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From: SFIC Secretariat  
To: Delegations

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Subject: Summary conclusions of the 36th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 7 March 2018

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The meeting was chaired by Ms Rozenn Saunier (SFIC Chair, FR).

**1. Adoption of the agenda**

After welcoming the new SFIC delegates, the agenda was adopted.

**2. "Tour de table" of national and Commission activities**

Delegations provided information on recent and upcoming international cooperation in research and innovation (INCO) activities in their countries.

In addition, the Commission provided an update on the joint committee meetings the Commission will have with Canada and Mexico in March 2018.

The Commission further clarified that the third INCO progress report will be published as part of the future legislative proposal for the 9th EU framework programme for research and innovation (FP9), as an annex to the impact assessment.

Delegations pointed out that with the previous INCO progress reports, published in 2014 and 2016, there was a useful exchange of information between SFIC and the Commission so as to ensure the report incorporated the INCO activities at national level. They also sought clarification on how INCO activities would be incorporated in the different pillars of FP9.

The Commission stressed that all possible efforts were being made to attain a level of completeness of the report and that it would be discussed in the Council and at the SFIC level in the context of the discussions on FP9.

The SFIC Chair concluded the discussion by thanking delegations for the useful exchange of information.

### **3. Review of ERA governance foreseen in 2018**

The Chair informed delegations that the ERAC Steering Board discussed the review of the ERA governance structure at its last meeting in January 2018. The terms of reference for the 2018 review would be adopted at the next ERAC plenary meeting on 15-16 March 2018, and a rapporteur would be appointed for carrying out the work that should be completed in September 2018. The Chair listed the points in the terms of reference which will concern SFIC. She also recalled that SFIC had provided a contribution to the 2017 ERAC Annual Report.

#### **4. State of play of working groups**

##### Toolbox Working Group

The SFIC rapporteur (Norway) presented the state of play and referred to the possible prolongation of the mandate for the Working Group on a Toolbox for international cooperation. The Working Group's current mandate expires on 29 March 2018. In line with the Working Group's mandate, SFIC assessed the need for a prolongation and decided to extend it to 31 December 2018. The Chair underlined that the extension should be seen in the light of the on-going work on the Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO).

#### **5. Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO)**

The Commission gave an overview of the content and various features of the RIO Policy Support Facility (PSF) website. SFIC acknowledged the added value of the Observatory and agreed to start an analysis for the possible inclusion of international criteria (from Toolbox to RIO). The ideal would be to have an item entitled "international" in the thematic pages. The first step will be to study the feasibility of the project.

SFIC will revert to this item at its meeting on 6 June 2018.

#### **6. Science Diplomacy**

Representatives of the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) provided an overview of cooperation in science diplomacy. They pointed out that, in order to create "success stories", this subject is high on the agenda and science diplomacy is integrated in the daily management in the Commission and the EEAS. They underlined that science diplomacy is often an "ice-breaker" in regions with a tangible political divide (e.g. the Israeli-Palestine conflict where SESAME plays a role), intends to establish the basis for an informed foreign policy (e.g. in the case of an Ebola outbreak or the appearance of the zika virus) and ensures better international conditions for science to foster innovation.

## 7. The future of SFIC working groups

The Chair referred to the draft set of conditions for the establishment of working groups (doc. WK 13939/2017) that had been presented at the last SFIC meeting. She outlined a number of topics for possible new working groups and recalled the methodology adopted for the activities and contributions to be provided by working groups under priority 6 of the ERA roadmap.

Delegations discussed the usefulness of setting up working groups related to specific geographical areas and country-specific working groups, in addition to groups dedicated to thematic issues.

Several delegations, as well as the Commission, emphasised that any new working groups should be set up with a clear scope and time frame, and should be given limited and precise objectives and deliverables, as suggested in the draft set of conditions. A new working group should only be set up if a minimum number of delegations were ready to actively participate in the work of the group.

The French delegation proposed to set up an *ad hoc* group focussing on a benchmarking of international research and innovation strategies, by making use of the information available in national ERA roadmaps, and indicated that it could take the lead in such a group. Many delegations supported this proposal and expressed their readiness to contribute to the work of this group. The Commission recalled in this context that the mandate given to SFIC included the responsibility for monitoring national action plans and priorities and developing a conceptual framework on indicators for international cooperation, which could be part of the tasks to be given to this group.

The Vice-Chair presented a proposal by the Belgian delegation to establish an *ad hoc* working group on science diplomacy in order to analyse the information and experience available and develop a common understanding on the concept and working definition. A number of delegations supported this proposal.

She also considered that further discussions on research ethics (see agenda item 11) could be held in the framework of an *ad hoc* group.

The Chair concluded the debate by noting SFIC's consensus on the establishment of a working group on international research and innovation strategies. The work on the mandate for this group would soon be launched. All other proposals for new working groups would be further examined by a reflection group. The Chair invited delegations to express their interest if they would like to participate in the work of this group.

## **8. Service Facility**

The Commission recalled its summary of service facility activities (doc. WK 15010/2017) circulated on 20 December 2017. It informed about upcoming new service requests relating to cooperation with CELAC and with India, and to the Central Asia and South Caucasus Water Regional Platform.

In reply to a question from the German delegation, the Commission provided information on the state of play and the envisaged timeline for implementing the service request on a conceptual framework for monitoring international cooperation, endorsed by SFIC on 8 December 2017. The Commission underlined in this context the necessity of having sufficient Member State data on international cooperation programmes available for carrying out the requested analysis. The German delegation indicated that it would provide to the Commission a list of contact points for each Member State that will be able to make the data available.

The Chair invited the Commission to inform SFIC at regular intervals in writing about ongoing service requests. Moreover, in more general terms and taking up requests from delegations, the Chair asked the Commission and delegations to regularly send any relevant information relating to international cooperation activities in research and innovation (developments, events, consultations, requests etc.) to the SFIC Secretariat for distribution to all SFIC members and observers.

## **9. EU-CELAC cooperation**

The Commission provided an update on ongoing and planned EU-CELAC cooperation activities.

Delegations were interested to know the link with activities under Horizon 2020, the relations with ESFRI, as well as with the work of the EU-LAC Foundation on an EU-CELAC Common Research Area. They asked to be regularly informed about the cooperation with CELAC countries, in order to be able distribute this information in Member States and Associated Countries.

## **10. Participation of Associated Countries in Horizon 2020**

The Commission summarised the main points on the participation of Associated Countries in Horizon 2020. It informed that the association of third countries would continue under FP9, but that discussions on details of the participation, contributions, financial rules, as well as on possible enlargements to other countries were still ongoing.

Delegations were interested to obtain further information from the Commission as soon as it is available. SFIC will therefore come back to this item at its next meeting on 6 June 2018.

## **11. Any other business**

The Vice-Chair informed about the results of the workshop on research ethics and the academic framework, organised by the Finnish delegation on 6 March 2018, and presented the main messages from the workshop to SFIC.