

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
COMMITTEE

Strategic Forum for International
S&T Cooperation

Secretariat

ERAC-SFIC 1356/12

NOTE

Subject : Summary conclusions of the 15th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 1 October 2012

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 4426/12.

The [Chair](#) recalled that the summary conclusions of the SFIC meeting of 11 June 2012 were approved by written procedure as set out in doc. 1355/12.

2. Communication on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in Research and Innovation: A strategic approach"

The Commission (Laurent BOCHEREAU, DG RTD) presented its Communication on "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in Research and Innovation: A strategic approach". The Commission's rationale for a new strategic approach on international cooperation is that Europe needs to engage more strategically in science, technology and innovation cooperation with its main partners in order to: strengthen the Union's excellence and attractiveness in research and innovation and its economic and industrial competitiveness; address global societal challenges; and support external policies.

To achieve these objectives, the strategy will follow a dual approach: On one hand, Horizon 2020 will be open to participation from entities from across the world, although the list of countries that receive automatic funding will be revised. This general opening will allow European researchers to cooperate with third country counterparts on topics of their own choice. On the other hand, there will be targeted cooperation activities on particular topics and with well identified countries and/or regions. Multi-annual roadmaps for cooperation with key partner countries and regions will be developed.

Delegations welcomed the Commission's presentation. Their questions related mainly to the involvement of SFIC in the strategy definition and implementation as well as to the development and implementation of the multi-annual roadmaps. The Commission explained that SFIC's involvement on the implementation of the strategy will be focused (but not limited to) the following set of activities:

- Developing EU/MS SRIAs and providing input to Horizon 2020 multi-annual roadmaps for international cooperation;
- Contributing to the development of the Research and Innovation Observatory;
- Coordinating between relevant departments, ministries and agencies and consulting with stakeholders;
- Developing common guidelines for S&T agreements;
- Promoting common principles for the conduct of international R&I activities;
- Contributing to common approaches in international organisations and European intergovernmental initiatives.

3. SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014: Exchange of views

The Chair recalled the strategic discussions that took place in Helsinki on 10-11 May 2012, the SFIC Chair's Vision for 2020-2025 as well as the discussions at Task Force level on the draft scheme for the SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014. The Chair presented the draft scheme for the SFIC Work Programme 2013-2014 focussing on four areas of activities: (1) Added value and visibility; (2) Common priorities and joint initiatives and actions; (3) Analyse, collect and share information; and (4) Networking and coordination.

Delegations welcomed the draft Work Programme 2013-2014 but some considered it "ambitious". A balance between policy and strategic initiatives and practical implementation will have to be sought. Delegations highlighted the need to link the work of SFIC (and in particular the Strategic Research and Innovation Agendas with priority countries) with the multi-annual roadmaps that will be prepared by the Commission in the framework of the new Communication and Horizon 2020.

Delegations were invited to submit comments on the draft scheme by 12 October 2012. A report-type draft Work Programme 2013-2014 will be prepared and presented to the Task Force in November before its submission to the plenary on 18 December 2012 for final adoption.

Moreover, FI volunteered to draft a concept note on best practices on international cooperation in the context of linkages between SFIC and national administrations and SFIC's role at national level. The Chair asked FI to present a proposal for a workshop at the Task Force for further discussion.

4. SFIC's role in the preparation of EU summits and Senior Official Meetings (SOMs)

The Chair recalled the importance of having the possibility to provide input to the formal decision-making processes to increase the impact and visibility of SFIC's work. Both the Third SFIC Annual Report as well as the SFIC Work Programme 2011-2012 acknowledge the

importance of facilitating prior coordination when STI issues are items of summits and/or bi-regional/ bilateral dialogues.

Ana Cristina NEVES (Vice-Chair, PT) presented a note prepared by the Task Force (with the advice of the Commission and Council legal experts) on how SFIC could potentially contribute to the preparation of research and innovation related topics in EU-Third country summits and R&I-related Senior Official Meetings (SOMs). The note is a reference document which explains the different steps to follow in case SFIC decides to provide input to summits or SOMs preparations. As a general rule:

- Any SFIC input to the Council should be directed to the Presidency of the Council of the EU (via the SFIC Chair or the SFIC Secretariat) and examined by the Research Working Party, which will advise the Presidency on further actions needed.
- Any SFIC input to the Commission should be directed to the relevant Commission service via the SFIC Chair or the SFIC Secretariat;
- SFIC must always agree (via plenary decision or written procedure) to (1) provide some input and (2) adopt the document to be submitted to the Council or the Commission.

The Forum agreed to use the note as a reference document. The Forum also decided to invite a representative from the European External Action Service (EEAS) to a forthcoming SFIC meeting to present their working procedures.

5. India: Discussion on the implementation of the Indo-European Partnership: Creation of a Group of Senior Officials (GSO)

Ana Cristina NEVES (Vice-Chair, PT) recalled the history of the SFIC India initiative and reported on the Task Force discussion on the Commission's proposal for a governance structure for the Indo-European Partnership now that the initiative is ready to evolve as a new policy development between the EU, Member States, Associated Countries (as observers) and India. The Commission is proposing the creation of a GSO (Group of Senior Officials), resembling the existing R&I-related SOMs.

Some concerns from Member States mentioned during Task Force discussions refer to the lack of resources at national level (which may impede them to participate in the new structure) and the new proposed structure being heavy and cumbersome. However, delegations acknowledged the purpose to better structure the dialogue between the EU, Member States, Associated Countries and India. Ms. NEVES also recognized the transparent role of the Commission in this process, involving Member States in the establishment of a Group of Senior Officials.

