUROPEAN UNION

Brussels, 21 May 2014

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

Secretariat

ERAC-SFIC 1353/14

NOTE

Subject: SFIC Annual Report 2013

Delegations will find attached the SFIC Annual Report 2013 (Fifth Report of Activities of SFIC, covering the period 1 January 2013 - 31 December 2013) to the Council and the Commission, as adopted at the SFIC plenary on 19 May 2014.

SFIC Annual Report 2013

Fifth Report of Activities of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) (1 January 2013 - 31 December 2013)

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I. Report summary

1) *Progress on the implementation of the European Partnership for international S&T cooperation*

This document is based on the reporting duties of SFIC as stated in its mandate¹. Accordingly, progress is reported on achieving the objectives of the European Partnership in the field of international scientific and technological cooperation ("S&T cooperation") between the European Commission and the Member States, with a view to implementing a European strategy for international S&T cooperation.

In line with its 2013-2014 Work Programme, SFIC has, since January 2013, developed activities related to its mandate and objectives, as follows:

- 1) Development of the external dimension of the European Research Area, notably by:
 - Providing strategic advice and commitment to common priorities and European added-value by giving **input to the Council conclusions** on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach" and focusing on the contribution to the development of the **Multi-Annual Roadmaps** and the **common principles** for international cooperation as asked by the Council, as well as contributing to the **ERA Progress Report**. Moreover, via the **SFIC opinion on the First ERA Progress Report**, SFIC recommended to move towards the integration of an international cooperation dimension into the ERA Monitoring Mechanism, which was later on reflected in the respective Council conclusions of 21 February 2014²;

¹ Council Conclusions of 2 December 2008 concerning a European partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation. Official Journal of the European Union, C 18, 24.1.2009, p. 11- 13.

² Doc. 6945/14.

- Increasing networking and cooperation by articulating **clear synergies** between SFIC activities and international aspects of the activities of other ERA-related groups, EU bodies (e.g. EEAS) as well as with BILAT projects and other relevant FP7 projects. This has also been accompanied by a **stronger engagement with relevant stakeholders and science counsellors** in relevant third countries;
- Participating in **external activities**, with SFIC's contribution to workshops and conferences and SFIC's presence in major events during 2013.

2) Development of joint EU/MS (AC) - SFIC initiatives, notably with:

- India: Supporting a broad participation of EU Member States in the first **Group of Senior Officials (GSO)** meeting, that took place on 8 October 2013;
- China: Endorsing the short version of the EU-MS/AC **strategic research and innovation agenda** with China as a basis document for future work, focusing on the preparation of further activities such as a joint workshop with Chinese representatives, and liaising with the BILAT DragonStar project where relevant;
- USA: Implementing the **roadmap entitled "Approaching US"** with emphasis on its point (4) "Destination Europe", with SFIC Members and Observers actively contributing to the preparation of and participation in the events.
- Brazil: Consolidating the work of the **Brazil initiative**, mainly via the compilation of an overview of STI activities with Brazil, as well as the organisation of the SFIC workshop "Approaching Brazil" aimed at finding solutions to joint challenges and at identifying focus areas for the Brazil initiative.
- Russia: Setting up a core group and developing a draft concept note in view of launching an initiative with Russia.

3) Best practice and information sharing, notably by:

- **Exchanging best practices** on the link between SFIC and the national administrations and the role of SFIC at national level via a peer-learning exercise activity (PLA);
- Sharing experiences through **presentations** of STI international (strategy, policy, activities) cooperation initiatives during plenary sessions;
- Elaborating **workshop reports of SFIC seminars and events**, which are accessible online to the wider public when appropriate;
- Enhancing information sharing practices via **Standing Information Points** at plenary sessions and regular **SFIC bi-weekly INFO** e-mails from the SFIC Secretariat.

