

**EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 27 April 2012**

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

**Secretariat**

**ERAC-SFIC 1354/12**

**NOTE**

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Subject : Summary conclusions of the 13th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 9 March 2012

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The meeting was chaired by Ms Riitta MUSTONEN (FI).

The Forum drew the following conclusions:

**1. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted as set out in document CM 1856/12. DE pointed out their intention to inform about the workshop organised by the BILAT USA project in cooperation with SFIC in April in Vienna (related to item 4.2) as well as about a draft proposal for a SFIC paper on Horizon 2020 (under AOB). The Commission asked for an information point on the Rio +20 initiative to be added. The requests by the UK concerning the processes for the preparation of EU summits and S&T agreements and the involvement of SFIC were announced to be dealt with in the forthcoming SFIC Task Force and plenary meetings.

The Chair recalled that the summary conclusions of the SFIC meeting of 16 December 2011 were approved by written procedure as set out in doc. 1351/12.

**2. Commission Communication on "Enhancing and focusing international cooperation in Research and Innovation"**

**- Presentation by the Commission and Exchange of views**

The Commission (Mr. John CLAXTON, DG Research and Innovation) presented information on the upcoming Commission Communication on "Enhancing and focusing international cooperation in Research and Innovation". The Communication will focus on strengthening competitiveness, tackling societal challenges and supporting the EU external policies. Science diplomacy will be cross-cutting to all three objectives. The Communication will be a short policy document building on the 2008 strategy, the ERA Framework and Horizon 2020 and will be complemented by a staff working paper. It is considered as a "dynamic" Communication which should focus on (1) a renewed strategy for international cooperation (a focused approach, promoting EU as a global partner and enhancing partnerships with MSs); (2) Governance and implementation issues and (3) Monitoring and evaluation. The Commission is expected to adopt the final document in September 2012.

A discussion paper prepared by the Commission was introduced and distributed to delegations. The paper was presented as a basis for a stakeholder consultation meeting planned for 13 March 2012 in order to give input to the drafting process. SFIC Members were equally invited to send answers to the questions put forward in the discussion paper by 19 March.

Delegations recalled the importance of consistency between the Communication and the horizontal nature of international cooperation in the Horizon 2020 proposal, currently being discussed in the Council and the European Parliament, and questioned the influence of the Communication on the ongoing negotiations. The Commission put emphasis on the clear link with the Horizon 2020 package and also recalled the broader scope of the Communication. Moreover, the Commission also confirmed that the outcomes of the SFIC Strategic Workshop in May 2012 will be fully considered.

### **3. Commission Communication on "Small business, big world - A new partnership to help SMEs seize global opportunities**

#### **- Presentation by the Commission and Exchange of views**

Following the agreement at the 16 December 2011 plenary, SFIC invited representatives from the Commission to strengthen the dialogue between science, innovation and industry. Mr. Didier HERBERT (DG Enterprise and Industry) presented the Commission Communication "Small Business, Big World". The Communication aims at bringing attention to the fact that the Commission and the existing instruments are well placed to improve SMEs access in third countries. The idea of the document is to sign post the available services and support and expand the use of the existing services for SMEs in third countries. The Communication focuses on clusters support, growth missions to third countries and financial instruments to help SMEs (already present in Horizon 2020 and COSME).

NO raised again the issue of the European Science House (mainly in the China context) and innovation support in third countries (with remarkable examples such as the Netherlands' support to innovation in California). SFIC Members and Observers called for a joint effort to avoid fragmentation in support structures and reminded the Commission not to duplicate national initiatives while recognising the challenges SMEs face when operating internationally. The Forum welcomed the possibility to join forces when opportunities arise during the development of the SFIC initiatives and will continue to explore synergies between research and industry.

### **4. Initiatives in progress**

#### **4.1 China**

##### **- Draft recommendations on thematic priorities**

Mr. Svend REMOE (NO) presented the draft recommendation paper prepared by the Task Force and the China core group as a set of first thematic recommendations for

SFIC. The paper was broadly supported by SFIC and the link to existing instruments/initiatives was very much welcomed. Additional suggestions made during the discussion were: including food security, increase the focus on innovation and support to high-tech SMEs, include the perspective of social sciences and further identify the EU added-value for addressing each of the themes. SFIC Members and Observers were asked to provide written comments to the draft paper by 16 March. After incorporating the comments, these first thematic recommendations are meant to be approved by the Forum via written procedure.

