

**ERAC-SFIC 1361/14**

**NOTE**

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Subject: Self-assessment of the Strategic Forum for international S&T cooperation  
(SFIC) in the context of the review of the ERA-related groups

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Delegations will find attached the self-assessment/review paper prepared by the Strategic Forum for international S&T cooperation (SFIC), as adopted via written procedure on 20 August 2014.

**Self-assessment of the Strategic Forum for international S&T cooperation (SFIC)  
in the context of the review of the ERA-related groups**

## **1. BACKGROUND FOR THE SELF-ASSESSMENT/REVIEW EXERCISE**

In its resolution of 30 May 2013 (doc. 10331/13), the Council has asked for a review of the ERA-related groups established by the Council to be done by the end of 2014:

*“5. AGREES that the statuses, the mandates and the reporting lines of those ERA-related groups that have been established by the Council should be reviewed by the end of 2014 and INVITES the Commission and the Committee itself to consider whether such a review is required in relation to the groups that they have established; such reviews could be carried out on the basis of (1) an assessment of the extent to which mutual cooperation, consultation and coordination as called for by the Council have effectively been achieved, (2) the timeliness and effectiveness of their advice, and (3) the efficiency of the functioning of these groups”.*

Following a decision by the SFIC plenary on 19 May 2014, the SFIC has conducted, via an online questionnaire, a self-assessment of its activities according to

- its mandate: Council conclusions on a European Partnership for international S&T cooperation (doc. 16763/08);
- the Council conclusions regarding SFIC activities: Council conclusions on the development of ERA (doc. 11032/11); on international R&I cooperation (doc. 10318/13); and on the ERA Progress (doc. 6945/14);
- the Council resolution of 30 May 2013 (doc. 10331/13) on the advisory work of the ERA.

17 Member States answered the questionnaire - Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom - as well as 2 Associated Countries - Moldova and Norway. The Netherlands also submitted some written input but out of the questionnaire. The questionnaire provided both a quantitative and qualitative assessment of SFIC's work. A more detailed account to the responses of the questionnaire is included in the Annex.

## 2. RESULTS OF SFIC'S SELF-ASSESSMENT

From the answers to the questionnaire it is very evident that SFIC Members are to a large extent satisfied or very satisfied with the overall results achieved through the work of SFIC and its impact on developing the international dimension of ERA since 2008. This regards sharing and pooling information as much as identifying common priorities towards cooperation with third countries. But apart from the general positive opinion, several ideas for streamlining and extending SFIC activities in the future have been addressed. Furthermore, SFIC Members see a clear need for change regarding certain aspects of the framework conditions for the work of SFIC in order to further enhance its impact and fully unfold its potential.

### *SFIC's achievements*

SFIC Members have especially highlighted in their answers the following achievements of SFIC's work:

- (1) SFIC, as an advisory body to the Council and to the Commission, has proved its added-value and it has had a clear impact on developing the international dimension of ERA. This has been done for example through opinions on the ERA framework of 18 November 2011 (where SFIC highlighted the international nature of science and its political environment) as well as on the ERA Progress Report, or by promoting the integration of the international dimension into the ERA monitoring mechanism and by contributing to the Multi-Annual Roadmaps. Other contributions by SFIC concern its input to the Council Conclusions on 'Enhancing and Focusing EU International Cooperation in Research and Innovation: a Strategic Approach'.
- (2) SFIC welcomes the work that has been done since its creation at the end of 2008, for instance on the initiatives towards India, USA, China, Brazil and, more recently, Russia. SFIC Members and Observers participating in the initiatives find it now easier to speak with a coherent voice when dealing with countries where a SFIC initiative has been launched.
  - a. SFIC has provided a platform for EU/MS coordination and collaboration even if the impact of SFIC contributions has in some cases been lower than expected;

- b. SFIC has developed a systematic approach to define a strategic research and innovation agenda towards priority countries (1. State-of-play; 2. Priority-setting in a strategic research and innovation agenda; 3. Implementation) relying on relevant activities (workshops, reports, compendium of activities, etc.);
  - c. SFIC plays its role as platform for information sharing on Science and Technology (S&T) cooperation activities and objectives;
  - d. SFIC contributes to the development of the knowledge triangle as far as it considers framework conditions (IPR, standards, doctoral level ...);
  - e. SFIC has contributed to the development of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps as asked by the Council by giving a sound information basis as well as having exchanges and consultation with the Commission. A dedicated SFIC opinion on the issue has also been adopted.
- (3) SFIC's advice can be highly effective for both large and small countries, e.g. they benefit from information and best practices sharing as well as from the strategic advice defined by SFIC.
- (4) SFIC welcomes the awareness-raising activities in third countries to make EU/MS partners aware of excellent research in Europe and to show concrete opportunities to work in Europe (e.g. Destination Europe conferences in the US, Tour of India, Tour of China, Tour of Brazil).

### ***Suggestions for advancing SFIC activities***

Even if the general opinion on the SFIC achievements hitherto is mainly positive, several SFIC Members voiced specific suggestions for the further development of SFIC's work:

- (5) The participation rate of delegations and the framework in which SFIC operates could be improved. The involvement of more SFIC Members and Observers in SFIC activities should be encouraged.
- (6) Networking and interaction with other stakeholders could be enhanced. This regards the relationship between SFIC and the science counsellor networks in third countries, closer consultations and links with BILAT/INCONET project teams as well as the dialogue with stakeholders, particularly with the potential recipients of its opinions and advice.