2) ***Outlook for 2014***

The Competitiveness Council, at its meeting on 30 May 2013, adopted Council conclusions on “Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach”³. In line with the Council conclusions, SFIC will continue implementing its work programme for 2013 and 2014, still pursuing the overall objective of developing the external dimension of the ERA, through the following activities:

1. Providing strategic advice on EU/MS common priorities for international STI cooperation, in particular *vis-à-vis* India, China, USA, Brazil and Russia, as well as any other third-country or region where a clear added-value is identified;
2. Facilitating prior coordination when STI issues are items of summits, bi-regional/ bilateral dialogues and international fora. In this respect, the aim is to develop SFIC as a platform that regularly contributes to the preparation of a European position ahead of EU summits, SOMs and GSO meetings in relation to STI issues;

³ Doc. 10318/13

3. Improving information sharing and consultation between SFIC Members and Observers, including the EU/MS/AC science counsellors and a wide range of stakeholders;
4. Increasing interaction with other ERA-related groups (i.e. meetings with the Chairs of the other ERA-related groups, organising joint workshops, etc.) and relevant stakeholders;
5. Enhancing the relevance and impact of the international dimension of ERA and Horizon 2020, particularly by contributing to the development of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps for key partner countries and regions;
6. Planning and organising a SFIC strategic workshop at the invitation of the SFIC Chair in Stockholm (to take place on 12-13 June 2014);
7. Contributing to the integration of the international dimension into the European Monitoring Mechanism (EMM) and providing advice on relevant indicators;
8. Contributing to the development of the common principles for the conduct of international cooperation in research and innovation.

3) *Recommendations*

In the light of the progress made and the findings in this report, SFIC recommends the Council and the Commission to:

1. Acknowledge the progress made by the Forum so far, including its advice on coordinated initiatives as well as the priority areas put forward by the SFIC Work Programme for 2013-2014 (and the relevant adaptations following the Council conclusions from May 2013);
2. Further implement the EU/MS joint initiatives towards China, US, Brazil and Russia with the appropriate support to complement and reinforce the already existing bilateral activities with these countries;

3. Underline the potential and relevance of advice by SFIC, with the relevant information provided by the Commission, in the further development of:
 - a) the international dimension of the ERA Framework;
 - b) the Innovation Union Flagship Initiative;
 - c) the coordination of international STI cooperation undertaken by Member States and the EU, including in the context of Horizon 2020⁴;
 - d) the ERA Monitoring Mechanism; and
 - e) the Multi-Annual Roadmaps.

4. Welcome the role of SFIC as a regular platform that can contribute and provide advice and input to the preparation of a European position ahead of EU summits, SOMs and GSO meetings when STI issues are part of the agenda;

5. Encourage further information sharing efforts amongst SFIC Members and Observers and invite the respective Ministries, Commission Directorates-General, European External Action Service (EEAS) and science counsellors to share information and knowledge;

6. Encourage SFIC to support, upon request, ERAC and the other ERA-related groups in their work on the new ERA activities and ERA monitoring for any aspects related to the international dimension.

⁴ The Horizon 2020 Programme Committee is in charge of the monitoring of international cooperation within Horizon 2020.

II. Detailed progress report

1) *Development of the external dimension of the European Research Area*

The Competitiveness Council of 11 December 2012, in its conclusions on "A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth", recalled that the external dimension of the European Research Area is "a vital, cross-cutting and integral part of the ERA and that deepening and strengthening the partnership between the Commission and the Member States will therefore be an important element of the strategic approach towards enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation"⁵.

Moreover, the Competitiveness Council of 30 May 2013 adopted Council conclusions on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach"⁶, in which the Council:

1. Encourages SFIC to continue its advisory work with its initiatives such as with India, China, the USA, Brazil and others;
2. Invites SFIC to contribute to the design and development of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps in collaboration and open discussion with the relevant stakeholders, while developing joint research and innovation agendas between the Union, Member States and strategic partners in third countries;
3. Invites SFIC to contribute to the development of the common principles for the conduct of international cooperation in research and innovation, notably through the provision of relevant advice and the sharing of information on international cooperation policies and activities and best practice developed at national level;
4. Invites SFIC, in pursuit of creating synergies between national and European initiatives, to continue its efforts towards sharing of information on Member States' and the Union's international R&D&I cooperation policies and activities.

