

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

Secretariat

ERAC-SFIC 1355/11

NOTE

Subject : Summary conclusions of the 10th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 20 June 2011

The meeting was opened by Ms Agnes REITER (HU) on behalf of the Hungarian Presidency. Following the election of the new SFIC Chair, Ms Riitta MUSTONEN (FI), in her newly appointed function, chaired the meeting.

The Forum drew the following conclusions:

1. Election of the SFIC Chair 2011-2012

Ms Riitta MUSTONEN (FI) was elected unanimously as the SFIC Chair for a two-year term, starting her role immediately after the election took place.¹

¹ The SFIC mandate of 2 December 2008 by the Council states that: "*It will be chaired by one of its Members representing a Member State designated for a period of 2 years*" The SFIC Rules of Procedure provide that "*SFIC shall be chaired by one of its Members representing a Member State designated for a period of two years (hereinafter "the Chair"). The Chair shall be designated by a simple majority of the representatives of Members, each Member having one vote.*" At its constitutive meeting of 18 February 2009, SFIC had elected Mr Volker RIEKE as its first Chair, for the period of 2 years. At the meeting on 25 February 2011, Ms. Leena VESTALA was also elected for a two-year term; however, after few weeks, she gave up her duties due to a change of position.

During her introductory speech, Ms MUSTONEN touched upon her past work and professional experience and put forward some ideas on which her mandate will be based: to get all Member States on board, to emphasize partnership between Member States and the Commission, to increase visibility of SFIC and to act in line with the values of transparency and trust while linking evaluation and assessment practices closely to SFIC working methods and structures.

2. Work Programme of SFIC 2011-2012

The Forum adopted the Work Programme for 2011-2012 (doc. 1354/11) drawn up by the Chair on the basis of the SFIC mandate set out by the Council, the contributions received from delegations and the input from the 'Priority Setting' Task Force. The Work Programme puts forward the following main planned activities:

- Supporting development of the European strategy for international STI cooperation;
- Strong coordination with other ERA and Innovation Union initiatives and respective groups;
- Implementation and consolidation of ongoing and planned activities: mainly in India, China, US and other potential third countries while developing geographical or thematic initiatives keeping in mind the global challenges identified in high level political processes and the resources available;
- Analysis and monitoring;
- Information sharing, communication and representation.

The Draft Provisional SFIC Action Plan 2011-2012 was also presented in an Annex with the upcoming milestones (provisional meetings and agenda items, Task Force meetings, summits and bi-regional dialogues, reporting milestones, etc.). Delegations very much welcomed the Annex. Slides and handouts were distributed to delegations concerning the Work Programme and the Provisional Action Plan, respectively.

Commenting on the Work Programme and Action Plan, delegations brought up:

- The potential launch of new pilot initiatives, mainly concerning Brazil and Africa. The Chair recalled Brazil has already been included as a provisional item in the next SFIC meeting agenda;
- The number of plenary meetings during a given year: so far there are only 2 meetings planned for 2012. The Chair was open to reconsider the issue in light of the SFIC decision of 25 February 2011 (3 meetings per year and a seminar during the chair mandate) as well as the work ahead.

3. SFIC working methods and structures

Ms Tiina VIHMA-PUROVAARA (member of the FI delegation and the 'Priority Setting' Task Force), presented a draft discussion document on the future “SFIC Working Methods and Structures”. The possibility to update the SFIC Rules of Procedures to bring them in line with the updated ERAC Rules of Procedures was also mentioned.

During the exchange of views, delegations put forward a number of issues to be taken into consideration, including the following:

- The nature of SFIC as a Strategy Forum based on support from the Task Force;
- The fostering of participation of SFIC Members and Observers (both in plenary and Task Force meetings);
- A deeper analysis on the separation of tasks and implementation of the Work Programme by the SFIC plenary and the Task Force;
- The better use of ICT tools for information sharing and increased visibility (e.g. internal and external websites and SharePoint tools);
- Better references on evaluation and assessment of the work carried out;
- The potential benefits of and possible ways to nominate a Vice-chair;
- The improvement of information sharing and visibility of SFIC.

Delegations were invited to provide any further written contributions, as soon as possible and by the end of June. Such comments will be an input for the next Task Force meeting on 7 July 2011, which will further discuss the issue.