Laurent BOCHEREAU (Commission, DG RTD) explained in more detail the new proposed structure for the GSO and the supporting entities. The GSO is responsible for the overall governance and steering and would meet every 18-24 months. It is supported by a Working Group responsible for the implementation of the initiative and the coordination of the Thematic Teams which will work on the different thematic areas covered by the SRIA.

Delegations stressed the importance of the success of this process as a showcase for the most advanced SFIC initiative. DE, FR, AT and DK asked for some political back-up to the process (mainly concerning the governance structure and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda) by the Council. Delegations considered that some issues on the structure can be improved, such as where the reporting of GSO recommendations goes to, or the set up of the Working Group and the Thematic Teams. However, there were no objections from the Forum for the Commission to discuss this structure with the Indian counterparts.

6. Brazil: Note from the SFIC Task Force and potential next steps

The Chair recalled that, during the last plenary on 11 June 2012, the Task Force was mandated to prepare a concept paper for a potential Brazil initiative.

Tiina VIHMA-PUROVAARA (FI) presented the note prepared by the Task Force as a recommendation for SFIC to launch a Brazil initiative while outlining the first steps to be taken in that process. The step-by-step approach would start with:

- Collecting information on EU/MS/AC S&T activities towards and with Brazil, including mobility schemes;
- Organising an EU/MS/AC-Brazil Workshop on STI to showcase good practices of cooperation models;
- Analysing the variety of on-going successful cooperation activities and identifying where overlaps exist and recommend areas where there is potential for a more coordinated European approach vis-à-vis Brazil which would add value to existing successful cooperation activities.

BE, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, NO, PT and the Commission welcomed the paper and explicitly supported the launch of a new SFIC initiative. The Forum decided in favour of launching a Brazil initiative and adopted the paper as the basis for the work of SFIC regarding Brazil in the coming months. The Chair announced that a reply to the Brazil Science Counsellors' letter received in November 2011 will be prepared informing them about the decision taken and the first steps envisaged.

7. China: State of play, Innovation Dialogue and Sustainable Urbanisation Partnership

Florence LELAIT (FR) gave an update on the work on preparing the EU/MS-China Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA): a draft SRIA representing the joint European interests is planned for discussion at the next Task Force in November in view of presenting it subsequently to the SFIC plenary.

On the Innovation Dialogue discussion, Laurent BOCHEREAU (Commission, DG RTD) informed the Forum on the EU-China Joint Declaration on Innovation Cooperation Dialogue signed at the last EU-China summit on 20 September 2012. The aim of the dialogue is to create an official platform for exchanges and cooperation on innovation between both sides. The intention is to discuss innovation strategies, jointly encourage and support cooperation on R&I activities and fully involve the relevant stakeholders while having a focus on global and common challenges (including energy, health, sustainable urbanisation and ICT, amongst others). An innovation seminar is planned for November in China adjacent to the EU-China Joint Steering Committee.

The Commission also gave an update on the initiatives taking place under the umbrella of the EU-China Partnership on Urbanisation. A side event on R&I for urbanisation took place at the EU-China Mayors Forum in September. A workshop on R&I for urbanisation is planned for May 2013 in China organised by the JPI Urban Europe, the EU delegation in Beijing in collaboration with the network of MS/AC science counsellors. SFIC was invited to take an active role in the workshop and to consider it an important building block of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

The Chair emphasised the importance of coordinating with other ERA Groups and initiatives such as JPIs to mainstream international cooperation, as agreed in Helsinki in May 2012 at the SFIC Strategic Workshop. Delegations agreed that SFIC should be involved in the workshop but only "providing support" and not being the lead organiser. The Chair concluded that SFIC should support the workshop by appointing a representative to be involved in the specific committee responsible for the policy dimension of the event and one representative to take part in the panel discussions during the workshop in Beijing, China.

8. USA: Destination Europe update and reports from events

Ms. Sigi GRUBER (Commission, DG RTD) gave an update on the status of the organisation of the next Destination Europe initiative. The second conference will take place on 6-7 December in San Francisco. The event will have two short plenary sessions and focus on 16 different 90 minute interactive break-out sessions so that all participating Member States/Associated Countries have the opportunity to inform about the research and innovation opportunities Europe has to offer. These 16 sessions will be organised by Member States, Associated Countries, the European Research Council (ERC) and Commission services and will be combined with an exhibition space for pop-up stands.

On another note, the Forum decided to publish the two reports on the two workshop events under the SFIC USA initiative that took place in October 2011 (in Brussels) and April 2012 (in Vienna). The reports will be published on the relevant Council and Commission websites.

9. Any Other Business (AOB)

- ***SFIC leaflet:*** DE distributed a draft SFIC Leaflet and gave the rationale behind this initiative.

- ***ASEAN-COST delegation visit to Brussels:*** The Commission informed about the ASEAN COST visit to Brussels in December 2012 in the context of the closing of the EU-ASEAN Year of Science. SFIC was offered the possibility to meet with the ASEAN COST in the afternoon of 12 December. DE expressed interest. Other delegations are still able to flag their interest directly to the Commission. The Task Force was invited to reflect on how this possibility could best be used.

- ***Calendar of Joint Steering Committees and high level bilateral meetings:*** delegations were informed that an updated calendar has been circulated and updates can be directly sent to the Task Force Secretariat.

- The Chair announced the date for the next plenary meeting: **18 December 2012.**