⁵ Doc. 17649/12

⁶ Doc. 10318/13

The following sections present the different milestones accomplished by SFIC during 2013 directed towards the development of the external dimension of ERA and an enhanced EU/MS partnership for international STI cooperation:

a. *Strategic advice and commitment to common priorities and European added-value*

– ***Council conclusions on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach":***

1) *SFIC Chair's input to the process*: The SFIC Chair, with recommendations from SFIC Members, provided input to the preparatory discussion in view of the Council conclusions on EU international cooperation in research and innovation during the first half of 2013 in the form of "key messages" that contributed to the discussions within the Council decision-making bodies. In its conclusions of 30 May 2013, the Council included most of the SFIC Chair's key messages (in Annex).

2) *Adaptation of the SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014*: Following the adoption of the Council conclusions on 30 May 2013, discussions at the SFIC plenary on 12 November 2013 focused on the adaptation of the SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014 in order to reflect the Council conclusions and to focus SFIC's work on those tasks outlined by the Council to which SFIC should contribute.

In this respect, a meetings table with tentative agenda points has since then been updated as a living document and distributed to delegations accordingly.

- ***Contribution to the Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation***: The Commission kept SFIC informed on the preparation process with a presentation at the SFIC plenary on 12 November 2013, where an outline of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps was presented. The Commission put emphasis on the role of SFIC in contributing to section 5 of such outline: 'Synergies with Member States activities' and invited all SFIC Members and Observers to contribute with their input via a questionnaire. Such consultation was finished in December 2013 and served as input for the SFIC plenary meeting on 5 February 2014.

- ***Contribution to common principles for international cooperation in research and innovation:*** SFIC started developing a scoping paper on common principles highlighting the need to identify: (1) who the global players are, (2) which standards are used, and (3) gaps where SFIC and its Members and Observers can add value while avoiding duplication of efforts. SFIC delegations have recognised the scoping paper as a first important step on the common principles discussion. Moreover, SFIC also decided to invite Science Europe to a forthcoming plenary for them to give their view on their contribution to the common principles debate, also as a member of the Global Research Council.

- ***Contribution to ERA Progress Report and to the ERA monitoring mechanism:*** The first ERA Progress Report was presented at the SFIC plenary on 12 November 2013 by the Commission. Following the SFIC Chair's input to ERAC on this issue, the SFIC plenary adopted a SFIC opinion on the first ERA Progress Report, in which SFIC underlines its readiness to further elaborate on the external dimension of ERA as an input to the next ERA Progress Report. As conclusion, SFIC recommends that the external dimension should be much more elaborated in the ERA Progress Report 2014 – both at EU-level and MS-level, as such and as an element of the other ERA priorities, notably by moving towards the integration of the “international cooperation monitoring mechanism” into the ERA Monitoring Mechanism.

In relation to the specific SFIC contribution to the ERA monitoring mechanism, the SFIC plenary also decided that the DE delegation in SFIC will follow-up and liaise with the ERAC ad-hoc group on Monitoring & European Semester, embedding the international dimension to its work.

- ***Strategic input from FP7-INCO projects into SFIC activities:*** Within the 2013 INCO Work Programme, it was stated that INCO activities (particularly BILAT projects) shall support SFIC initiatives. This builds a programmatic and institutionalised link between MS-driven activities of SFIC and FP7 projects.

- ***Contribution to European added-value:*** SFIC has increased the interaction between EU and Member States/Associated Countries in a growing number of initiatives, contributing to joint EU-MS/AC actions as well as to the establishment of new governance structures following commitment by national governments (e.g. implementation of the Indo-European Partnership and its related governance structure, the Group of Senior Officials).

- b. *Networking and cooperation*
 - ***Interacting with other ERA-related groups:*** International cooperation is part of all ERA activities and SFIC's role is to ensure coherence by, on demand, supporting and providing advice to other ERA-related groups such as ERAC, GPC, SGHRM, Knowledge Transfer group and ESFRI on how to integrate an international dimension in their respective activities. Such interaction has been fruitful with SFIC's contribution to the ERA monitoring mechanism as well as the SFIC opinion on the First ERA Progress Report, which was also transmitted to ERAC. It is worth noting that Mr. Dan ANDRÉE (SFIC Chair since 18 June 2013) is also a permanent member of the ERAC Steering Board, which guarantees strong links between the work of SFIC and that of ERAC, and potential synergies in future work.

