

NOTE

From: SFIC Secretariat
To: Delegations

Subject: Final summary conclusions of the informal videoconference of the members of the ERAC-SFIC on 10-03-2021

The meeting was chaired by Ms Martina Hartl (AT) and the Vice-Chair Tiina Vihma-Purovaara (FI). All presentations made during the meeting are included in document WK 2438/20.

1. Welcome and agenda

The Vice-Chair welcomed participants to the informal SFIC Plenary session. The agenda was approved¹.

2. Tour the Table

Ahead of the meeting, delegations were invited to send comments (WK 2864/2021) in a written format on their bilateral collaboration with third countries, multilateral collaboration with third countries, strategic activities and national coordination. The Vice-Chair acknowledged the comprehensive international cooperation undertaken by Member States and Associated countries (see presentation in WK 3419/2021). An additional week (deadline 19 March) was given to provide additional comments. The received comments have been circulated.

¹ CH, NO and TR participated as observers in items 2, 5, 6 and 9.

The PT Presidency gave an update on ongoing activities (See Presentation in WK 3437/2021).

- The priorities on R&I focus on the coordination of efforts and synergies between the European Scientific, Technological and Innovation Communities. The aim is to prepare for a resilient recovery through a renewed European Research Area (ERA). Based on R&I activities, that should in turn entail that Europe becomes leading in green and digital transformation (The EU budget, including the Recovery Instrument, an national funding will play a role).
- The outcome of the "Launch of Horizon Europe Event" and the informal meeting of research ministers broadcast from Lisbon on 2 and 3 February will feed into upcoming discussions on ongoing files, as well as into the draft Council conclusions on improvement of researchers' careers and working conditions.
- The PT presidency and EP negotiators reached provisional political agreement on the two EIT files on 28 January.
- Council work is ongoing on the European Institutionalised Partnerships on the EuroHPC.
- On the international R&I cooperation, focus will be in the “*Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education and Youth*” communication, the EU-China Roadmap, EU-African Union, and EU-CELAC.

The Commission provided an update on recent INCO-activities:

- EU-Morocco: The Joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committee with Morocco took place on 21 January 2021. Morocco is interested in being associated to Horizon Europe. Explorative talks have started but the concrete negotiation on a possible association will start at a later stage. Cooperation in field of the marine environment will be further developed.
- EU-India: On 12 February 2021 at EU-India Joint Steering Committee for R&I, the possible future cooperation in Horizon Europe was discussed, on ICT, in particular cyber-physical-systems (ICPS) including artificial intelligence and robotics, circular economy and resource efficiency (waste-to-energy; plastics; etc.), electric mobility and sustainable agri-food processing.
- EU-CELAC: The Commission is in the process of negotiating a 'Strategic Roadmap' (a Non-Binding Instrument - NBI) to include a list priority areas for cooperation between the EU and CELAC, such as mobility of researchers, research infrastructures, health research, green transition, digital transformation, innovation and open access. The Commission is expected to return shortly to the Council with the concrete text; subsequently, the Council should authorise the Commission to sign the NBI.
- The 12th meeting of the EU-Argentina Joint Science and Technology Committee took place on 10 December 2020. The meeting allowed reviewing recent achievements in EU-Argentina research and innovation cooperation and paving the way for future collaboration in the strategic fields of global health notably on Covid-19, marine within the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Forum, clean energy, and space under the Copernicus programme.

3. International innovation activities

No tour de table document related to innovation activities was distributed due to timing constraints, but this will be rectified for the next meeting in June.

4. ERA related activities and updates

The Chair gave the following information concerning ERA-related activities:

I. ERAC Plenary, 16 March 2021

Present and forthcoming Presidencies

PT Presidency priorities and key events (see item 2).

SI presidency:

- Informal meeting of research ministers: 19 July
- Formal Competitiveness Councils (Research): 28 September and 26 November (conclusions on ERA governance)
- High level conference on ERA: end of October.
- Several conferences will be organised including on MSCA and ESFRI.
- Depending on progress, important files on R&I might include the association to HE by third countries, Partnerships and Missions.

FR presidency:

Three main priorities will be:

1. Synergies ERA/EHEA, with an informal meeting of ministers for research and for higher education in the second half of January back-to-back with a flagship event on "Forum of universities for the future",
2. Global Europe / International strategy, with a flagship conference planned in Marseille in March 2022,
3. Future of higher education, including the Higher Education Transformation Agenda.

A number of conferences could deal with topics such as breakthrough innovations and Missions (how to engage citizens in science). An ERAC meeting might take place in Paris, April 2022.

