

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

Secretariat

Brussels, 10 March 2017
(OR. en)

ERAC-SFIC 1357/17

NOTE

From: SFIC Secretariat
To: SFIC Delegations
Subject: SFIC opinion on the 2nd progress report on international S&T cooperation
by the European Commission

Delegations will find annexed to this Note the SFIC opinion on the 2nd progress report on international S&T cooperation by the European Commission, as approved by the SFIC plenary on 8 March 2017.

**SFIC opinion on the 2nd progress report on international S&T
cooperation prepared by the European Commission**

SFIC BELIEVES that openness to the world remains a strategic priority for the EU. It is essential for excelling in science and technology, getting research results to market faster and creating new business opportunities for R&D-intensive industries. It is also crucial for contributing to solving global societal challenges and allowing the EU to have a leading voice in global debates and developments.

SFIC WELCOMES the second Commission progress report on the implementation of the strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation concluding that “over the past two years clear progress has been made towards achieving the objectives of the strategy, but more needs to be done to tap the full potential of the ‘Open to the World’ policy priority”.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, SFIC would like to emphasise the following aspects as regards to the second Commission progress report on the implementation of the strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation:

1. SFIC ACKNOWLEDGES the clear added value of a biennial reporting process on the Commission’s strategy for international S&T cooperation and RECOGNISES its contribution to a more transparent and strategic interaction with Member States (MS) and Associated countries (AC).
2. SFIC WELCOMES the Commission’s consultation with SFIC members in the development and updating of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps for International Cooperation in Research in Innovation (MARs). In parallel, SFIC RECOMMENDS a clearer implication of the MARs on the relevant thematic programme committee discussions, including periodical presentations of their evolution to Member States’ delegates.

3. SFIC SUPPORTS an in-depth analysis of third country involvement as part of the Interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 and the actions which will be derived from it, including further reflection on how to better identify and align common interests with third countries and strengthen joint commitments through bilateral/multilateral calls for projects. The H2020 mid-term evaluation is subject of a separate SFIC Opinion, which also includes suggested corrective measures on the structure of the 9th Framework Programme.
4. SFIC WELCOMES the proactive approach of the Commission to assist third countries in setting up national mechanisms for funding their researchers in Horizon 2020 actions. SFIC ENCOURAGES the Commission to continue its joint efforts with third countries to enhance and diversify matching funds in order to improve the framework conditions for cooperation and to significantly boost the participation of third countries. Other factors beyond funding (international visibility, administrative workload, legal barriers, etc.) need to be explored in detail as well
5. Quantitative data illustrating the decline of participation of entities from non-associated international partner countries from 4.3 % in FP7 to 2.4 % in Horizon 2020 reveals the need for further action. SFIC WELCOMES the efforts made by the Commission so far and strongly RECOMMENDS taking additional measures to increase the participation rate, such as the definition of focused topics of sufficient scale and scope specifically devoted to international cooperation, including the mandatory participation of third countries, and strengthening the international dimension of innovation actions like public-private partnerships and research infrastructures of global interest.
6. Additionally, SFIC ENCOURAGES the Commission to equally illustrate the qualitative development of international cooperation in Horizon 2020 in the third INCO progress report. In doing so, an in-depth picture of the current status of international cooperation could be better achieved.

7. In its strategy for international S&T cooperation (2012), the Commission commits itself to “further developing the partnership with European intergovernmental initiatives” and refers to EUREKA and COST. The 2nd INCO progress report does, however, not refer to any activities with those networks. SFIC ENCOURAGES the Commission to support intergovernmental initiatives as a vehicle for better coordination as well as enhanced exchange and cooperation between MS/AC and the Commission with third countries.
8. In line with Horizon 2020 focus on innovation and in order to increase the presence of the industry in general and SMEs in particular, in international cooperation activities, SFIC RECOMMENDS to explore the feasibility of a specific Horizon 2020/EUREKA collaboration scheme for supporting international cooperation, building on the experience of Eurostars, as it was suggested by the Horizon 2020 Advisory Board for International Cooperation (15/07/2014).
9. In this report, the Commission refers to “the external dimension of the ERA as a paradigm [...] to gradually shape a vision of a 'Global Research Area'”. The latter relates to an area where “researchers and innovators are able to work together smoothly across borders, and where researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate as freely as possible”. SFIC SUPPORTS the Commission’s proactivity in ensuring good framework conditions for international cooperation, including co-funding mechanisms for an increased number of countries, reciprocity of access, R&I-friendly visa schemes, additional effort on innovation issues, etc. However, the report does not clear the relationship between “Global Research Area” and “Open to the World”. Therefore, SFIC RECOMMENDS an exchange of views between Commission and MS/AC on the “Global Research Area” concept.
10. The intention of the Commission to engage more in science diplomacy is appreciated. However, SFIC ENCOURAGES the Commission to provide a clearer outline of its objectives and expectations regarding science diplomacy. In addition, SFIC RECOMMENDS the Commission to specify its strategic approach towards science diplomacy and the cooperation with Member States in this regard. Such specifications should focus on areas of conflict and crisis, in which science diplomacy can help build bridges.

11. SFIC SUPPORTS an active European role in multilateral initiatives to tackle global societal challenges while intensifying the synergies with the EU's external policies. Such an action requires dedicated tools whose governing principles could complement that of scientific excellence (market uptake, capacity building, improving knowledge transfer and strengthening the scientific base in certain countries, etc.).
12. SFIC WELCOMES the recent implementation of the INCO Service Facility and recognises its potential role to facilitate a uniform access to relevant information which remains spread out over a number of sources and to add value to the SFIC Toolbox working group activities. The monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of the Service Facility activities should be conducted with the support of SFIC. In line with the terms of reference, Member States, through the SFIC Plenary, shall be consulted regularly to provide input for setting priorities for this Service Facility and for evaluating the outcome of its activities.