 - ***Interacting with the European External Action Service (EEAS):*** Following a decision of the SFIC plenary in 2012 and recurrent requests from delegations, the Chair may decide to invite, when appropriate, the European External Action Service (EEAS) to SFIC plenary meetings. A member of the EEAS, Pan-African Affairs Unit was invited to the SFIC plenary on 19 March 2013 and presented a mapping of STI activities in Africa as well as the past, current and future situation of the 8th Partnership for science, information society and space.

- ***Engaging with FP7 projects:*** SFIC has continued to actively engage with FP7 projects such as BILAT projects relevant for the SFIC initiatives. The objective of the BILAT projects is to support the EU-third country bilateral STI policy dialogues. The BILAT projects also include as part of their tasks the support of SFIC activities when possible. The BILAT-USA, DragonStar, B.BICE+ and BILAT RUS Advanced projects have had some interaction with SFIC activities via the SFIC Task Force or core groups' work, e.g. the coordinator of the BILAT DragonStar attended the Task Force meeting in January 2013.

- ***Engaging with relevant stakeholders:*** The involvement of stakeholders in SFIC activities especially through upfront consultations at national level as well as in dedicated workshops in the implementation phase of SFIC activities remains a major point where SFIC is well aware that continuous efforts must be made. This concern has been taken seriously in the planned activities contained in the SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014, both in terms of mutual learning about how best to consult at national level as well as ensuring more openness of SFIC workshops. An excellent example of this approach is the peer-learning exercise organised by SFIC on 5 March 2013.

- ***Engaging with science counsellors:*** The work of science counsellors is also a key element in developing the European Partnership and joint or coordinated activities of the Member States and the EU take place through science counsellor's networks in Brasilia, Beijing, Washington or Moscow, amongst others. To strengthen the involvement of science counsellors SFIC has intensified the involvement of science counsellors in the discussions about each particular initiative, distributed relevant SFIC documents to science counsellors as a matter of course, and invited science counsellors to SFIC-related events.

c. External activities

Visibility of SFIC and its work is essential for the success of the European Partnership on S&T cooperation. During the 2013 reporting period, the following milestones were achieved:

- **Contributing to workshops and conferences:** SFIC has organised and/or contributed to different workshops and conferences related to the SFIC initiatives, providing human and financial resources from Member States and the Commission for such purpose. Examples of workshops and conferences with relevant contribution from SFIC are: the "SFIC and the national administrations and the role of SFIC at national level" peer-learning exercise (5 March 2013), the Brazil workshop (17 June 2013) and the "Destination Europe Conference" in San Francisco (12-13 December 2013). Such events have contributed to enhance the profile of SFIC, to make some progress on policy coordination at horizontal level and have counted with the participation of major stakeholders. Results of the events are made publicly available on the Internet, when agreed by the Forum.
- **Representing SFIC at major events:** SFIC has been systematically represented at major events and conferences addressing issues that are in the remit of SFIC's activities. The SFIC Chair, jointly with the European Commission and the EU Presidency (when appropriate), have participated in high-level events such as the Urbanisation Workshop in Beijing, China (30-31 May 2013), the Lithuanian Presidency conference "High Level Eastern Partnership Summit" that took place in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 30 September - 1 October 2013 as well as the "Destination Europe Conference" in San Francisco, USA, in December 2013.

2) *Development of joint EU/MS (AC) - SFIC initiatives*

a. India

During 2012 the SFIC India initiative developed into a political partnership between Europe and India. In 2013, efforts of the India Group and also of the Commission were focused on the preparation of the first Group of Senior Officials (GSO) meeting, which took place in Brussels on 8 October 2013. The GSO meeting agreed on the Terms of Reference and also confirmed the three thematic groups on water, energy and health, calling for two extra groups on ICT and bio-economy to be established. The SFIC plenary has been taken note during 2013 of progress on EU-India cooperation, however, the formal work of SFIC has been completed on this initiative and there will only be information points on India and other related activities at future SFIC meetings, when needed.

b. China

During 2012 the China initiative moved from developing a roadmap to the implementation of the listed activities with focus on the development of a strategic research and innovation agenda (SRIA). At the SFIC plenary on 19 March, both the short and long version of the SRIA, which were accompanied by a paper on ongoing activities in priority areas, were presented. During the 18 June SFIC plenary meeting, the SFIC Vice-Chair recommended to consider the current work on the SFIC initiative completed with the acceptance of the short version of the SRIA. The SFIC Chair also announced that such work could feed into the Multi-Annual Roadmaps discussion.