II. New expert group 'ERA Forum for Transition'

The kick-off meeting of the above expert group took place on 4 February. Its tasks will be to have deliverables on:

- DELIVERABLE 1: Recommendations on a new ERA governance framework including notably a Pact for R&I;
- DELIVERABLE 2: Development of an ERA policy agenda, and kick-start of its implementation;
- DELIVERABLE 3: Input for a new ERA scoreboard

No explicit consultation with the ERA-related groups foreseen. The Chair encouraged participants to stay in contact with the relevant members of the group.

- III. The “*Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education and Youth*” communication should be further discussed between SFIC members and the EC at the workshop on 10 March 2021 (afternoon).

5. Report on Africa related activities

The WG Rapporteurs drew the attention to the draft report on Africa related activities (WK 3172/2021), and outlined the main results of the Innovation Survey Results (See presentation in WK 3434/2021). Five activities have been handled during three meetings according to the work plan 2020-March 2022 work plan):

1. Dialogue on African issues for impact,
2. Outreach,
3. Horizon Europe,
4. Understand innovation activities with Africa,
5. Science diplomacy and triangular relations.

Fourteen Member States and one Associated country had replied to the survey’s seventeen questions. The preliminary analysis showed a need for more visibility in Africa, i.e. a presence beyond the embassy level (a number of Member States and Associated countries have R&I Counsellors in Africa) like “*Think Tanks*” or centres with advanced knowledge.

The survey also indicated that most countries used European funding instruments, and that there was a wide spread cooperation between European and African stakeholders when projects were funded by the EU or other international schemes.

The aim of the cooperation were often to foster innovation but some obstacles were observed to those innovation-oriented activities.

The participants were given two weeks to comment on the report – deadline 24th of March 2021 (WK 3172/2021). After that the report will be revised.

6. Report of the Science Diplomacy Task Force

The WG Rapporteur presented the main results were presented to SFIC (see the presentation in WK 3435/2021). In line with the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) Input Paper “Science Diplomacy”, Advancing the impact of Science Diplomacy at EU and Member States level through targeted support and improved coordination (ERAC-SFIC 1352/20), a questionnaire was circulated with a deadline for replies by the beginning of 2021. The results of the survey showed that for half of the countries, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Ministries related to Education/Science/Research/ Technology/Innovation were in charge of Science Diplomacy. The key objectives of science diplomacy were to increase the research, technology and innovation competitiveness, followed by tackling global societal challenges and facilitation of cooperation among researchers in other countries.

The science diplomacy targeted primarily Europe, North-America and Asia, including the Pacific, the essential stakeholders were to be found within the governmental domains and the research/academic area.

In around two out of three replies, the central instruments used to put Science Diplomacy into practice were bilateral or multilateral S&T cooperation agreements, advisors attached to the embassies and national/regional funding schemes.

The main coordination mechanism was regular coordination between national and regional government actors (mainly with science counsellors/attachés). Almost 60% of all activities were coordinated with the EU level. A large majority of the respondents considered improved EU coordination to have added value. About half of the respondents reported that science diplomacy was part of their monitoring/reporting to ERA.

The full report with the analysis of the survey will be provided to delegations in April 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, the taskforce suggested prolonging its work until October 2021. The Plenary agreed to that proposal.

Since a new ERA science diplomacy monitoring/reporting scheme was supposed to be in place by the beginning of 2022, the Chair queried whether it would be appropriate to come up with recommendations to that effect. This issue will be further discussed within the Task Force.

The European Commission has reported the following main points:

- Science Diplomacy in WPs: In the current version of WPs various forms of Science Diplomacy are present (status February 2021), especially in Cluster 2, Cluster 6, WIDERA, as well as INFRA.
- Commissioner & DG RTD Hierarchy will be present at the S4D4C conference next week.
- Science Diplomacy Booster: Best efforts are made to finance SID Booster to recognise its very high EU added value and innovative ways of working.

7. Update on China

The Commission informed that on 21 January 2021, the EU-China high level dialogue took place to discuss the progress on the above roadmap for the future on S&T cooperation. At this stage, a number of technical issues had been solved. On the roadmap's framework conditions, the parties agreed in principle to keep these conditions in the roadmap, i.e. ethical standards, reciprocity and access to Chinese funding for European companies. On the concrete wording, however, some reluctance was seen from the Chinese side.

A provisional agreement on the launching of a flagship on climate change and biodiversity had, nonetheless, been endorsed.

On the R&I Knowledge Network on China (EU-KNoC), SFIC agreed to work on the elaboration on operational policy recommendations on how to take this work forward. A drafting group should be set up. The intention would be to forward these recommendations to ERAC.

