

NOTE

From: SFIC Secretariat
To: Delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the 37th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 6 June 2018

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

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

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

Delegations and the Commission informed about recent topics of particular interest to SFIC members. Responding to a request by delegations the chair invited them to circulate relevant information in writing to the SFIC secretariat before the meeting (ideally 10 days). A standing point on the status of bi-regional cooperation will also be included in this point by the Commission. On that point, the SFIC chair proposes to more involve the SFIC delegations in the preparation and the participation to meetings in order to build a work plan coherent with the EC activities.

The SFIC secretariat will send out a reminder before the meeting and will circulate the received information afterwards through the SFIC bi-weekly.

3. Work programme of the current and incoming Presidencies

BG presented the achievements of the presidency, in particular the progress on High Performance Computing, the Euratom Research and Training programme and the Council conclusions on knowledge circulation within the EU.

AT presented its plans for the presidency with a strong focus on the negotiations of Horizon Europe and the Council conclusions on the ERA advisory structure.

4. Review of ERA governance in 2018

The Chair will circulate a written note on the point after the meeting.

5. PRIMA

The chairman of PRIMA presented PRIMA activities, the first calls and the next steps (in particular the evaluation of the first calls and the preparation of the annual work programme 2019 and 2020, in which innovation will become more relevant). Delegations welcomed the work of PRIMA, but expressed concerns about the low success rate of calls and asked about KPIs. The PRIMA chairman considered the oversubscription an indicator of success and recognised room for improvement in future calls. KPIs are in the annual work programme.

The SFIC chair proposed that PRIMA gives once per year a presentation to SFIC to follow up on the implementation of the programme.

6. ENRICH - European Network of Research and Innovation Centres and Hubs

On the initiative of the Austrian delegation, representatives from the three ENRICH centres in the US, Brazil and China presented their activities. Their activities focus on supporting research and innovation organisations and companies of all sizes to establish connections and a foothold in these countries. ENRICH provides information on R&I systems and contacts to potential partners for European R&I actors. For this purpose ENRICH has opened physical offices in the countries. ENRICH also provides information to local R&I actors about the EU system and partners. The ENRICH offices develop services in this respect tailor-made to the specific needs of the European research and innovation stakeholders operating in the respective countries. ENRICH centres are expected to become self-sustainable and elaborate business models to generate revenue over time including membership and charging for specific services. Their services are available to MS and AC and their organisations. ENRICH also met with MS/AC science counsellors in the third countries to define the positioning for ENRICH and engage with the MS/AC research and innovation agencies operating in the third countries.

SFIC will follow up on this presentation in a year's time to review ENRICH activities and involvement of MS/AC organisations as beneficiaries or partners of ENRICH. The Commission invited SFIC members to embrace the Centres and ask their agencies and organisations to use their services where appropriate.

7. State of play of SFIC working groups

8. Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO)

Points 7 and 8 were taken together.

The rapporteur updated SFIC on the work of the toolbox working group¹. Its work remains the starting point for more and better sharing of information for mutual learning and more effective international cooperation activities. The rapporteur encouraged all members of the group to become active in order to finalise the work of the working group by the end of its mandate at the end of 2018. The rapporteur also informed about him leaving SFIC for other tasks, but could not yet provide information on the follow-up on his role as rapporteur.

The Commission (JRC) illustrated how the results of the toolbox working group could be integrated in the RIO website. This discussion will be taken further during the remainder of the toolbox WG mandate, in particular to define the roles for the operational phase. The challenge is, in the view of the JRC, in the operational phase to regularly update the information that is put on the RIO website. The SFIC chair offered to send a letter to the JRC requesting support.

9. The future of SFIC working groups

The vice-chair recalled past work and thoughts of the forum on the future of SFIC working groups. ES recalled that working groups without a clear timeline and with an unclear output would not justify the designation of resources and thus of participation. The vice-chair proposed to determine the need for a working group through a workshop or similar before taking a decision, if needed. The chair recalled the need to have few working groups with a clearly defined objective and a limited timeline, and a pilot to drive the debates. NO recalled the usefulness of past working groups and of workshops or seminars on particular topics. The vice-Chair recalled that there is always space for short-term task force-type of actions and workshops.