The SFIC plenary on 12 November 2013 discussed the different options for further work on the China initiative, from an annual follow-up of EU-MS/AC STI cooperation with China or a joint workshop, to implementation through Horizon 2020 or joint calls. Following also discussions at the Task Force on 9 December 2013 (as well as the subsequent SFIC plenary on 5 February 2014), the option of a workshop with Chinese representatives in June 2014 was welcomed and considered as main priority.

The coordinator of the BILAT DragonStar attended the Task Force meeting in January 2013. As each BILAT, this project has a dedicated work package to support policy dialogues which can include actions to support SFIC activities.

c. USA

Work on the SFIC USA initiative has resulted in the roadmap entitled "Approaching US" which includes 5 objectives with specific action points for SFIC to proceed on: (1) Enhancing the scale of European-US STI cooperation; (2) Developing the innovation dimension; (3) Developing a level playing field and improving framework conditions; (4) "Destination Europe" initiative; and (5) Information sharing.

Progress on the implementation of the roadmap has been mainly focused on point (4), with SFIC action feeding into several events: the Destination Europe events in Boston at the MIT Career Fair on 22 February 2013; in Washington DC at the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) on 11 April 2013; and in San Francisco at the American Geophysical Union (AGU) in December 2013. During the whole 2013 year, SFIC Members and Observers have contributed to the Destination Europe conference concept, making their proposals and suggestions, and the SFIC Chair attended the San Francisco event. These activities always took place in close cooperation with the Science Counsellor's network in the USA. SFIC also liaised with the BILAT USA 2.0 related to objective (2) above as the Commission plans to organise an innovation-related conference.

d. Brazil

In 2012 SFIC launched the SFIC Brazil initiative and started the consolidation of its work in 2013. At the beginning of 2013, SFIC Members and Observers focused their efforts on the compilation of an overview of STI activities with Brazil ("Compendium"), as a relevant mapping exercise and information sharing tool.

On 17 June 2013, a SFIC workshop on Brazil took place, with the following title: "Approaching Brazil". The main target of the seminar was to find solutions to joint challenges and to identify focus areas for the Brazil initiative. The workshop was intended to generate out-of-the-box thinking with a key note presentation on the new Brazilian innovation programme and an overview of the current Brazil initiatives by MS/AC, Commission and relevant stakeholders. Using a peer-learning exercise, defined groups discussed the relevant challenges and solutions for EU/MS-AC cooperation with Brazil. Workshop recommendations (available on the SFIC relevant webpage) stressed the opportunity for increased information sharing on the EU side about Brazil, the significance of finding win-win scenarios for EU/MS-AC cooperation with Brazil, the importance of the sustainability of cooperation efforts and the prioritisation of themes (e.g. bio-economy).

At the end of 2013, the Brazil core group worked on a Brazil roadmap and Action Plan focusing on next steps for the Brazil initiative, which was presented at the SFIC plenary on 5 February 2014.

e. Russia

During early 2013, the Task Force continued its discussions on a potential initiative with Russia. Moreover, the Commission regularly informed SFIC about the preparations of the EU-Russia Year of Science in 2014, which had its launch event on 25 November 2013. The BILAT project for Russia is providing the Secretariat for the EU-Russia Year of Science and, at the SFIC plenary meeting on 18 June 2013, representatives from the FI delegation in SFIC were nominated as SFIC representatives to the steering group for the EU-Russia Year of Science.

At the SFIC plenary meeting on November 2013, a core group, led by DE and with participation from FI, FR, PL, NO, CH and the Commission, was set up with the mandate to work on a concept note for a potential SFIC initiative with Russia, with the aim at presenting an updated paper to the SFIC plenary with clear next steps for a SFIC initiative with Russia. The document was discussed in the second half of 2013 both at Task Force and plenary level.

f. Other

SFIC was regularly informed about the preparations and main outcomes of the EU-Africa High-Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation that took place on 28-29 November 2013.

