

ERAC-SFIC 1357/18

**NOTE**

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| From:    | SFIC Secretariat   |
| To:      | Delegations  |
| Subject: | Summary conclusions of the 38th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 26 September 2018 |

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

**1. Exchange of views with the Director-General Jean-Eric PAQUET of the Commission's DG RTD on international cooperation in Horizon Europe**

Following a short introduction of the chair presenting the main topics and questions of interest for SFIC, DG Paquet underlined that Horizon Europe would continue its general opening for third country participation and launch targeted actions to pursue strategic international cooperation in line with EU priorities and the core principles of common interest and mutual benefit. He also recognised that the mainstreaming INCO in Horizon 2020 had led to mixed results. He stated that SFIC could help shape the strategic orientation of EU policy in the area of international R&I cooperation and invited SFIC to reflect on its purpose and prioritisation for a deeper impact. He stated - in line with the ERA governance review - that different ERA groups had varying impact on the R&I agenda. In particular, SFIC could have an impact when providing a view on international

cooperation in the context of the different national systems. In view of the stronger innovation angle, SFIC could also reflect on international cooperation in this domain, where it may be more complex and less consensual.

Delegations concurred on the complexity of international cooperation in the domain of innovation, and emphasised the SFIC role for a longer term, strategic approach to international cooperation. Delegations also called for international cooperation to be more reflected in the programme committee discussions and in calls. Delegations also raised the issue of limited SFIC resources, which impacts the ability to react. On multi-annual roadmaps, SFIC welcomed the consultative approach taken in the past. A few delegations asked for clarifications on the future association strategy. Finally, the issue of indicators was raised.

In response the Commission recalled the inter-institutional process for examining the legislative proposal and noted the central role played by MS in the strategic planning process. SFIC should be involved in elaborating prioritised and impact-oriented advice. SFIC should also be involved in the discussion on multilateral fora, but it was equally important for the Commission to know about national strategies vis-à-vis these dialogues with strategic regions. On indicators, the Commission reminded that these were already being monitored and reported on based on the objectives of the international cooperation strategy.

The Commission proposed to have a discussion at the next plenary on international cooperation strategy that could be an input for Horizon Europe strategic planning. The chair agreed to add this to the agenda of the next SFIC plenary.

The vice-chair concluded that the exchange was useful for preparing the next SFIC work programme.

## **2. Exchange of views with GPC on monitoring of activities**

The Co-chair of GPC (Emmanuel Pasco Viel) presented the monitoring tool that GPC developed to monitor on a voluntary basis the implementation of the actions as reflected in the national roadmaps. BE and AT shared their positive experience (no too time consuming) with using such a tool to monitor the implementation across all ERA priorities. The idea would be for SFIC to adopt a similar instrument, once the work on benchmarking the national strategies will be done.

The second part of the exchange focussed on the collaboration between GPC and SFIC. The GPC co-chair presented the international dimension of partnerships. AT announced that a partnership would approach GPC and SFIC in the near future on INCO in public-public partnerships. DE supported the close cooperation between GPC and SFIC in view of the strong international dimension of public-public partnerships and raised the issue of how this should be achieved practically (e.g. through the participation of GPC in SFIC task forces).

The link between SFIC and GPC should be strengthened by identifying/nominating a correspondent (ideally a member of both groups).

### **3. State of play of SFIC working groups**

#### **Toolbox Working Group / Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO)**

The FR member of the working group, on behalf of the rapporteur, updated SFIC on the objective to include data on international cooperation in RIO, run by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the Commission. The objective is to make existing information accessible in a user-friendly tool. The Commission agreed that available data on international cooperation could also be published on RIO, such as co-publication, co-patents, and participation of third countries to Horizon 2020. For additional information, agreements e.g. with the OECD on the (re)use of existing data may be required. The JRC would not be able to collect additional data.

Delegations welcomed the progress made, but some of them were concerned about the burden of gathering additional data. There was general support to formally conclude the work of the toolbox working group by the end of this year through a report.

The co-chair concluded that the discussion provided very good starting points for the conclusion of the work of the working group and the following steps. DE was asked to engage with NO on arrangements for concluding the report of the toolbox WG.

The JRC will start to modify its RIO webpage to include the elements identified by SFIC in line with the above.

## **Ad hoc working group on benchmarking**

The revised agenda (highlighting the priority 6 of ERA roadmap) was presented and SFIC approved it. FR proposed to provide the support for the examination work. ES DE DK HU NO UK BG PL and FI confirmed their participation and the co-chair will take the role of rapporteur in an initial phase.

### **4. Way forward for SFIC in view of ERA review report**

The co-chair recalled the recommendations by ERAC on the ERA opinion on the review of the ERA advisory structure and acknowledged the need to evolve the work of SFIC and strengthen its visibility.

The chair presented suggestions for a new organisation for SFIC's work with a strengthened steering board with a focus on strategic discussions, the introduction of 'sentinel task forces' focusing on topical issues and preparing the launch of more formal e.g. working groups, regular bi-weekly teleconferences, and the nomination of correspondents for other ERA working groups.

Delegations' reactions covered a broad range of issues. The idea to split the SFIC meeting in two parts: (a) exchanges with INCO actors and among delegations on best practices and b) a strategic advice on international cooperation) found some support (BG, DE, ES, RO, AT). Many delegations cautioned about the limited resources for any new initiatives (DK, AT, FI, RO, DE, CH), though the idea of 'sentinel task forces' to explore and prepare more formal work strands was welcomed (DE, BG, DK). Overall, delegations welcomed the focus on communication, but emphasised that first, it should be clarified whom SFIC advises and subsequently to clarify communication means (PT, BG, ES, FI). Strategic discussions should remain in the plenary, and not be moved to the steering board (SE, CH). A number of delegations proposed to forego interpretation (DK, AT, FI), which was opposed by FR, other delegations remained neutral. FI raised the issue of the meeting room setup, which could be made more fit for working meetings rather than only information exchange meetings. Teleconferences would be useful, especially when more task forces or working groups would be set up. PT suggested to create an internal joint platform to share all documents. BG (and RO) offered to act as SFIC link to ESFRI. HU volunteered to be the contact for open science.

In concluding, the Chair proposed to move forward by working in a core group on the form, way of working, as well as a new mandate and work programme for SFIC. ES, FR, AT, FI, DE, RO and the COM agreed to participate in this exercise.

## **5. Role of SFIC in international cooperation post-2020**

SFIC unanimously agreed to prepare a contribution with strategic advice on international cooperation post-2020. Several delegations highlighted the need to remain at a broad and strategic level as not to interfere with the decision-making process on existing programme proposals which is in the purview of the EU Council and not ERAC representing a larger community including associated countries.

The Chair concluded that there was a comprehensive support for SFIC advice on strategic issues in the context of international cooperation in the future. With a view to finalising the advice before the Competitiveness Council at the end of November, the deadlines will be rather tight. A draft document will be prepared and circulated.

## **6. Service Facility**

The Commission informed SFIC that the information provided in July (WK 9053 2018) was still up to date.

DE informed about the state of play of the service request and the decision to wait until the ERA Council conclusions would be adopted in November before moving forward with the proposed service request on a conceptual framework for monitoring International Cooperation, which would be on the agenda for adoption in the next SFIC plenary session in December 2018.

## **7. Any other business**

COM informed that in mid-October it will have a dialogue with ASEAN in the Philippines.

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The next SFIC plenary meeting is planned for 4 December.