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**SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL
RESEARCH COMMITTEE**
**Strategic Forum for International
S&T Cooperation**

Secretariat

CREST-SFIC 1354/10

NOTE

Subject : First Report of Activities of the Strategic Forum for International S&T
Cooperation (SFIC)

Delegations will find attached the first annual report of activities of SFIC to the Council and the Commission as adopted at the meeting of the SFIC on 28 April 2010.

Draft First Report of Activities of the Strategy Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC)

18 February 2009 - 12 February 2010

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I. Report summary and conclusions

Implementing the new partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation

This document is based on the reporting duties of SFIC as stated in the “Mandate for CREST Concerning a Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation¹”. Accordingly, progress is reported on achieving the realisation the objectives of the European Partnership between the Commission and the Member States.

Towards a European strategy in international science and technology cooperation

Europe has a longstanding tradition in international Science & Technology (S&T) cooperation with non-European countries. European research organisations continuously opened new areas of cooperation and developed new international cooperation approaches. The European Union and its Member States foster their international S&T cooperation activities through their bilateral and multilateral S&T agreements and related investments. They are often similar in terms of general objectives, topics, and instruments, and do not necessarily take into account opportunities for mutual collaboration, leading to potential overlaps.

The new Europe 2020 strategy, to be adopted in June 2010², however, is expected to demand more coordinated activities amongst actors. This will in return enable Europe to speak with a consistent voice in international fora and with its main international partners, when appropriate. To make the ERA³ a reality public authorities at all levels should seek to jointly promote consistency between their S&T cooperation activities and develop joint initiatives that give Europe leadership in addressing global challenges, reaching sustainable development goals, and boosting the competitiveness of its industry. The new European Partnership for International S&T Cooperation has started to contribute to these objectives by helping to step up scientific and technological cooperation and by supporting Europe to be an effective player at the world scene.

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 Commission's communication of 3 March 2010 "Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", COM (2010) 2020 final.
Conclusions of the European Council of 25/26 March 2010, doc. EUCO 7/10.

³ Competitiveness Council of 2 December 2008: Conclusions on a definition of a "2020 Vision for the European Research Area". Official Journal of the European Union C 25, 31.1.2009, p.1-4.

A more coordinated and more consistent approach in international S&T cooperation (between the Member States on one hand, and between Member States and the European Union, on the other hand) should help build the critical mass needed to provide an effective response to major societal challenges which are increasingly global. It is also expected to help Member States' and Europe's competitiveness through collaboration with the emerging/BRIC economies. Finally, it will enable Europe to participate more effectively in agenda setting in international fora, to convey a consistent message and to speak with 'one voice' where appropriate.

Following the invitation made by the Council of the European Union in December 2008⁴, the EU Member States and the European Commission have, therefore, started to work closer together in a new European partnership for international S&T cooperation. The Council also established the necessary institutional setting to guide and propel this partnership, namely the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC).

As set out in its mandate, SFIC will "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, and coordinating activities and positions vis-à-vis third countries and within international fora."

To achieve this, SFIC has started establishing effective and efficient working structures, strengthening the impact of the international S&T cooperation activities of SFIC members and fostering the international dimension of the European Research Area (ERA).

Throughout 2009, SFIC developed a step-by-step approach, starting with proposals for pilot initiatives in areas where cooperation between SFIC members could provide added-value. The pilot initiatives endorsed by SFIC are to be implemented in a 'variable geometry' approach. Experiences gained in this process will serve as basis for a broader-based strategy, with a differentiated approach to the three main country groupings: industrialized countries, emerging/BRIC economies and developing countries.⁴ Additionally, a strategic approach in view of multilateral and bi-regional research cooperation such as EU-Africa or EU-Latin America will be explored.

⁴ Throughout this report the country "categories" are illustrative only as SFIC has not yet adopted a definitive approach to this issue.