Furthermore, information has been regularly provided to SFIC Members and Observers on the EU-CELAC Senior Official Meetings and other relevant events.

Other relevant policy dialogues (e.g. Mediterranean, ASEAN) were partly in focus, too.

Following the developments in policy dialogue processes has enabled SFIC delegates to improve information flow at national level and prepare senior officials appropriately.

3) *Best practices and information sharing*

a. Peer-learning activities

At its plenary meeting of 1 October 2012, SFIC decided to exchange best practices on the link between **SFIC and the national administrations and the role of SFIC at national level** via a peer learning activity (PLA). A PLA workshop was organized in Brussels at the Finnish Permanent Representation on 5 March 2013. The workshop gathered nine MS and AC to strengthen the impact and visibility of SFIC at national and regional level. The aim of the seminar was to focus on the national processes of international scientific and technological cooperation and on the SFIC activities as a part of those and other national processes. The main recommendations emerging from the workshop dealt with the following issues:

- Recognition of SFIC within national ministries;
- Dissemination of information and active participation;
- Bridging the gap between ministries and funding bodies;
- Adequate timing of different policy, budget and political cycles;
- Added value of SFIC, with benchmarking, assessment and exploitation of results;
- Mapping exercises (helping towards tangible results);
- Select the right people to SFIC;
- ERA-related groups interactions and coordination at national level *vis à vis* ERA governance;
- Setting strategic priorities for SFIC nationally;

b. Presentation of best practices at SFIC plenaries

SFIC Members and Observers are invited to share their experiences through **presentations of best practices** on STI international (strategy, policy, activities) cooperation initiatives during plenary sessions.

At the SFIC plenary meeting on 18 June 2013, the SE delegation made a presentation on the Swedish experience on international cooperation and the work of VINNOVA, the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems.

At the SFIC plenary meeting on 12 November, the DK delegation gave a presentation on Innovation Center Denmark as a partnership between the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark with the two strategic objectives of strengthening Danish research, higher education and innovation in order to create economic growth as well as marketing Denmark's strengths and playing an important role as facilitator of international collaboration.

c. Publication of workshop reports

SFIC elaborated **workshop reports** of its seminars and events, which are accessible to the wider public when appropriate. In this respect, the following reports were added to the SFIC Secretariat (Consilium) website as well as to the relevant Commission website⁷:

- Peer Learning Activity Report: "SFIC and the national administrations and the role of SFIC at national level", 5 March 2013, Finnish Permanent Representation, Brussels.
- "Approaching Brazil - SFIC workshop", 17 June 2013, Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO), Brussels.

d. Information sharing by the SFIC Secretariat

In addition to the above-mentioned information sharing practices and to the usual secretariat practices, the SFIC Secretariat has distributed several **Standing Information Points** ahead of SFIC plenary meetings on a variety of issues. Moreover, as announced at the SFIC plenary meeting on 12 November 2013, the SFIC Secretariat started to disseminate bi-weekly e-mails with information or action requests from the Commission and/or other SFIC Members and Observers to harmonise current practice and reduce the number of e-mails sent to delegations. Since November 2013, the SFIC Secretariat is sending a **SFIC bi-weekly INFO** every two weeks with relevant documents and information points to all SFIC delegations.

⁷ All reports are available at:

- Consilium website: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/policies/era/sfic/sfic-advice-\(opinions,-reports\)?lang=en](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/policies/era/sfic/sfic-advice-(opinions,-reports)?lang=en)
- Commission website: <http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/index.cfm?lg=en&pg=sfic-general>

4) *Internal organisation*

a. *Election of SFIC Chair and SFIC Vice-Chair*

At the SFIC plenary meeting on 18 June 2013, **Mr. Dan ANDRÉE (SE)** was elected as SFIC Chair for a two-year mandate and took over the chairmanship of the Forum, replacing Ms. Riitta MUSTONEN (FI), who had been SFIC Chair since 20 June 2011.