Based on the proposal by the FR delegation contained in WK 3459/18, SFIC decided to set up the proposed ad hoc working group for a benchmarking exercise on strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I and to launch a written procedure on its mandate before the summer to allow the WG to take up its work in the autumn. The Chair also called on SFIC members to indicate their willingness to participate in the work of the group. The work will be set up in two phases, the first of which will be preparatory and run until the end of this year and the second one (possibly with a MLE) starting in 2019.

¹ currently the only active SFIC working group

BE presented the proposal for a working group on science diplomacy, however, indicated that BE could no longer drive it, but would be a member. General support was expressed by AT and PT. The Vice chair concluded that based on information by the Commission about on-going Horizon 2020 projects related to science diplomacy a more mature proposal could be brought to the plenary at a later stage. The call for a rapporteur and participants to this work stream are open.

Other topics are also welcome. The earlier suggestion by the vice-chair for research ethics and integrity is no longer valid, as ERAC is forming a Mutual Learning Exercise on Research Integrity under Horizon 2020 PSF.

10. Service Facility

The Commission informed that 8 projects with a value of EUR 8 mil. are ongoing: Western Balkan countries steering platform on R&I; EU-ASEAN Joint Funding Scheme; EU-CELAC joint initiative on R&I; R&I policy advice for CELAC countries; programme level cooperation with Canada; stakeholder networks and events in support of Tunisia; and two horizontal services: 1. how to better link Horizon 2020 NCPs in EU partner countries with European networks. 2. communication activities: promotion material and organisation of 60-70 events.

Four service requests are in the pipeline for EUR 3-4 mil. in 2018: EU-India innovation cooperation; water regional science diplomacy with Central and South Asia; EU-African Union High Level S&T policy dialogue; and EU-CELAC working group on research infrastructures.

The request on a conceptual framework for monitoring international cooperation, based on the DE proposal, was discussed. The Commission indicated that five years ago a study had been conducted aiming to develop a framework for monitoring international R&I cooperation of the Member States and identified data availability and comparability as two of the main bottlenecks. In order to be able to make concrete progress with respect to the 2013 study, active contribution from Member States would be deemed necessary. DE was of the view that the conceptual clarification would be necessary before moving forward with the empirical data collection.

It was decided that a teleconference among interested parties would be organised to come to a common understanding of the request.

The Vice-chair invited the Commission to provide an updated written summary of activities of the service facility for international cooperation and concluded that the service facility would be again on the SFIC agenda in September, including a discussion on a master plan for services in the remaining period.

FR presented developments in the EU African Union R&I partnership on climate change and sustainable energy and invited SFIC members to provide a support letter from their national authorities to be involved in the setting up of a European Joint Programme.

11. Participation of third countries in Framework Programme 9

The Commission informed SFIC about international cooperation elements in the upcoming proposal on Horizon Europe. Horizon Europe will intensify its openness to the world, but also make explicit a number of safeguards to ensure the interests of the Union. Programme committees and joint committees with third countries will remain important for a as part of strategic planning. Horizon Europe will stay open for international partners, have targeted international cooperation actions ('of unprecedented scale' - especially in pillar 2), seek complementarity and synergies with actions of other Union programmes (e.g. external instruments of the new budget), and extend openness to association of third countries.

The Commission proposes a change in eligibility for participation: 3 entities from 3 countries of which 1 must be from a MS; possibility to exclude third countries from participation in specific actions; case by case justification for funding entities from non-associated countries.

The chair asked about the possible involvement of SFIC in the discussions on Horizon Europe. The Commission responded that MS were involved through the Council's Research Working Party, and in the strategic planning through the programme committees. This strategic planning process will start in parallel with the legislative process for adoption of the proposal. This builds on the lessons learned from the experience with Horizon 2020, where the first strategic planning process was launched relatively late.

The chair concluded that SFIC should be kept informed about the progress of negotiations in the Council.

12. Any other business

The chair invited delegations to send points to be raised in the September plenary to the SFIC secretariat by 1 September, in particular with a view to the participation of Director-General Jean-Eric Paquet of the Commission's DG RTD. She also informed the forum about the planned presentation of GPC on its methodology and about a planned discussion on a structure for the follow-up of SFIC's work at the September meeting.