Progress by SFIC to date

So far, SFIC has made the following progress:

- Adoption of rules of procedures and a work programme for 2009/10;
- The setting-up of working structures, notably two temporary ad hoc Task Forces (TF I⁵ and TF II) mandated to help SFIC in the preparation of its decisions and orientations;
- Preparation of concrete activities aiming at meeting SFIC objectives, notably to:
 - work towards more structured information sharing and knowledge pooling through the development of a dedicated IT-tool (Sharepoint System);
 - launch the EU-India pilot initiative focusing on ‘water related challenges’ serving as an example for a common approach for similar initiatives on a range of relevant topics, e.g., with other emerging/BRIC countries;
 - continue to work on a thematic pilot initiative on ‘energy’, by focusing on the strategic cooperation with an industrialised country;
 - deepen the analysis of the different initiatives/actions undertaken by the Member States and the European Union with and vis-à-vis Latin America and Africa, notably in the context of the EU-Africa S&T cooperation strategy such as the 8th partnership on S&T in the context of the EU-Africa partnership or the G8 initiative on Health Research Centres in Africa;
 - contribute, as appropriate, to international Summits, Ministerial meetings and bi-regional policy dialogues;
 - strengthen the networking of science counsellors in major partner countries.

⁵ On 12 February 2010, TF1 completed its work.

Outlook for 2010

In 2010, SFIC will continue to implement its work programme, including the following priority areas:

- Developing the two Pilot Initiatives (India and Energy) as basis for a general strategy development with the respective country groupings;
- Analysing how a more coordinated approach with other country groupings could shape up. Depending on the results of such analysis, work could focus on the US as example for an industrialized country and on Africa as example for developing regions. Any activities with African countries should build upon the relevant existing mechanisms, notably the initiatives undertaken by the G8/G20, as well as the EU-African Union (AU) 8th Partnership; for the emerging/BRIC countries, China and Brazil may be taken into focus.

The important role of the international dimension in the context of the further development of ERA and its related instruments both at national and European Union level should be taken duly into consideration.

Conclusions:

1. **Potential:** SFIC's work has revealed a potential for the strengthening of the international dimension of the European Research Area and for addressing global challenges in a coordinated way, based on strong existing bilateral and international S&T cooperation programmes of the EU and its Member States. This potential for synergies is supported by the fact that the EU and its Member States often share similar objectives and apply the same mix of instruments in international cooperation (see chapter 2.3). Therefore, SFIC could be instrumental in enhancing consistency and coherence in international S&T cooperation.
2. **Commitment:** EU Member States and the European Commission have committed themselves to more closely coordinate their activities in international S&T cooperation (including as regards the EU RTD Framework Programme). The new partnership proved to be a sound basis for working towards joint international S&T activities – in a 'variable geometry' approach.

3. **Involvement:** The new partnership between the European Commission and Member States has had a positive effect on the networking of European science counselors in third countries as well as on strategic discussions in order to underpin a more coherent view between the EU and its Member States. The appropriate role of SFIC should be further defined in view of preparing bi-regional S&T platforms for dialogue, e.g. in the context of the EU-Africa Partnership.
4. **Resources:** Developing SFIC to its full potential and implementing the new common European partnership for international S&T cooperation implies substantial commitment, in terms of people and financial resources. Activities at European level have to be based on EU and national policy priorities and be carefully prepared internationally. The collection and supply of relevant information and the appropriate alignment of international and national priorities alone involves a number of actors that have to be taken into consideration by each SFIC-member.

SFIC suggests that the Council and the Commission:

- take note of the progress made by the Forum so far, including its proposed coordinated initiatives as well as the priority initiatives proposed by SFIC for 2010;
- consider ways and means to support the implementation of the India-Pilot-Initiative so that Member States and the Commission could best contribute to the success of this initiative;
- build upon the SFIC initiatives when developing European strategy on international S&T cooperation, and to work towards coordinated positions in view of research-related topics in international summits and fora, when appropriate;
- provide the necessary political support and appropriate means to reinforce the work of SFIC as an important contribution to the opening of the ERA to the world.