4. SFIC contribution to ERA Framework

Mr Isi SARAGOSSI (European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, Director) gave a presentation of the state of play on the development of the ERA Framework, the issues at stake and the problems and barriers to be addressed. Moreover, the Commission suggested a set of questions (based on an ERAC paper) for discussion on which SFIC could base its opinion on the ERA Framework.

Mr Dan ANDRÉE (SE delegate to SFIC and ERAC) spoke on behalf of the ERAC Vice-Chair (Mr Bjarne KIRSEBOM) inviting SFIC to contribute to the ERAC opinion on the ERA Framework by formulating its own opinion. Mr ANDRÉE described the process, led by the enlarged ERAC Steering Board, to associate the other ERA groups and ESFRI to the ERAC opinion.

The Commission stressed that, in this first step of the ERA Framework development, the SFIC contribution will in particular be valuable in analysing the obstacles for the realisation of ERA with respect to international cooperation. In the discussion, delegations already noted some obstacles such as attracting researchers from outside of Europe, lack of critical mass and a certain degree of fragmentation among others. Delegations also noted the sensitivity of the matter and the need for an in-depth discussion. Presentation slides used by the Commission were afterwards distributed to delegations.

The Chair invited the Task Force to prepare a draft Position Paper to be approved during the next SFIC meeting. The procedure to develop the SFIC opinion was agreed as follows:

- The Task Force meeting on 7 July 2011 will actively involve the SFIC Chair and will discuss the topic in depth. A rapporteur may be appointed;
- The Task Force meeting on 6 September 2011 will be jointly organised with a back-to-back brainstorming exercise, from which substantial input for the draft Position Paper will emerge;
- A preliminary version of the Position Paper, based on the input by the Task Force, is to be sent to ERAC (and its Steering Board +) by the end of September for discussion at the next ERAC meeting in Cracow, Poland, on 12-14 October 2011. It will therefore be necessary to circulate the draft Position Paper to SFIC Members and Observers for comment by written procedure in mid-September;
- The Position Paper will be approved by the SFIC plenary at the next SFIC meeting on 26 October 2011.
- Member States not present in the Task Force are also invited to contribute in writing during the process;
- The Chair, supported by FI, will endeavour the setting up of an Intranet System for information sharing purposes specifically for this case.

5. Pilot Initiatives in progress

a) "Approaching China"

As the host of the event, the FI delegation informed SFIC about the summary recommendations emerging from the Workshop on "Member States', Associated Countries' and European Commission strategies and initiatives towards China" (Brussels, 3-4 May 2011). Moreover, the "next steps" ahead in the 1-2 coming years were presented to and approved by the SFIC plenary, among them the workshop report and recommendations as well as the organisation of a workshop on framework conditions to take place in Brussels in November 2011. A mandate was given to the Task Force to prepare a detailed roadmap on the Europe-China Strategy. Delegations were also informed that the China Workshop II in Beijing may be postponed to the first half of 2012. Slides used during the presentation were distributed to delegations after the meeting.

b) Delivering on the India Pilot Initiative

In the absence of the Chair of the Task Force (Ms Ana NEVES), the Commission (Ms Sigi GRUBER) informed the Forum of the latest developments and the progress made on the India Pilot Initiative since the last SFIC meeting, including:

- As part of the EU-India bilateral activities, the agreement with India authorities on the launch of two coordinated calls in July 2012 (FP Work Programme 2012) in the field of water purification and water waste management and biotechnology for a total of €16m from both the EU and India side;
- The results of the partnering initiative call with India and the outcomes of the NEW-INDIGO Era-Net;
- The organisation of the first EU/MS awareness raising and information campaign in 27 key research and innovation hotspots across India from 13 to 24 June 2011;
- The development, by the India Technical Group, of a Europe-India strategic research and innovation agenda (SRIA) to be endorsed by Ministers in May 2012.

The DK delegation informed SFIC on the progress made in planning the EU/MS-Ministerial meeting for May 2012 under the Danish Presidency on the occasion of the Competitiveness Council on 30 and 31 of May 2012. Confirmation at ministerial level from Danish authorities is still pending.

The DE delegation informed SFIC about the opening up of MS bilateral calls with India, fostering the engagement of other Member States in order to create a critical mass. DE invited SFIC Members to engage using their own national resources.

c) Approaching the US

The DE delegation informed SFIC about the cooperation practices between DE and the US and their overarching agreement and knowledge sharing activities. The German delegation encouraged participation of SFIC Members in the searching for synergies within more coordinated or joint European cooperation activities vis-à-vis the US.