- (7) SFIC should expand the analytical scope of its work and its range of activity:
- a. SFIC should foster the analysis of third countries' resources and capabilities relying on studies and deliverables for instance from INCO projects funded by FP7 and Horizon 2020 as well as from Joint Programming international activities;
  - b. SFIC should discuss on further countries/regions where SFIC could have a role;
  - c. Regarding the Multi-Annual Roadmaps, SFIC should engage in a forward perspective and deliver valuable input to further develop the Multi-Annual Roadmaps process. SFIC should also be a key actor for developing concepts for international cooperation in Horizon 2020;
  - d. SFIC should address not only the geographical focus of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps, but also the bilateral or multilateral instruments for international cooperation in Horizon 2020;
  - e. Indicators measuring international cooperation have to be further defined;
  - f. SFIC should take more into account the third pillar of the knowledge triangle: higher education (e.g. doctoral level).
- (8) The impact of SFIC contributions has in some cases been lower than expected. SFIC should therefore put more focus on impact and results:
- a. SFIC should take further efforts that its recommendations on priority countries are strongly taken into account in Multi-Annual Roadmaps, in Horizon 2020 calls, intergovernmental initiatives (e.g. joint programming initiatives);
  - b. SFIC should reflect where and how added value of an EU effort can be reached with respect to some common principles for international cooperation;
  - c. SFIC's strategic inputs should also be made known and used at national level;
  - d. SFIC should reflect how its strategic advice could also be communicated more efficiently to end-users.

### ***Framework conditions for SFIC's advice***

As the suggestions show, SFIC can still enhance its scope of activities, but some framework conditions need to be changed on an external level in order to make SFIC's work more effective and to ensure that SFIC is able to provide timely and effective advice. The following suggestions were made during the assessment in order to improve the SFIC consultation process:

- (9) The consultation process of SFIC could be improved:
- a. SFIC needs a structured process to provide early advice about the implementation of the strategy for international S&T cooperation and Horizon 2020;
  - b. SFIC should be consulted as soon as decisions or documents with foreseeable impact on international S&T cooperation are prepared or drafted within the usual decision-making processes (e.g. contribution to policy dialogues, preparation of bilateral and bi-regional summits). SFIC should more regularly and timely be informed about discussions in relevant committees (e.g. Research Working Party, geographical working parties...);
  - c. SFIC's advice should have a role in shaping the external dimension of the ERA (as a cross-cutting and integrated part of ERA) but also in contributing to international S&T cooperation as a whole;
  - d. SFIC's advisory role should be reinforced by keeping SFIC informed on High Level Groups targeting priority countries (e.g. India);
  - e. SFIC should be more engaged in the bi-regional cooperation strategies and activities, e.g. EU-Africa, EU-CELAC, EU-ASEAN.

***Relations between SFIC, ERAC and other ERA-related groups***

- (10) SFIC is in contact with other ERA-related groups and the SFIC Chair is regularly invited to meetings of ERA-related groups' chairs organized by ERAC. However, the interaction between SFIC, ERAC and ERA-related groups could be enhanced. International cooperation still lacks visibility in the ERA:
- a. SFIC would welcome closer interactions with ERAC and other ERA-related groups: ERAC and ERA-related groups could express what they expect from SFIC; Joint activities could be organized;
  - b. More coordination at national level is needed between delegates of the different ERA-related groups;
  - c. The integration of the international dimension into the European Monitoring Mechanism should contribute to increase its visibility and therefore its impact at European level;
  - d. SFIC should transmit key messages on international S&T cooperation to the other ERA-related groups;
  - e. SFIC should be consulted to contribute to the ERA roadmap.

### ***The current SFIC mandate***

The SFIC Members finally expressed their thoughts on the possible change of the SFIC mandate.

- (11) Should the mandates for ERA-related groups' be revised, a new mandate for SFIC could:
- a. Introduce the innovation dimension;
  - b. Acknowledge that SFIC needs financial resources (e.g. from the European Commission, Horizon 2020, etc.) to perform its activities and fulfill its role effectively;
  - c. Reflect on giving advice to the Council and to the Commission on ways that can have an impact on the strategic bilateral and bi-regional dialogues;
  - d. Underline the need to propose forward-looking activities and their implementation (e.g. JRC's work);
  - e. Introduce the necessary collaboration between SFIC and ERAC and other ERA-related groups;
  - f. Change the reporting period to Council and Commission and submit a report of activities every two years.

### 3. KEY MESSAGES TO COUNCIL, COMMISSION AND ERAC

- Delegations welcome the work done by SFIC since its creation at the end of 2008 in contributing to the external dimension of the ERA as well as to international S&T cooperation as a whole;
- SFIC's advice can be highly effective for both large and small countries;
- SFIC should not only focus on geographical priorities and on forward looking activities, but also on instruments for international S&T cooperation as well as impact and results;
- SFIC should be consulted as soon as decisions or documents with foreseeable impact on international S&T cooperation are prepared or drafted within the usual decision-making processes (e.g. policy dialogues, preparation of bilateral and bi-regional summits);
- The involvement of more SFIC Members and Observers in SFIC activities should be promoted;
- Collaboration between SFIC, ERAC and ERA-related groups should be strengthened as well as with stakeholders and science counsellors networks;
- Further coordination at national level between national delegates in the different ERA-related groups should also be encouraged;
- In case the mandates of the ERA-related groups are revised, SFIC would like to see some modifications to its current mandate to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its work.