II. Detailed progress report

1) Background and Mandate

Modern high-technology and frontier research are complex, knowledge and resource intensive, and often spanning across traditional boundaries of science. Public research is nationally and internationally linked and part of huge knowledge networks. Research in multinational companies is often decentralised with project members at different locations within the same country but also very often at locations in different countries. The locations of knowledge, competences and resources steer the knowledge flows. As a consequence, the international cooperation of public research actors and companies plays an increasing role, both for the national competitiveness as well as for new knowledge creation in general.

Internationalisation of S&T can take various forms such as the mobility of researchers, cooperation between partners from different countries, research activities from institutions abroad, informal knowledge exchange, and systematic exploitation and application of foreign knowledge e.g. by being present in other countries for acquisition of know-how and networking. International S&T cooperation is a multi-faceted and multi-purpose policy field, that is mainly driven today by the science community itself but which is increasingly confronted with the need to respond to broader policy objectives. At the same time, international S&T cooperation plays an increasing role in the functioning of the science system itself (with regard to science excellence) as well as with regard to seizing the opportunities of S&T for Europe's competitiveness.

Thus, the understanding of the process of internationalisation of S&T is indispensable for policy making and taking strategic decisions. The emergence of an EU international cooperation strategy can build upon activities at both national and European Union level – as European countries increasingly have high-level internationalisation strategies in place and national research funding agencies are increasingly coordinating efforts and even cooperating on joint programmes. In parallel, research performing institutions at the national level (and especially Higher Education Institutions) are increasingly including internationalisation as part of their formal strategies.

By working together, Member States and the European Commission can achieve much more, both within the European Union and worldwide. Working together will increase the attractiveness of Europe's research and foster better conditions for investment and acquisitions in key markets. Member States and the EU need to define, to the extent possible, common research policy priorities with third countries to draw most benefit from coordinated initiatives and actions.

A well coordinated and effectively communicated approach to international S&T strategy can enable Europe to develop a consistent common position, where appropriate, on key global challenges and will help the European Union to participate more effectively in agenda setting in international fora such as the OECD, and in particular those with a UN focus such as UNESCO, WHO, and the ITU.

Europe's foremost challenge consequently is to develop a strategic approach that corresponds to the very nature of international S&T cooperation and at the same time incorporates the new requirements vis-à-vis international S&T cooperation.

Mandate

In the Council Conclusions⁶ of 2 December 2008, 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”.

⁶ Official Journal of the European Union, C 18, 24.1.2009, p. 11-13.

The main tasks of SFIC are:

- 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 ("what and with whom?");
- 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.

2) Progress during the first reporting year

2.1) Progress in setting up SFIC working structures

The constitutive meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation took place on 18 February 2009 in Brussels and was chaired by Ms. Miroslava KOPICOVA, representative of the Czech Presidency of the EU. SFIC decided unanimously to elect Mr. Volker RIEKE (DE) as Chair for the period of two years, in accordance with the Council Conclusions of 2 December 2008. The Forum agreed on meeting 4 times a year. Further to the constitutive meeting, three additional SFIC Meetings were held in Brussels during 2009 (25 May, 21 October and 18 December). SFIC adopted its own rules of procedures which are based on the CREST rules. The secretariat for SFIC is provided by the Council Secretariat.

Following its second meeting of 25 May 2009, SFIC adopted a common work programme for the period 2009/2010 on 10 July 2009 by written procedure⁷. The work programme reflects the SFIC mandate as stated in the Council Conclusions of 2 December 2008 and it also builds on the preparatory work of the CREST OMC Working Group “Internationalisation of R&D”. The work programme defines the following objectives, providing the framework for specific activities:

- establishing efficient and effective working structures to organise the internal information exchange and collect knowledge and data on S&T activities of third countries;
- identifying a set of common priorities by concentrating on common challenges and other common research priorities identified;
- seeking to foster the international dimension of the European Research Area.

