

ERAC-SFIC 1360/19

NOTE

From: SFIC Secretariat
To: SFIC delegations

Subject: SFIC opinion on international research and innovation cooperation

Delegations will find attached the SFIC opinion on international research and innovation cooperation, as adopted at the SFIC plenary on 18 December 2019.

SFIC opinion on international research and innovation cooperation

1. In view to develop appropriate joint strategic approaches and actions for international research and innovation (R&I) cooperation in line with the priority 6 of the European Research Area (ERA) roadmap, an *ad hoc* Working Group on a Benchmarking exercise on strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I ('SFIC Benchmarking WG') was set up by SFIC. The mandate¹ of the SFIC Benchmarking WG included the following activities: to map out and to compare the various approaches in the drafting of national roadmaps and strategies for international cooperation in R&I as well as to identify transferrable good practice and joint approaches where relevant.
2. Main findings of the SFIC Benchmarking WG are based on two main strands, (i) a comparison of National ERA Action Plans and (ii) a survey on bilateral S&T cooperation with third countries, and are presented in the final report of the Working Group², presented during the SFIC Plenary of October 2019 and adopted during the SFIC Plenary of December 2019.
3. SFIC Delegates note that Member States and Associated Countries take a broad range of approaches in drafting and implementing their policies in the area of international cooperation in R&I with third countries. Together with the activities of the European Commission, international cooperation encompasses all the regions of the world and a large number of third countries. However, R&I cooperation frameworks, structures and activities are concentrated in a limited number of (mostly industrialised and BRIC) countries that show particular potential in terms of research and innovation.

¹ Mandate of the SFIC *ad hoc* Working Group for a benchmarking exercise on strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I of 28 September 2018, doc. *ERAC-SFIC 1356/18*.

² Benchmarking exercise on strategies and roadmaps for international cooperation in R&I. Final report, doc. *ERAC-SFIC WK 13463/2019 INIT*.

4. SFIC Delegates take note of the sustained joint interest of Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission on several key focus countries. Even though the actions of Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission are not always aligned for these focus countries, their priorities are often quite similar and consistent over time, displaying good potential for joint approaches (e.g. in terms of earmarking of calls in the work programmes of Horizon 2020 and, later, Horizon Europe).

HAVING REGARD TO THIS, SFIC:

5. Is committed to continue its mandated role, facilitating the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of the European Research Area, with focus on the external dimension of the European Union and Member States' R&I activities. It will do so by sharing of information and consultation between its members with a view to identifying common priorities which could lead to coordinated or joint initiatives, and coordinating activities and positions vis-à-vis third countries and within international fora.
6. Emphasises the importance of international cooperation in R&I as a priority of the European Research Area, also in the future, notably in order to tackle global societal challenges that ask for cooperation not only in Europe but with R&I actors worldwide as well as in order to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European Union.
7. Invites the Commission to consider the data collected and analysed by the SFIC Benchmarking WG when planning, implementing and evaluating its bi-regional R&I policy dialogues.
8. Underlines the importance of working jointly with the Commission on international cooperation in R&I, for example via a comprehensive consultation of SFIC regarding the updates of the Commission's multiannual roadmaps for R&I cooperation with third countries and regions.

9. Will strive at playing an active role as initiator and platform for joint action. Based on the evidence provided by the abovementioned report of the SFIC Benchmarking WG, cooperation activities should be coordinated between interested Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission, while increasingly and continuously taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
10. Highlights that in order to maintain the evidence basis to show common interests in key focus countries, the collection of relevant data on structures in and actions towards third countries should take place on a more regular basis and in a structured way, and also include relevant data from the Commission. This should be considered in connection with the request by SFIC to see the international cooperation activities of Member States and Associated Countries integrated into the EU Research and Innovation Observatory (RIO).
11. Emphasises that with a view to Horizon Europe, international cooperation within the framework programme for research and innovation should remain a priority, enabling to co-fund research and innovation cooperation with third countries and stimulating the emergence of new collaborations in the spirit of the SDGs.³ In order to ensure the success of the abovementioned approaches and joint actions, dedicated instruments for international STI cooperation should be offered by Horizon Europe.
12. Stresses the need to continue its work of exchanging best practices and mutual learning activities as well as advising both the Council and the Commission on international cooperation in R&I, particularly around recently set up geographic and thematic task forces, e.g. on Africa, China and Science Diplomacy.

³ SFIC opinion on international cooperation in ‘Horizon Europe’ of 15 January 2019, doc. *ERAC-SFIC 1351/19*.