This Annex is a compilation of the main results of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 64 questions, assessing SFIC since its formation in 2008. Those questions were grouped along SFIC activities demanded by the Council in various Council Conclusions, and the SFIC mandate. This Annex is based on SFIC's delegates responses on what and how SFIC has performed, focusing on the main activities identified in the SFIC mandate and other Council requests, and taking into account SFIC's objective "to facilitate the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of ERA"<sup>1</sup> and other activities mandated by the Council:

**SFIC's mandate**

1. Systematically sharing and structuring information on the S&T cooperation activities and objectives of the various partners;
2. Pooling relevant knowledge concerning third countries, in particular analyses of their S&T resources and capabilities;
3. Ensuring regular consultation between the partners in order to identify their respective objectives and common priorities in terms of S&T cooperation with third countries;
4. Where appropriate, coordinating activities of a similar nature implemented by Member States and the Community;
5. If necessary, proposing initiatives to be implemented with appropriate ways and means;
6. Networking of Member States' and the Commission's scientific advisors in key third countries;

**Other activities mandated by Council**

7. Strengthen cooperation between SFIC, ERAC and the ERA-related groups, functioning at a strategic level;
8. Contribute to specific work items: design and development of Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation, development of common principles for the conduct of international R&I cooperation, development of an ERA-roadmap, support to the Innovation Union, etc.

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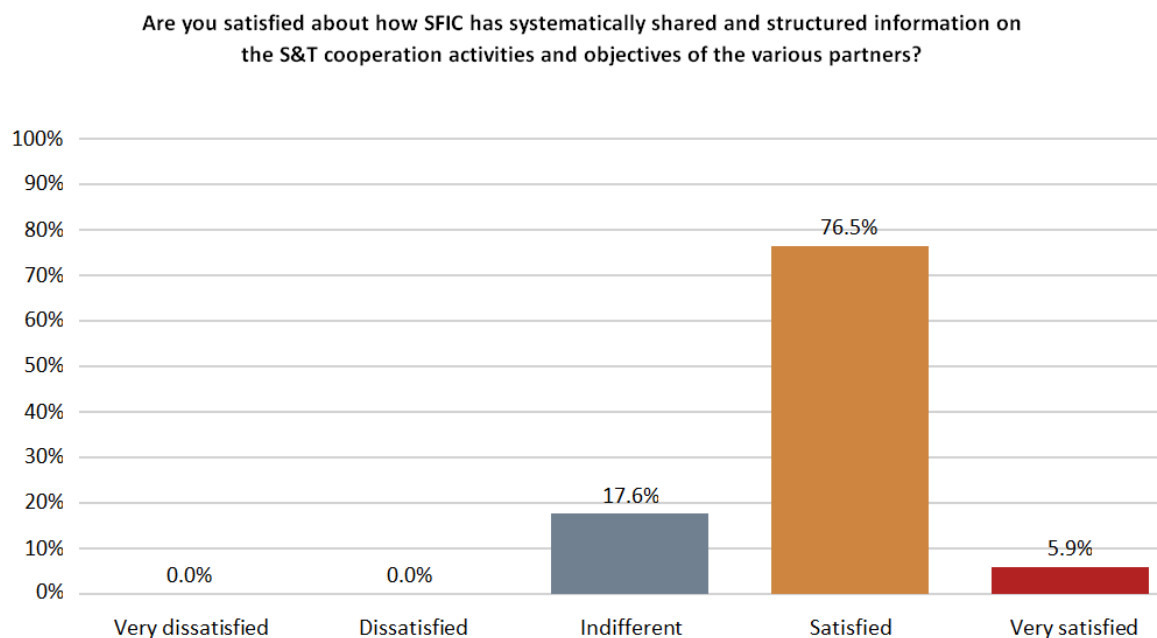
<sup>1</sup> Council conclusions concerning a European partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation (doc. 16763/08)

## OVERVIEW OF MAIN RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- 76.5% of respondents are satisfied and 5.9% very satisfied with the way SFIC has fulfilled its mandate concerning **sharing and structuring information**.
- 68.4% of respondents believe SFIC has fulfilled its mandate as regards **pooling knowledge concerning third countries**.
- 73.7% of respondents are positive as regards having fulfilled the mandate to **identify objectives and common priorities with third countries**.
- Only 42.1% of respondents estimate that the task of **coordinating activities of a similar nature implemented by Member States and the Community** is fulfilled, against 36.8% who do not think so, and 21.1% without any opinion.
- 61.5% of respondents are satisfied with the work done as **regards proposing initiatives to be implemented with appropriate ways and means**.
- 77.8% of respondents are satisfied with the way **SFIC continued its advisory work with its initiatives** such as with India, China, Brazil and others.
- 41.7% of respondents are indifferent and another 41.7% are satisfied as regards **networking of scientific advisors in key third countries**. Only 16.7% are dissatisfied.
- 64.7% are satisfied with **the way ERA-related groups have functioned at a strategic level**.
- 58.3% are satisfied and 16.7% are very satisfied about SFIC's role to reconfirm the **need for strengthened coordination between ERAC and the ERA-related groups**.
- 89.5% consider that SFIC has contributed to the development of the **Multi-Annual Roadmaps**.
- 73.1% consider that SFIC has contributed to the development of **common principles** for international R&I cooperation.
- 72.7% are satisfied about the way SFIC has contributed towards supporting the implementation and monitoring of progress of the **Innovation Union** initiative.