To implement the activities proposed in the work programme, two ad-hoc task forces were established with a mandate to prepare the ground for decisions of SFIC:

- The first ad-hoc Task Force dealt with the issue of ‘information sharing’ (TF1), and was set up to establish effective working structures and to encourage the exchange of information and documents between SFIC members.
- The second Task Force on ‘priority setting’ (TF2) was established to prepare the decisions for the thematic and regional priorities SFIC should deal with and consider the appropriate instruments for the implementation of the activities concerned.

The Commission provided the secretariat for both Task Forces.

With regard to the role of the associated countries to FP7, SFIC agreed to follow the CREST practice and invite associated countries to FP7 as observers to SFIC meetings. Nevertheless, SFIC reserves its right to meet amongst Member States and the Commission only, when specific issues on the respective agenda so require. The associated countries to FP7 were invited as observers for SFIC meetings starting with the meeting of 25 May 2009.

⁷ Doc. CREST-SFIC 1356/09.

2.2) *Mapping of international cooperation activities between SFIC members and third countries*

The exchange of information between SFIC members constitutes a central element of effective working structures of SFIC as well as allows for the mapping of activities.

SFIC agreed that its work should build to a large part on already available mapping exercises, and if necessary to complete and amend such information. The main sources of available information used for mapping are the reports of the CREST OMC working group on “Internationalisation of R&D”⁸ as well as information from science counsellors of the EU and Member States, or from other studies commissioned at EU or national level. SFIC members will remain a key source of information for SFIC.

TF1 suggested to SFIC to set up a web-based IT tool, a Sharepoint System as an electronic tool for information sharing. The prototype is available, ready to use by SFIC and its Task Forces and will be tested in 2010 for developing specific joint pilot initiatives. All SFIC and Task Force members received access to allow for efficient information sharing between all partners.

The Task Force has recommended that information be shared, where appropriate, on:

- S&T agreements between SFIC members and third countries;
- outcomes of Joint Commissions or similar formal meetings;
- the activities of SFIC member science counsellors and attaches in Embassies and consulates in third countries, including a calendar of events;
- information about the S&T systems, budgets and priorities of third countries, particularly mechanisms for international collaboration;
- information about the S&T systems, budgets and priorities in SFIC members for international collaboration;
- Output of studies and networks (e.g. INCONets, ERANets).

To keep the amount of shared information to a minimum, only information necessary for concrete initiatives in the focus of SFIC should be collected. Data analysis and drafting of synopses and summaries should be performed centrally by a “SFIC information officer”, placed, for instance, at the Council Secretariat or at an appropriate Commission service.

⁸ Reports of the CREST OMC Working Group are available at <http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/index.cfm?lg=en&pg=initiatives>

2.3) *Analysis of the scope, coherence and complementarities of the various activities of SFIC members*

The identification of complementary and overlapping initiatives and strategies of single SFIC members is essential to develop a European approach in international S&T cooperation.

The overall result of analysis so far is that many SFIC members implement international S&T policies based on bilateral S&T agreements or arrangements with third countries. The mix of instruments includes enabling instruments (such as mobility programmes, workshops, etc.), joint projects, institutional cooperation and outreach activities such as marketing measures. In addition, the analysis highlighted that until now SFIC members work in parallel without seeking opportunities for pooling of resources and cooperation.

The established Sharepoint System will simplify information sharing, the more active involvement of science counsellors both from the Member States and the European Commission as well as the work of Task Force 2 whose members will contribute to providing the necessary analytical support.

Task Force 2 on "Priority Setting" decided to base its work on the work done by the CREST OMC working group on "Internationalisation of R&D", in particular on the already available country reports on India, China, Russia and Brazil. The country reports provided a comprehensive synopsis on bilateral agreements, on the different scientific areas and drivers behind the choice of cooperation as well as on different instruments most frequently used by the different Member States when fostering international cooperation activities.