- **Workshops**

The Forum agreed to organise a joint workshop on mobility together with the SGHRM (to take place at the French Permanent Representation, probably on 12 June 2012) and mandated the Task Force to prepare a concept paper as a basis for the workshop. The workshop should not target only China but be extended also to other BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India). As the workshop may take place back-to-back to the next SFIC plenary in June, the concept paper must be approved via written procedure. Moreover, the Task Force was also given the task to look into the possibilities and value of a third China workshop and prepare a concept paper for discussion at the next plenary.

- **China roadmap**

Delegations were invited to submit written comments to the China roadmap (a 'living document' presented in the SFIC plenary on 16 December) by 16 March.

## 4.2 USA

- **Presentation of the USA concept paper**

DE presented a concept paper "Approaching US", which includes 5 objectives with specific action points for SFIC to proceed on in the coming months, the following: (1) Enhancing the scale of European-US S&T cooperation; (2) Developing the innovation dimension; (3) Developing a level playing field and improving framework conditions;

(4) "Destination Europe" initiative; and (5) Information sharing. The paper was well-received by Members and Observers (who were asked to submit written comments by 16 March) and the Task Force was mandated to continue working on this basis towards the realisation of a US roadmap.

- **Joint workshop with the BILAT USA project**

DE presented the workshop "Ways of successful science, technology and innovation cooperation between Europe and the USA" organised by the BILAT-USA project in cooperation with SFIC. The workshop will take place in Vienna on 23 and 24 April 2012 and its objective is to analyse barriers related to framework conditions and legal governance for ST&I cooperation with USA partners and to put forward recommendations on how to develop solutions. The organisers encouraged SFIC Members and Observers to send suggestions concerning potential speakers (Europeans and/or Americans) as well as successful projects/programmes that could be presented during the symposium.

- **Interaction with the EU-US Energy Council**

The Commission (DG Research and Innovation) explained the work of the US-EU Energy Council and some potential synergies with SFIC were discussed. According to the Commission, the European added-value in S&T in the field of energy is not fully realised and better coordination between Member States and the Commission is essential. However, the current SET-Plan Steering Group gives only limited attention to international cooperation. The general view emerging from delegations is that SFIC should not duplicate the responsibilities of other governance structures. However, SFIC may, when appropriate, consider contributing to sectoral policy dialogues when requested well in advance in order to have enough time to coordinate a position.

#### **4.3 India**

- **Strategic Agenda and stakeholder meeting 31 May/1 June: next steps**

The Commission reported back from the video-conference with the Indian counterparts on 7 March. Science counsellors in Brussels and Delhi participated to the video-

conference, where it was suggested that the Strategic Agenda could become a "White Paper". Written input from the Indian side was expected by mid-March. Moreover, the Commission also informed about the preparations of the stakeholder conference taking place on 31 May and 1 June 2012 and invited interested SFIC Members to join the steering group for the event preparations.

The Commissioner plans to invite the Indian minister and the possibility of a ministerial roundtable in the morning of 1 June is envisaged, following the Competitiveness Council the day before. SFIC delegates will explore their ministers' availability to attend.

The Commission also recalled the EU-India joint declaration on R&I signed at the EU-India summit on 10 February 2012. SFIC Members voiced once again the need for better information sharing between the European Commission and MSs to enhance coordination in such cases, particularly before adoption of documents and involving SFIC when appropriate.

## 5. SFIC Annual Report

### - Presentation by the SFIC Chair

The Chair presented both an introductory letter (with a more political message) and the Annual Report with its main features. The report is based on two main parts: (1) a summary with progress on the implementation of the European Partnership for international S&T cooperation, an outlook for 2012 and recommendations; and (2) a detailed progress report,

including the milestones towards the development of the external dimension of ERA, the work done by SFIC initiatives, information sharing and internal organisation aspects.

Delegations generally welcomed the report, made some oral remarks (e.g. including the references to Associated Countries through the report, when appropriate) and were invited to submit written comments to the report until 23 March 2012. A revised version is then to be submitted for approval via written procedure.

## **6. SFIC Strategic Workshop (Helsinki, 10-11 May)**

### **- Information point**

Ms. Tiina VIHMA-PUROVAARA (FI) updated delegations on the organisation of the SFIC Strategic Workshop taking place on 10 and 11 May in Helsinki, Finland. The Strategic Workshop will mainly have the specific purposes of (1) defining the added-value of joint European international cooperation; and (2) articulate the vision of SFIC for a European Strategy on International STI cooperation and find the main focus areas of SFIC's work.