## 1. Systematically sharing and structuring information on the S&T cooperation activities and objectives of the various partners

76.5% of respondents are satisfied and 5.9% very satisfied with the way SFIC has fulfilled its mandate concerning sharing and structuring information, while 17.6% are indifferent.

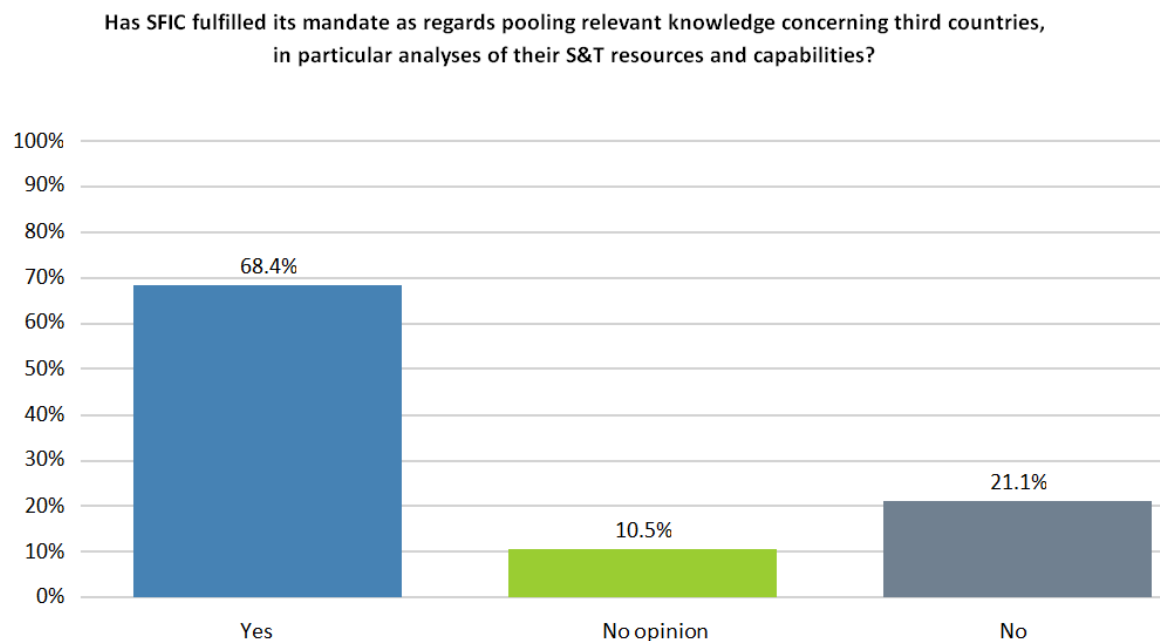


### Key comments:

- SFIC plays its role as platform for information sharing on S&T cooperation activities and objectives with presentations in plenary, mapping activities and bi-weekly information from the Secretariat, compendium on mobility schemes, workshops and public reports, informal discussions in the working groups etc., particularly on the countries where SFIC has launched an initiative (India, USA, China, Brazil, Russia).
- There is need to continue and strengthen sharing and structuring information on the S&T cooperation activities.
- Peer-learning and best practices and related SFIC activities are positive contributions to SFIC work.
- SFIC's country-specific initiatives are helpful to develop own national initiatives.
- There has been a useful SFIC contribution to Destination Europe events and to the Multi-Annual Roadmaps process.
- There is need for good preparatory discussions and also for more in-depth discussions.

## 2. Pooling relevant knowledge concerning third countries, in particular analyses of their S&T resources and capabilities

68.4% of respondents believe SFIC has fulfilled its mandate as regards pooling knowledge concerning third countries; 10.5% have no opinion and 21.1% are negative.