SFIC strives to ensure that its activities concerning international science and technology cooperation are coherent and complementary with those of the four additional ERA initiatives⁹ of 2008. A first information exchange with the High Level Group for Joint Programming (GPC) has taken place. As most of the JP-initiatives have an international global dimension, further exchange with SFIC is expected to be useful. Cooperation was also sought with the CREST Working Group on Knowledge Transfer (KT) and the SET-Plan. SFIC will endeavour to ensure a regular exchange and coherence of measures with these ERA-initiatives and lend its support and expertise as regards the development of the international dimension of these initiatives.

2.4) *Identification of common priorities and proposals for measures to implement them*

Identifying common priorities and how to implement them is a key task of SFIC. Priorities will be mainly focused on common global challenges such as energy, health or climate change. The process of agreeing upon objectives, strategic partner countries/regions and activities that are of common interest and where a joint approach is of added-value, will be of a longer term and continuing nature. The aim of SFIC is to develop a common understanding of the international research priorities of SFIC members - and develop a coherent approach for coordinated and joint activities.

TF2 was mandated to prepare the ground for decisions by SFIC with respect to:

- definition of selection criteria of international cooperation (global challenges and other relevant S&T areas) and with a strategic focus on selected sub-areas;
- analysis of the type of instruments available and not covered today from an integrated perspective und the knowledge triangle paradigm;
- consideration of the appropriate instruments for the implementation of the activities concerned.

⁹ (1) researchers' careers and mobility, (2) research infrastructures, (3) knowledge sharing and (4) joint programming. (Commission Green Paper of 4 April 2007 - The European Research Area: New Perspectives, COM(2007) 161 final).

Preliminary analysis by the CREST OMC Working Group on 'Internationalisation of R&D' had already showed that the EU and its Member States base their international S&T cooperation on a broad set of general criteria. The multitude of actors involved in implementing international S&T cooperation, the variety of criteria or drivers, the different funding structures and the parallel use of *bottom-up* and *top-down* intervention strategies make it difficult to define 'universal' criteria for developing choices for both S&T priorities and instruments. Therefore, and for practical reasons, TF2 largely endorsed the criteria for prioritisation that were identified already by the CREST OMC Working Group 'Internationalisation of R&D'. This approach allows the design and implementation of ERA wide activities in international S&T cooperation in practice, within the required policy framework.

The pilot initiatives endorsed by SFIC are implemented in a 'variable geometry' approach. The experiences gained in this process will finally serve as basis for a broader-based strategy, with a differentiated approach to the main country groupings: industrialised countries, emerging/BRIC economies and developing countries.

Based on these considerations and building on existing analysis, SFIC has decided to implement this part of its mandate by preparing 'pilot initiatives' both in geographical and in thematic terms. SFIC has chosen 'India' as a first pilot for a geographic priority and 'energy research' as a first pilot for a thematic priority.

Analysis of the S&T cooperation with India showed that it was a priority for a number of Member States and the EU. Furthermore, the Ministerial meeting in 2007 clearly highlighted in its Conclusions, the New Delhi Declaration¹⁰, the importance of the European Commission and EU Member States to work together in order to promote a clear and strong European dimension across various S&T cooperative actions with India.

¹⁰ Available at http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/new_delhi_communique_signed_en.pdf

The EU-India Pilot initiative on “water related challenges”

Building upon the analysis of the CREST OMC working group on “Internationalization of R&D” further analyses were undertaken by TF2 concerning on “why, what and how” cooperation with India is supported at bilateral level. SFIC stressed the importance to put forward concrete topics for cooperation with India, such as “Water related challenges” suggested by the Task Force (including water management, water infrastructure and green biotechnology), whilst being open to expansion to other themes later. An overview on current national and EU initiatives on water related challenges will be developed with a view to developing a strategic European research agenda vis-à-vis and with India in the longer term. The initiative is based on a series of different activities ranging from networking/clustering of existing and ongoing national and EU projects, to opening up "bilateral" laboratories in India to other EU Member States participation and a conference in India in autumn 2010. A technical group of interested SFIC members will carry forward the necessary work for developing this pilot initiative.