DE also informed SFIC about the organisation of a workshop in October on "Approaching the USA" along the same lines as the China workshop held in May 2011. The aim of the workshop will be based on information sharing of best practices and challenges in EU/MS-USA cooperation to build a basis for the development of a strategic partnership with the US authorities.

6. Good practices in Member States: UK's Science and Innovation Network

The UK delegate presented to the SFIC plenary the work of the UK's Science and Innovation Network and details of a recent exercise to determine priority countries for the Network. The network promotes strategic partnerships between the UK and international science and innovation communities to enhance business, research and policy interests and investments.

The work of the network is guided by two high level objectives covering "influence" (on policy development and identification of good practices) and "opportunity" (facilitation of science and innovation collaboration). Slides used during the presentation were distributed to delegations after the meeting.

The presentation was very much welcomed by the Chair and SFIC Members. Delegations may inform the GSC Secretariat if they would like to present good practices from their country to the SFIC plenary.

7. Information points

a) Information from the incoming Polish Presidency

The PL delegation gave an overview of the general priorities of the incoming Presidency in the research and innovation field, focusing on: intellectual capital, a simpler and harmonised new FP, synergies between Cohesion Policy and the next Framework Programme and mobility of young researchers.

Two special events were brought to the attention of SFIC Members and Observers:

- Transatlantic Dimension of the future EU Strategic Framework Programme (Washington DC, 5 December 2011 -date tbc);
- Policy Stakeholders Conference: 'EU-Eastern Europe/Central Asia Cooperation in Research and Innovation: The way towards 2020' (Warsaw, 15-16 November).

The PL delegation provided some handouts with information about the above-mentioned events.

b) Latest developments in the field of international cooperation

The Commission informed the SFIC plenary about the following:

- **CSF wrap-up event on 10 June 2011:** On 10 June 2011 the outcome of the consultation on future EU research and innovation funding was discussed at a major conference in Brussels. In addition, the Commission organised on 17 May a consultation event dedicated to international cooperation. Topics covered societal challenges, the need to develop Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas with Third Countries and the building of balanced partnerships to ensure reciprocity.
- **EU-Japan Joint Steering Committee:** The S&T cooperation agreement between the EU and Japan entered into force on 25 March 2011 and the first EU-Japan steering committee took place on 16 June in Tokyo. At the meeting parties defined and agreed on working modalities for the implementation of the EU-Japan S&T Cooperation agreement (e.g. roadmap and thematic sub-groups);

- **EU-Russia Joint Steering Committee:** Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn and Russian Minister for Education & Research Fursenko agreed on 24 February 2011 not to open negotiations on Russia's association to FP7. Instead, strengthening current cooperation in both EU and Russian programmes was envisaged, with a view to establish a new strategic partnership with Russia in the fields of research and innovation. The EU-Russia Steering Committee will take place on 29 June 2011.
- **EU-USA Joint Steering Committee:** The Joint Consultative Group meeting with the US under the S&T cooperation agreement is foreseen for mid-September in Brussels. The date is still to be confirmed. The agenda will address global/societal challenges and also focus on innovation and competitiveness issues.
- **EU-LAC Senior Officials meeting:** The European Union-Latin America and Caribbean (EU-LAC) Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) took place 28-29 March 2011 in Brussels. The SOM adopted the implementation roadmap prepared on the basis of the Madrid Summit Action Plan.
- **Conference "Enhancing Regional Cooperation in the Mediterranean within the framework of the Innovation Union":** A regional conference bringing together the stakeholders involved in the various projects funded by FP7, ENP instruments and MS programmes is foreseen in the first 2012 semester in Europe. The location is yet to be confirmed.
- **ASEAN-EU Year of Science, Technology and Innovation, 2012:** ASEAN endorsed the initiative of the Year at the last EU-ASEAN Dialogue Meeting on S&T in May 2011. Member States were encouraged by the Commission to actively participate.

8. AOB

The FR delegation informed SFIC about the French non-paper on the 8th EU-Africa partnership: Roadmap for the Science Priority (2011-2013) and asked for SFIC Members' contribution to it. PT informed that such document is under discussion at the P8 EEG (European Expert Group), whose second meeting took place on the 14 June under the 2nd EU-Africa Action Plan. The French non-paper was circulated after the meeting.

Next SFIC meeting will take place on 26 October 2011 in Brussels.