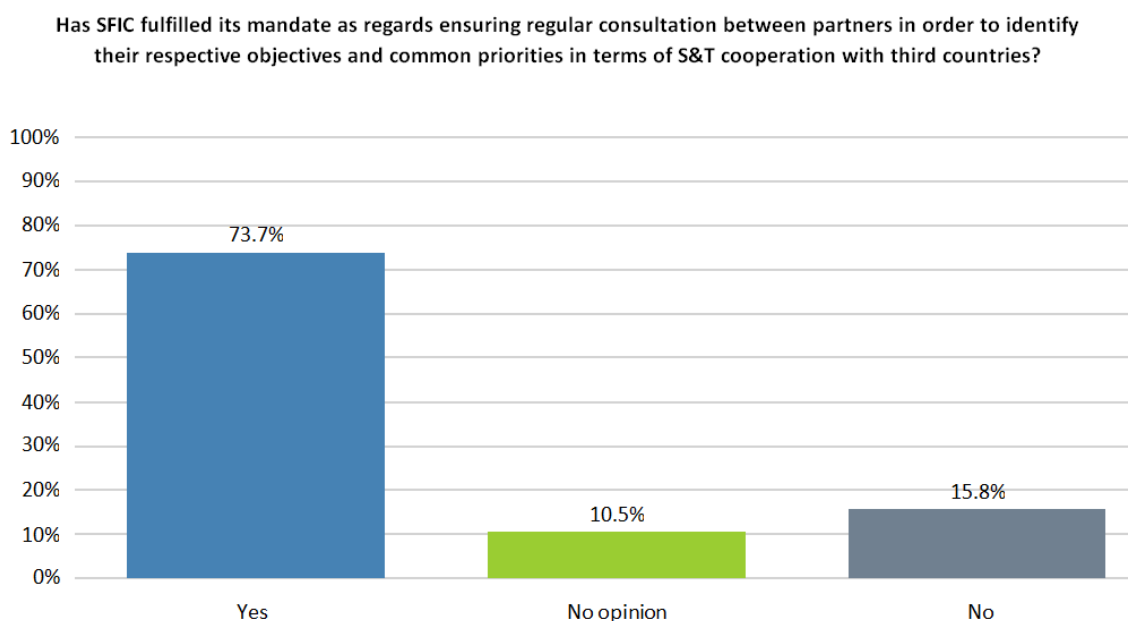


### Key comments:

- Pooling relevant knowledge concerning third countries has been carried out within SFIC initiatives (China, India, USA, Brazil and Russia).
- Dedicated working groups as well as workshops and reports establishing first, the state-of-play of S&T cooperation between SFIC Members and Observers and third countries (followed, if decided, by a strategic R&I agenda) are very much appreciated by respondents.
- Some note that not all initiatives have been carried out in the same comprehensive and structured way; however, others prefer a certain degree of flexibility to develop particular SFIC activities that fit with the specific characteristics of the target country.
- Information on third countries needs to be regularly updated, including SFIC Members and Observers' activities and studies, as well as third country participation in national and thematic programmes in FP7 and Horizon 2020.
- Work needs to be expanded to other countries and regions.

### 3. Ensuring regular consultation between the partners in order to identify their respective objectives and common priorities in terms of S&T cooperation with third countries

73.7% of respondents are positive as regards having fulfilled the mandate to identify objectives and common priorities with third countries, 15.8% are negative and 10.5% are without opinion.

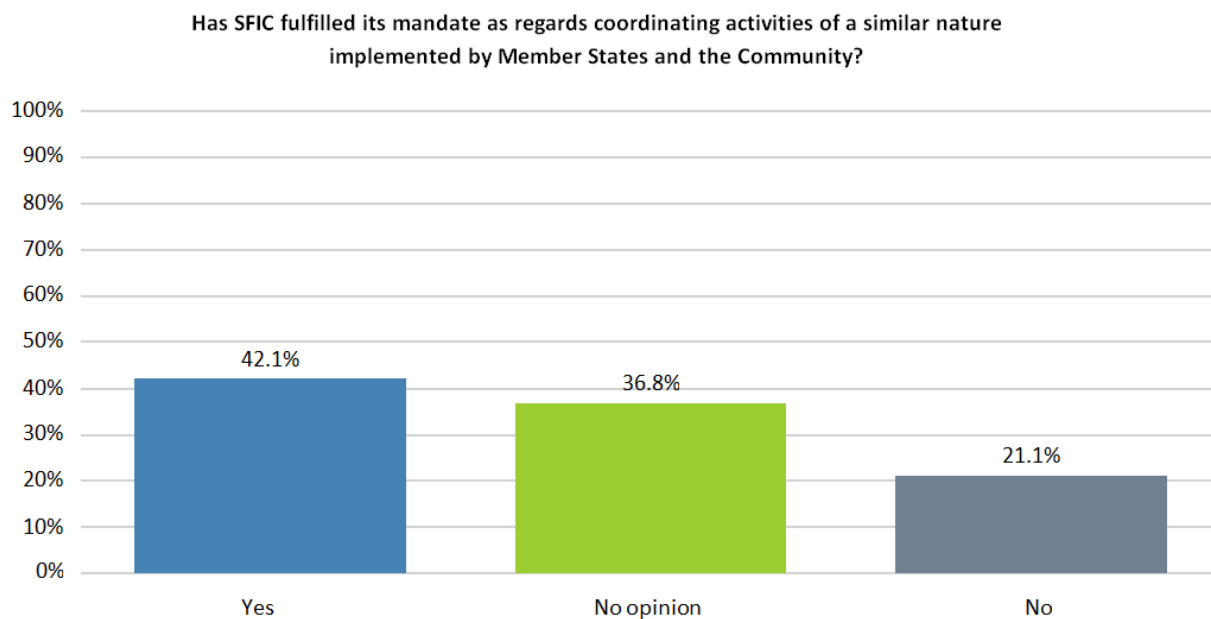


#### Key comments:

- SFIC's method (1. state-of-play; 2. priority setting; 3. implementation) is welcome. Delegations consider that this objective has been fulfilled towards China and India (e.g. Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda), but not yet towards the USA, Brazil and more recently, Russia.
- It is important to ensure the follow-up of these activities in the context of the new SFIC working methods (e.g. working groups and mandates, rapporteurs, etc.).
- Input from SFIC delegates is diverse. More countries should get involved.
- BILAT/INCONET projects should support ERA policy dialogue with third countries and consequently be in connection with SFIC. Furthermore SFIC should contribute to the preparation of bilateral and bi-regional summits.
- Specific formats in addition to the plenaries should be implemented to allow more discussions on practical work and exchange of best practices at a more technical level.