To get the necessary political endorsement, to start building a joint strategic research agenda based on mutual trust and interest and to raise visibility of this pilot initiative, SFIC finds it essential to approach the Indian partners early in 2010. SFIC therefore recommends that a high-level meeting of officials would give an important political signal, generate the indispensable commitment of our Indian partners and set the ground for the package of pilot activities.

Pilot Initiative Energy

For the Pilot Initiative "Energy" close interaction with the Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET-PLAN)¹¹ has been and will be further sought. SFIC highlighted that energy could be particularly relevant topic for cooperation with emerging/BRIC economies as well industrialised countries. However, it was agreed that no parallel structures should be created and that the activities of the EU-US Energy Council should also be taken into account. To this end, individual information exchange with the members of the SET-PLAN Steering Group at national level is envisaged as is the participation of SFIC in subsequent SET-PLAN Steering Group meeting(s) and vice versa when appropriate. A workshop on international energy (research) cooperation back-to-back with the SET-PLAN Steering Group would create synergies between both groups and mutually reinforce each others' activities.

SFIC involvement in meeting preparations of platforms for dialogue

SFIC's role to be played in the preparation of meetings of forthcoming established dialogue platforms¹² was discussed. In general terms, SFIC considered that it should be kept informed by the acting EU-Presidency, notably, on upcoming Summits and Ministerial Meetings. SFIC should hold strategic policy orientation discussions in advance of major Summits/Ministerial meetings and relevant international events.

EU-Latin America

SFIC followed in particular the EU-Latin America cooperation dealing with innovation and research (Ministerial conference on 14 May 2010 and summit on 18/19 May 2010 in Madrid) as learning example on how SFIC could contribute to such international events. This Summit will include a joint declaration for research and technology. Any SFIC contribution would be made available through the appropriate channels, depending on the events concerned.

¹¹ COM (2007) 723 final.

¹² See summary outcome of proceedings of SFIC of 21 October 2009, doc. 1351/10.

EU-Africa

SFIC acknowledged that there is scope for improving the coherence of the activities with Africa at various levels, including the implementation of the 8th Partnership and the G8 initiative on Health Research Centres in Africa. SFIC will continue to provide input to the development of a high-level EU-Africa S&T dialogue, taking into consideration the EU-AU Summit in the second half of 2010.

Strengthening the networking of science counsellors

As regards the strengthening of the networking of science counsellors, SFIC found it important to involve science counsellors from the beginning in any discussions about a particular target country, to distribute to science counsellors relevant SFIC documents as a matter of course, and to invite science counsellors from other SFIC members (and associated countries, if appropriate) for a debriefing following a joint commission or similar meetings.

SFIC has welcomed the important work science counsellors already pursue in partner countries and encouraged them to continue and intensify their activities. SFIC, however, pointed out that SFIC members need to actively engage in a good flow of information in both directions and encourage cooperation with their respective science counsellors.

Involvement of S&T stakeholders

SFIC committed itself to identify and develop regular contacts with relevant stakeholders worldwide. As a first step SFIC was visible in the ERA Conference "Working together to strengthen research in Europe" in October 2009, with the aim to start engaging in an active consultation with a wide range of key stakeholders at national as well as European and global level. The specific discussion at this Conference on international cooperation can be considered as a first step to involve S&T stakeholders actively in SFIC work. It should be ensured that SFIC will not work in a vacuum, but will involve S&T stakeholders actively to identify most appropriate topics and instruments for joint initiatives of Member States and the Commission with and towards international partner countries.