At the SFIC plenary meeting on 12 November 2013, **Ms. Florence LELAIT (FR)** was elected as SFIC Vice-Chair, replacing Ms. Anna Cristina NEVES (PT), who had been SFIC Vice-Chair since 11 June 2012 and Task Force Chair since 1 January 2011.

b. *Update of the SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014 and meetings table*

During the beginning of 2013, the final discussions and work towards the adoption of the **SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014** took place. The new Work Programme was adopted via written procedure on 4 March 2013, following several discussions at Task Force and plenary level. The document has its focus on four different priorities and areas of action, each one with specific objectives and goals:

- Added value and visibility;
- Common priorities and joint initiatives and actions;
- Analysis, collection and sharing of information;
- Networking and coordination.

During the SFIC plenary meeting on 18 June 2013 and in order to reflect the Council conclusions from May 2013, the Forum agreed that the focus of SFIC activities should be on those already set out in the Work Programme that were highlighted by the Council conclusions, and should be considered as main agenda items for meetings during 2013 and 2014. Moreover, it was also agreed to continuously update and distribute a provisional meetings table with tentative agenda points for the upcoming meetings as well as a set of calendar tables with milestones for the future months (similar to the current ERAC approach).

c. Revision of the SFIC Rules of Procedure

The Forum had a discussion on potential scenarios for SFIC working methods and procedures at the 12 November 2013 plenary in view of a future revision of the SFIC Rules of Procedure⁸. During the SFIC plenary meeting on 12 November 2013, the Commission also announced that it will stop the reimbursements of travel costs for SFIC Task Force meetings as of 2014, to streamline the SFIC procedures with practices in other ERA-related groups. Such decision was coupled with the withdrawal of the Commission from its tasks as Task Force Secretariat (announced in the Task Force meeting on 9 December 2013).

⁸ The new SFIC Rules of Procedure (ERAC-SFIC 1351/14) were adopted via written procedure on 14 March 2014.

Annexes to the Fifth SFIC Report of Activities - SFIC Annual Report 2013

- Annex I: SFIC and its mandate
- Annex II: Summary of SFIC events during 2013 and attendance to other meetings and events by the SFIC Chair, Vice-Chair or SFIC delegates on behalf of SFIC
- Annex III: SFIC Chair's advice to the Irish Presidency on Council conclusions on International Cooperation
- Annex IV: SFIC opinion on the First ERA Progress Report

SFIC and its mandate

SFIC is a strategic forum and an advisory body to the Council and the Commission with a view to implementing a European Partnership in the field of international scientific and technological cooperation (S&T cooperation). Member States and the Commission are Members of the Forum while countries associated to the 7th Framework Programme have an observership status. SFIC's objective is to facilitate the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of ERA by the sharing of information and consultation between the partners with a view to identifying common priorities which could lead to coordinated or joint initiatives.

The rationale for such framework is provided by the Council conclusions of 2 December 2008⁹, in which the Council invited Member States and the Commission “*to form a European Partnership in the field of international scientific and technological cooperation with a view to implementing a European strategy and to collaborate within a dedicated configuration of CREST to drive forward the European Partnership for S&T cooperation*”. The mandate annexed to the conclusions includes the main tasks of SFIC:

- Systematically sharing and structuring information on the S&T cooperation activities and objectives (whether ongoing or planned) of the various partners;
- Pooling relevant knowledge concerning third countries, in particular analyses of their S&T resources and capabilities;
- Ensuring regular consultation between the partners in order to identify their respective objectives and common priorities in terms of S&T cooperation with third countries;
- Where appropriate, coordinating activities of a similar nature implemented by Member States and the Community (in 'variable geometry');
- If necessary, proposing initiatives to be implemented with appropriate ways and means;
- Networking of Member States' and the Commission's scientific advisors in key third countries.

⁹ Official Journal of the European Union, C 18, 24.1.2009, p. 11-13.

Summary of SFIC events during 2013

<i>Event</i>	<i>Number of meetings</i>	<i>Dates</i>
SFIC Plenary	3	19 March 2013 18 June 2013 12 November 2013
SFIC Task Force	4	31 Jan - 1 Feb 2013 24 April 2013 17 September 2013 9 December 2013
Workshops/seminars	2 (total)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Peer-Learning Activity (PLA): "SFIC and the national administrations and the role of SFIC at national level", Finnish Permanent Representation, Brussels. ▪ "Approaching Brazil - SFIC workshop", Belgian Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO), Brussels. 	1 1	5 March 2013 17 June 2013