#### 4. Coordinating activities of a similar nature implemented by Member States and the Community

Responses on this task are mixed: only 42.1% of respondents estimate that it is fulfilled, against 36.8% who do not think so, and 21.1% without any opinion.



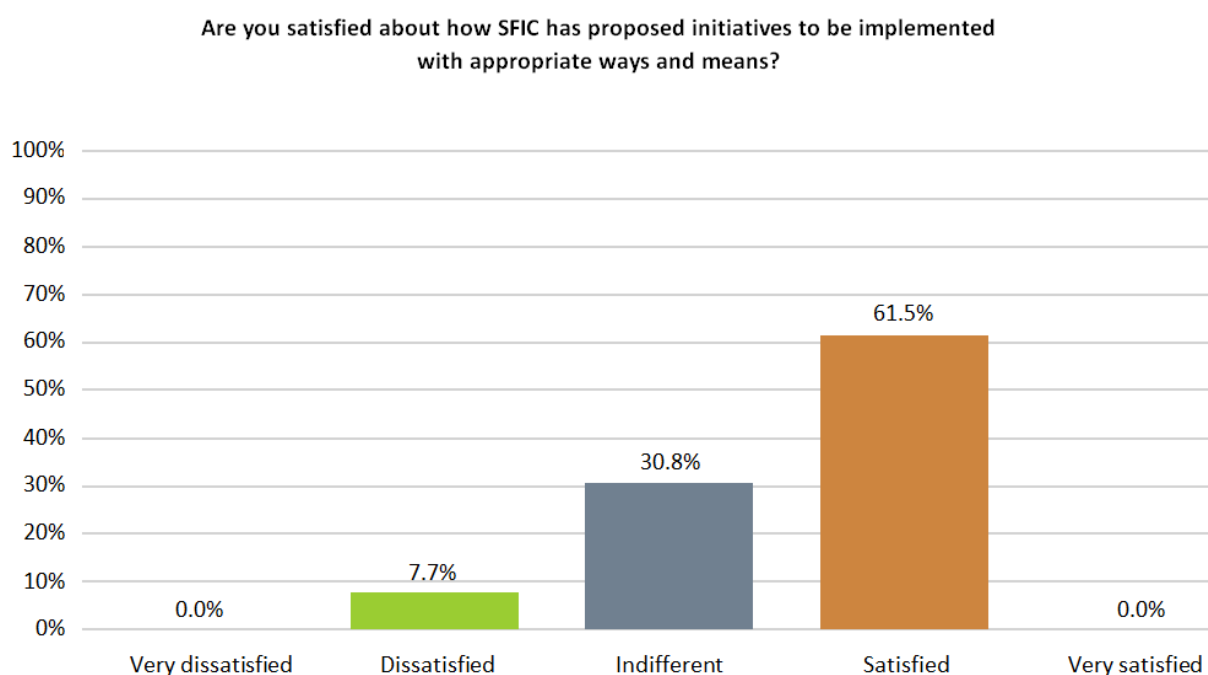
##### Key comments:

- A list of good practices for coordinating activities identified in this field include: the participation of SFIC Members and Observers in Destination Europe conferences in the USA; awareness-raising campaigns organized by the EU delegations and the EU science counsellors in India, China and Brazil; the creation of the GSO EU/MS - India based on the priorities identified by SFIC; and the information exchange regarding FP7-funded INCONET projects.
- However, some delegations consider that there was no coordination between Member States and the EU except from the partnership with India. SFIC has still to reflect on the best implementation mechanisms to give advice to the Council and to the Commission (is the GSO EU/MS-India a good governance model? Are other governance models available?).
- SFIC as a valuable platform for coordinating activities of similar nature by Member States and the Commission could be developed further.

## 5. Proposing initiatives to be implemented with appropriate ways and means

61.5% of respondents are satisfied with the work done, 7.7% are dissatisfied and 30.8% are indifferent, although responses show that not all delegations define the activities to be implemented by SFIC in the same way.

77.8% of respondents are satisfied with the way SFIC continued its advisory work with its initiatives such as with India, China, Brazil and others.