FR, supported by DE, suggested that the Research working party be kept informed.

8. Update on the Guidelines regarding “foreign interference”

The Commission emphasised that the background was that Europe have an open approach to international R&I cooperation. Therefore, a potential risk of foreign interference exists, designed to destabilise the European democratic and fundamental interests and values. Because a number of foreign interference incidents have been observed and reported, it has become clear that an EU approach would be preferable. Accordingly, the Commission stressed that the idea was to elaborate guidelines to be better prepared to protect fundamental European rights, interests and values.

The draft guidelines, which inter alia cover cyber security, are at an advanced stage. They are, however, not yet finalised. The intention is that the Commission continues its consultation with Member States and other stakeholder with a view to having the guidelines published before the end of the year.

9. SFIC Work Programme 2021/2022

Work programme 2021-2022 (see the presentation in WK 3438/2021)

The Chair highlighted that the SFIC draft work programme had been forwarded to the ERAC Steering Board that didn't have any comments to the programme (WK 3046/21). SFIC can therefore proceed to adoption of the work programme. Subsequently, the adopted work programme will be sent to ERAC for information only.

A written "silence procedure" for adoption will be launched shortly. With view to the activities ongoing and envisaged the following topics have been discussed in more detail:

Ad-hoc Task Force on freedom of scientific research/Bonn Declaration

DE stressed that in order to support the international dimension of that declaration, the intention is that SFIC establishes a Task Force (ES, FR, NL, PT supported the initiative) to prepare draft recommendations on freedom of scientific research, in particular for the international cooperation in research and innovation. The idea would be to have a first draft ready by April 2021. At the June 2021 SFIC plenary, it is envisaged that the Ad-hoc Task Force presents its draft recommendations. Subsequently, an adoption of the recommendations (opinion) by written procedure is foreseen.

Monitoring the activities of the ERA-related groups. The following delegates have volunteered to take on that task: ERAC – Chair and Vice-Chair of SFIC, GPC – Brigitte Weiss, ESFRI – Iulia Mihail, Standing Working Group on Gender-Armela Dino, SWG-OSI- Agota David (Back-up Iulia Mihail), SWG HRM – Agota David. Respective reports on the activities of these groups will be included in the next Plenary Meeting.

With view to the OECD recommendations, delegations have been provided with the texts for the stakeholder consultation and the collective feedback has been provided to the OECD on 8 March 2021. Once the final OECD recommendations are available, they will be distributed to delegations (probably before summer).

10. Debriefing from the Thematic Workshop

The outcome in a written format of the workshops (Pacific-, Africa and UK-sessions) will be distributed shortly.

11. EUREKA – report by the AT Presidency

The AT EUREKA Presidency stressed that the EUREKA supports SME innovation projects (a minimum of cooperation between two SMEs from two different countries). Over 35 years, around 7.500 projects have been supported with EUR 48.4bn. The aim is to further increase that number.

This year, EUREKA celebrates its 35 years anniversary. All European countries, except Belarus are now members. A number of other third countries around the world are also members.

EUREKA also has a global dimension (Eurostars' programme). Not only SMSs from member countries can receive support but also SMEs from non-member countries. Africa is currently a priority field.

12. Any other topics (including news related to the OECD)

The topic on OECD was addressed during the discussion on the work programme.

PT highlighted that a COST online Awareness Day for the Near Neighbour Countries would take place on 11 March 2021.

13. Conclusions and points of action regarding the SFIC virtual Plenary Meeting

- Concerning inputs to the Tour de table, the deadline for additional written comments is 19 March.
- On the new expert group “ERA Forum for Transition”, delegations are encouraged to stay in contact with the relevant members of that group to facilitate the inclusion of international cooperation aspects.
- As regards the report on Africa related activities, delegations have two weeks to comment on the report (WK 3172/2021), i.e. by 24 March 2021.
- On the R&I Knowledge Network on China, a drafting group will be set up to elaborate operational policy recommendations (delegations are encouraged to participate - please contact the chair martina.hartl@bmbwf.gv.at).
- On the work programme 2021/22, a written “silence procedure” for adoption will be launched shortly. Delegations are encouraged to participate in the various working groups mentioned in the work programme.
- The Ad-hoc Task Force on freedom of scientific research/Bonn Declaration will elaborate recommendations focused on international cooperation aspects. (delegations are encouraged to participate – please contact the chair martina.hartl@bmbwf.gv.at)

The next Plenary session takes place as a full day meeting (10:00 to 16:30) on 10 June 2021 with a half-day workshop foreseen for the 9th of June afternoon (13:00 – 17:00).