*Attendance to other meetings and events
by the SFIC Chair, Vice-Chair or SFIC delegates on behalf of SFIC*

- Urbanisation Workshop in Beijing, China (30-31 May 2013) - SFIC Chair
- Lithuanian Presidency conference "High Level Eastern Partnership Summit" , Vilnius (30 September - 1 October 2013) - SFIC Chair
- "Destination Europe Conference" in San Francisco (December 2013) - SFIC Chair and SFIC delegates
- Other "Destination Europe Conferences" in Boston (February 2013) and Washington (April 2013) - SFIC delegates

**SFIC CHAIR'S ADVICE TO THE IRISH PRESIDENCY ON COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

Version 13/3/13 (final)

The Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU is considering the adoption of Council conclusions on international cooperation at the Competitiveness Council in May 2013. Therefore, the SFIC Chair has decided to provide input to the discussion in the form of "key messages" that should be a valuable input to contribute to the discussions without overlapping with the Council decision-making bodies. The SFIC Chair will forward such "key messages" to the Council Research Working Party Chair. The IE Presidency has requested the reception of the input after the 18-19 February Competitiveness Council, as the RECH WP may then start its deliberations.

KEY MESSAGES PROPOSED BY THE SFIC CHAIR:

- International cooperation in research and innovation plays a vital role in strengthening the Union's excellence and attractiveness in research and innovation as well as its economic, industrial and technological competitiveness in the context of the research-innovation-education knowledge triangle, as an essential contribution to improve the well-being of European citizens and to tackle grand and societal challenges.
- The external dimension is an essential, cross-cutting and integral part of the European Research Area and deepening and strengthening the partnership between the Commission and the Member States via the Strategic Forum for international S&T Cooperation (SFIC) is an important element of the strategic approach towards enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation. This approach should be developed in close cooperation with Associated Countries.

- The work of SFIC has been substantial in mutual learning and in promoting coordination of international cooperation priorities of Member States with the different SFIC initiatives and priorities of national and regional funding organisations. Building on this, the promotion of a more systemic interaction with the main public and private research and innovation stakeholders is needed.
- The SFIC India initiative and the building up of the Indo-European Research and Innovation Partnership has shown the added value of joint action and shed light on the successful paths for enhanced cooperation towards third countries where such actions are appropriate. Similar impact should be sought for with the initiatives vis-à-vis with China, the USA and Brazil.
- Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), is the main Union's tool to promote and support cooperation with third countries. In the pursuit of creating synergies between the national and the Union's initiatives on international R&I cooperation, SFIC's contribution to the design and development of the foreseen Commission's multi-annual roadmaps is to be envisaged.
- Coordination between STI policies and the Union's external and development policy objectives should be encouraged and reflected in a closer interaction and mutual support. STI synergies with other Union policies should also be sought.

SFIC opinion on the First ERA Progress Report

The ERA Progress Report¹⁰ has a short paragraph on international cooperation which concludes that the realisation of ERA will ‘facilitate international cooperation in research and innovation and create a global level playing field’.

As underlined in the Council Conclusions on international cooperation from May 2013¹¹, the international dimension remains an important part of the ERA. This should be reflected in the on-going process. SFIC considers that the international dimension is not dealt with in a satisfactory way in the ERA Progress Report.

It is not clear from the Report/supporting documents how international co-operation is being monitored and assessed at a country or EU level. It therefore makes it difficult to use the ERA Progress Report as a baseline for assessing the external component of the ERA.

In this context it is also important to distinguish between the integration of international cooperation in the five priorities on one hand and the external dimension of ERA on the other hand.

Finally, SFIC recalls the importance of Horizon 2020 as the most important instrument at EU-level to support and leverage R&I cooperation with third countries and the external dimension of ERA. It should be used in a pro-active manner to support these areas.

SFIC is prepared to further elaborate on the external dimension of ERA as an input to the next ERA Progress Report.

Conclusion: *SFIC recommends that the external dimension should be much more elaborated in the ERA Progress Report 2014 – both at EU-level and MS-level, notably by moving towards the integration of the “international cooperation monitoring mechanism” into the ERA Monitoring Mechanism.*

¹⁰ Doc. 13812/13 (COM(2013) 637 final)

¹¹ Doc. 10318/13