FI also presented the provisional programme for the 2-day workshop, which includes a welcome speech by Mr. Jukka Gustafsson (Finnish Minister for Education and Science) and various sessions focussing on the SFIC vision for the future European Strategy for international S&T cooperation, measurable targets for future SFIC work and potential elements for the SFIC's Work Programme 2013-2014.

The workshop is targeted at SFIC delegates of all levels. The Chair welcomed both SFIC Members and Observers to Helsinki in May.

## **7. Strategic discussion on information sharing**

### **- Presentation of Information Sharing Guidelines**

The Chair recalled the importance of information sharing and the related discussions during the last plenary on 16 December 2011, in which the Forum invited the Task Force to elaborate a 1-page paper as "Information Sharing Guidelines", focused on "how" to share information amongst SFIC Members and Observers. Ms. Tiina VIHMA-PUROVAARA (FI) presented the Information Sharing Guidelines elaborated by the Task Force in collaboration with the SFIC Secretariat.

Delegations supported the information sharing effort and generally welcomed the paper presented. However, Members and Observers suggested considering it as "recommendations" rather than "guidelines". Members and Observers were invited to submit comments by 16 March 2012.

DE briefly presented their newsletter "SFIC News" to the plenary that is to be distributed at national level within ministries and research organisations.

## **8. SFIC Rules of Procedure**

### **- Adoption**

Delegations welcomed the final draft of the SFIC Rules of Procedure prepared by the SFIC Secretariat and the Task Force. Some minor modifications were proposed, specifically concerning:

- Comments received during last SFIC plenary meeting (16 December 2011) and last Task Force meeting (9-10 February 2012);
- Restructuring of the text (moving of some articles and paragraphs with no deletion of any content);
- The addition of some provisions for clarity and extra-linkage with Rules of Procedure from other ERA groups (i.e. notice of nominations, clarification of representatives/ alternates, etc.);
- Comments from Council and Commission Legal Services to avoid any future misunderstanding (i.e. clarification of voting arrangements and simple majority voting).

After the presentation by the SFIC Chair, the Council Legal Service took the floor to propose a modification on Article 8 (Voting arrangements and quorum), in order to clearly specify the simple majority rule, the delegation of votes and the written (and silence) procedure.

Delegations had no objections to these proposed changes. The new Rules of Procedure were adopted by the SFIC plenary.

Following the adoption of the Rules of Procedure, the SFIC Chair informed delegations about the procedure for the election of the Vice-Chair, which entails the following:

- *Submission of candidacies*: All Member States have the opportunity to put forward candidates (CV and motivation letter) for the Vice-Chair position until 23 March 2012;
- *Compilation and distribution of candidacies*: SFIC Secretariat will compile all names and distribute the CVs and letters from all of them to SFIC Members;
- *Election*: Election of the Vice-Chair will take place during the next plenary meeting, on 11 June 2012;
- *Transition period*: Until the election, Ana Neves (PT) will continue with her tasks of Task Force Chair and can act as SFIC representative (acting Vice-Chair) if needed.

## 9. AOB

- DE presented a draft proposal for a SFIC opinion on Horizon 2020 and informed that ESFRI is equally preparing an opinion. As an advisory body to the Council and the Commission, DE considers that SFIC is well-placed to provide some input or opinion focusing on the international dimension of Horizon 2020. SFIC Members recalled that any potential paper should be without prejudice to national positions. The Task Force was mandated to look into the issue again and further discuss it.
- The Commission informed about its proposal to establish, in the context of the preparations for the Rio+20 3rd Earth Conference on sustainable development (Rio de Janeiro, June 2012), a "mechanism for global science and research cooperation on societal challenges of global importance". The proposal for such "mechanism" has been included and detailed in the official EU submission to the United Nations. It has subsequently been reflected in the so-called "zero draft" which is the basic compilation

text for the negotiations leading to the conference. The Commission invited SFIC Members to raise awareness about this proposal in their respective countries. An information note will be circulated to all SFIC delegates.

- The Chair informed the Forum about the letter received from the network of EU science counsellors in Brazil in November 2011, and encouraged the Task Force to "further explore the issue".
  - The Chair announced the date for the next plenary meeting: **11 June 2012.**
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