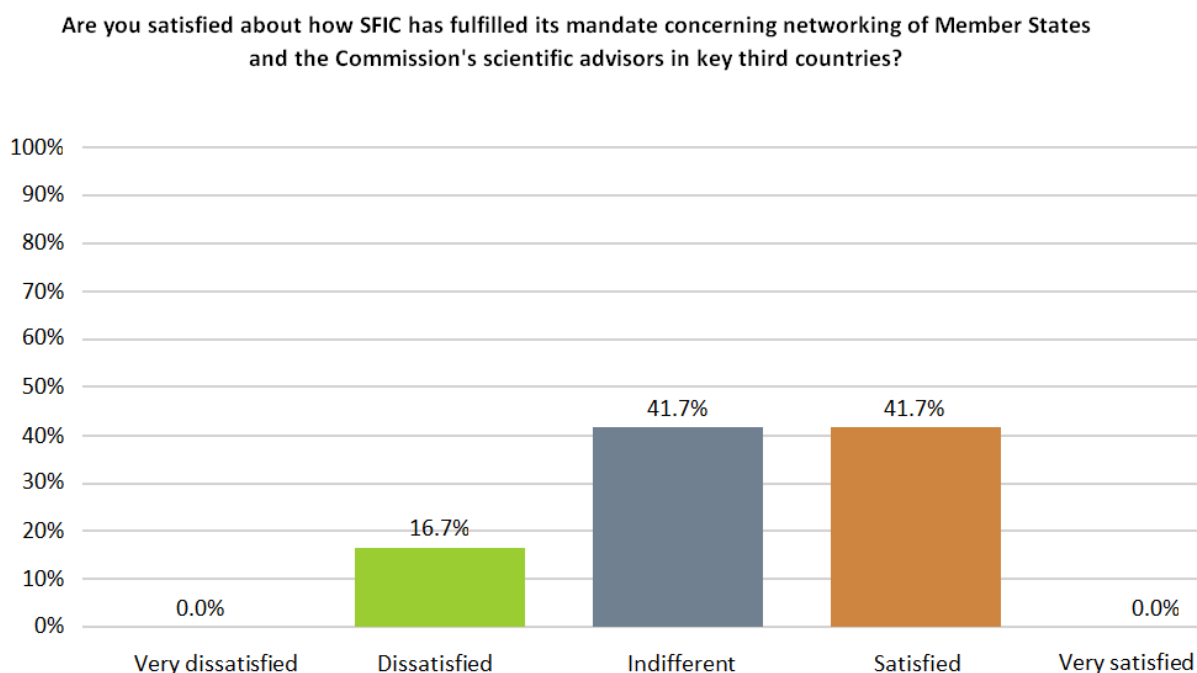


### Key comments:

- There should be closer cooperation between INCO projects (e.g. under schemes such as the BILAT projects) and SFIC to support SFIC's advice with an appropriate evidence base while ensuring there is no duplication of work.
- SFIC delegations could be grouped together to push specific agendas in specific target countries.
- More work is needed as certain initiatives have not yet been implemented, although the R&I agendas for India and China are two good examples of SFIC's contribution.

## 6. Networking of Member States' and the Commission's scientific advisors in key third countries

There is an equal number of respondents who are indifferent and satisfied as regards networking of scientific advisors: 41.7%; only 16.7% are dissatisfied.



### Key comments:

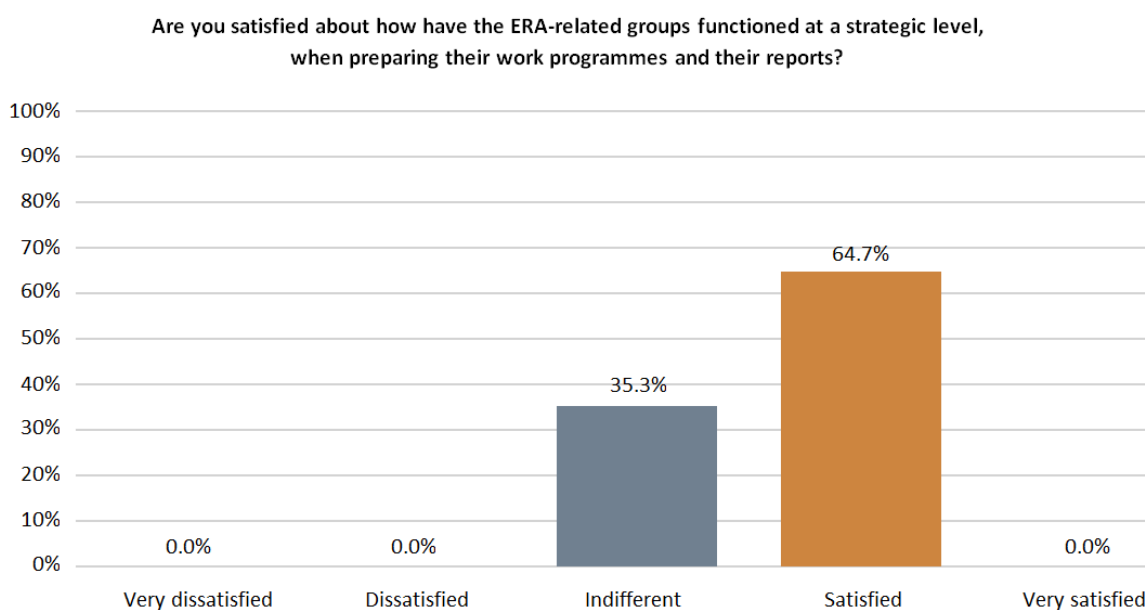
- The internal organisation can be quite different from one Member State to another which makes it difficult to coordinate scientific counsellors in third countries. EU delegations therefore can have an important role to facilitate cooperation.
- Delegations recognise that progress has been done but there is still room for improvement:
  - There should be a systematic exchange of information between scientific counsellors and SFIC with, for instance, EU scientific counsellors being invited to SFIC plenary meetings when they are in Brussels.
  - SFIC could also provide advice to EU/MS science counsellors, when appropriate.



