

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

Secretariat

**Brussels, 28 January 2015
(OR. en)**

ERAC-SFIC 1352/15

NOTE

Subject: SFIC opinion on the Report on the implementation of the Strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation of the European Commission

Delegations will find attached the opinion of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) on the Report on the implementation of the Strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation of the European Commission, as adopted via written procedure on 27 January 2015.

SFIC opinion on the Report on the implementation of the Strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation of the European Commission

The Communication of the European Commission (EC) ‘*Enhancing and Focusing EU International Cooperation in Research and Innovation: a Strategic Approach*’ proposes “to enhance and focus the Union’s international cooperation activities in research and innovation, in particular with a view to preparing the implementation of Horizon 2020”¹. The strategy aims at strengthening the Union’s excellence and attractiveness in research and innovation as well as its economic and industrial competitiveness, at tackling global societal challenges and at supporting the Union’s external policies.

With the ‘*Report on the implementation of the strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation*’ of 15 September 2014, the Commission provides for the first time extensive up-to-date information about the progress of the implementation. The progress report is accompanied by a Staff Working Document containing the ‘*Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation*’² (MAR) with eleven key partner countries and regions selected on the basis of promising synergies and complementarities, expected access to new or emerging markets, potential for contributing to the EU's international commitments (e.g. the Millennium Development Goals) and the existence of adequate legal and administrative frameworks for cooperation.

SFIC welcomes the report and the roadmaps and supports the Commission’s conclusion that “progress has been made in implementing the strategy”, but also that “this has only been a starting point and more has to be done”.

Taking this into consideration, SFIC would like to emphasise the following aspects:

¹ COM(2012) 497

² COM(2014) 567, SWD(2014) 276

1. SFIC WELCOMES the dual approach adopted by the Commission to further develop the international dimension of Horizon 2020, combining the general opening of the programme with targeted international cooperation activities. SFIC recalls that according to preliminary results of the first Horizon 2020 calls, the participation rate of third countries has receded. In order to ensure an international involvement in Horizon 2020 that is “at least at the level of the FP7”³, SFIC calls on the Commission to regularly provide information and analysis on international cooperation in Horizon 2020 to the respective programme committees configurations (including but not limited to the strategic configuration and SC6) and SFIC for further discussion.
2. SFIC SUPPORTS the Commission’s communication campaign ‘*Horizon 2020 – Open to the world*’ and underlines the important role of the NCPs in EU and partner countries when it comes to promoting Horizon 2020. With the INCONTACT network, the Commission has established an important tool for awareness-raising and communication activities, particularly in third countries. In line with the recommendations of the Horizon 2020 Advisory Board for International Cooperation (15/07/2014)⁴, SFIC recommends reinstating a dedicated support structure/network within the NCPs, in order to ensure continuous communication and dedicated support for the participants in the EU and in third countries.
3. SFIC WELCOMES the improvements made in the MAR following the consultation of Member States (MS) and the workshop organised by the Commission on 26 March 2014, notably taking into account the short-term recommendations given in the SFIC opinion from 10 June 2014⁵. Since national stakeholder consultations are a prerequisite for this exercise, SFIC ENCOURAGES the Commission to provide sufficient time and a clear outline of its expectations, so that MS can produce constructive feedback.

³ Council decision 2013/743/EU of 3 December 2013 establishing the specific programme implementing Horizon 2020 (recital 3).

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetailDoc&id=15677&no=1>

⁵ SFIC opinion on the Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation (doc. ERAC-SFIC 1359/14).

4. SFIC ENCOURAGES the Commission to build upon this good starting point in the next MAR process, especially in view of implementing the long-term recommendations given in the respective SFIC opinion, namely to realise a structured consultation and implementation process for the MAR. The objective is to achieve synchronisation with the Horizon 2020 programming cycle, to foster a challenge-based instead of thematic approach and to develop the regional dimension of international cooperation.
5. However, several MS recommendations issued during the workshops of 26 March 2014 have not been taken into account in the final version of the document. In the perspective of the preparation of the future MAR, SFIC therefore INVITES the Commission to provide a clearer rationale for its choices of countries and research areas in order to avoid contradiction with and to foster synergies between EU and MS strategy.
6. SFIC RECOMMENDS further involving other Directorates General of the Commission as well as the EEAS in the future development of the roadmaps in order to achieve a truly challenge-based approach. Given the global dimension of the MAR, this would also help connect the MAR not only with Horizon 2020, but with instruments of the EU's external action (e.g. EuropeAid, ENP, Trade, CFSP).
7. SFIC RECALLS that added value with regard to the external dimension of the ERA in the implementation of the Union's strategy on international cooperation can only be achieved through a joint approach of EU and MS as foreseen in the strategy⁶. Thus SFIC reiterates its recommendation to systematically include MS in the further implementation of its strategy for international cooperation and the MAR.

⁶ COM(2012) 497, p. 10.

8. In view of the development of the SFIC work programme for 2015/16, SFIC WILL ENSURE fulfilling the requirements set by the Council in its Conclusions of 30 May 2013⁷. SFIC's advice might for example address priorities of cooperation with international key partner countries (e.g. based on its country initiatives), monitoring approaches, the Commission's strategic approach towards international fora and multilateral initiatives (e.g. Belmont Forum) or the political dialogues with third countries and regions, in which the MS through SFIC should be more actively involved.
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⁷ Council Conclusions on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach" of 30 May 2013 (doc. 10318/13).