## 7. Strengthen cooperation between SFIC, ERAC and the ERA-related groups, functioning at a strategic level

64.7% are satisfied with the way ERA-related groups have functioned at a strategic level, while 35.3% are indifferent.

58.3% are satisfied and 16.7% are very satisfied about SFIC's role to reconfirm the need for strengthened coordination between ERAC and the ERA-related groups.



### Key comments:

- SFIC has an advisory role but improvements need to be made as regards the strategic level of discussions, as so far it has focused more on implementation. Some respondents believe the new rules of procedure and clear mandates of working groups will help achieve this objective.
- Some respondents believe that there is not enough coordination between the different ERA-related groups. The SFIC-SGHRM joint workshop in 2012 could be seen as an example of best practice.
- More coordination should be done in capitals between delegates of the different ERA-related groups.
- SFIC participates actively in the review of the ERA-related groups.
- SFIC should be seen on an equal footing with all other ERA-related groups, not a subset of ERAC.
- Information flow between the ERA-related groups should be more structured.

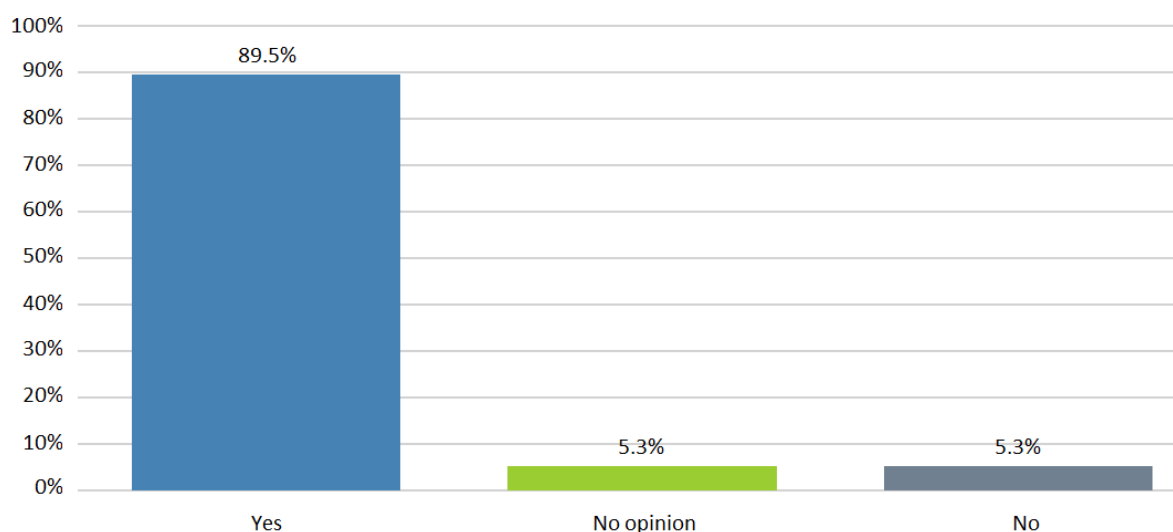
8. **Contribute to specific work items: design and development of Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation; development of common principles for the conduct of international R&I cooperation; development of an ERA-roadmap; support to the Innovation Union, etc.**

89.5% consider that SFIC has contributed to the development of the Multi-Annual Roadmaps.

73.1% consider that SFIC has contributed to the development of common principles for international R&I cooperation.

72.7% are satisfied about the way SFIC has contributed towards supporting the implementation and monitoring of progress of the Innovation Union initiative.

Has SFIC contributed to the design and development of the multi-annual roadmaps in collaboration and open discussion with the relevant stakeholders, while developing joint research and innovation agendas between the Union, Member States and strategic partners in third countries?



Key comments:

- Although the majority is satisfied with SFIC's contribution to the **Multi-Annual Roadmaps** process, some delegates would have preferred the contribution to take place at an earlier stage of the process (i.e. design phase). However, the workshop on the roadmaps organised by the Commission was positively welcomed with a good level of participation by SFIC delegates.

- The development of Multi-Annual Roadmaps can benefit from the work and knowledge gathered by SFIC as shown by SFIC initiatives in India, China, USA or Brazil. SFIC's work should be taken into account in the design and development of the roadmaps.
  - As regards supporting the implementation of the **Innovation Union initiative**, some respondents consider that SFIC has given a structure to Member States-EU activities on international cooperation (e.g. contributing to Council conclusions) while others think SFIC's contribution has been lower than expected.
  - SFIC's work on **common principles** has been scoped and the concept developed. SFIC's promotion of common principles can be delivered through the sharing of best practice and working through promotion by other ERA-related groups.
  - Delegations support the idea that SFIC should contribute to defining an **ERA roadmap** at European level and point out that the international dimension has already been included in the European Monitoring Mechanism. However, ERAC and other ERA-related groups should give clear guidance on the contribution expected from SFIC. An increased involvement of SFIC Members and better coordination with the Commission would be needed for the development of the ERA roadmap, including the suggestion of organising a seminar on this subject.
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