

NOTE

From:	SFIC Secretariat
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Summary conclusions of the 43rd meeting of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 18 December 2019

The meeting was chaired by Ms Martina Hartl (AT).

1. Adoption of the agenda

2. Tour de Table

Presentation of recent INCO developments

The traditional tour de table took place. Contributions by delegations will also be circulated to the committee in a dedicated SFIC bi-weekly.

The Commission/Director Cristina Russo gave an update on the recent INCO meetings and developments. On 21-22 November 2019, the 'EU-LAC Innovation Cooperation Conference' brought together stakeholders, decision makers, funding agencies and innovation actors from both sides of the Atlantic. The intention is to add innovation as a fourth trend in this R&I cooperation framework. An EU-LAC meeting at senior officials level around June 2020 should confirm this. A similar event between the EU and Brazil is expected to be organised in the near future.

A Partnership to strengthen innovation cooperation between the EU and Africa was launched in a meeting in Nairobi in September 2019. At the African Union-European Union High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) meeting on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) that was held on 7-8 November in Addis Ababa, the EU-Africa Partnership was officially adopted. A second meeting of the Partnership was organised on 5 December 2019 in Marseille. The Commission is preparing a new strategy on Africa, expected during the first quarter of 2020. Ms Russo underlined the importance to have a positive agenda with Africa and stressed the importance of research and innovation in the collaboration between the EU and Africa.

A meeting of the EU-MED Group of Senior Officials met on 25 November 2019 in Barcelona, Spain. It took place under the auspices of the Union for the Mediterranean and the aim was to take stock of the current situation, as the previous meeting had taken place two years ago. It was agreed that the following meeting should take place soon, possibly already during the first quarter of 2020.

On 3 December 2019, a meeting of Japan-EU Joint Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation took place in Brussels. The discussions covered *inter alia* the possibility to link Horizon Europe, especially the future missions, to the Moonshot Research and Development Program. Joint committee meetings with Turkey and Armenia have also taken place recently, and a meeting with the EU-Canada joint committee meeting is expected in 2020.

The new Commission is a geopolitical Commission, and the new Commission President has stressed the importance of cooperation with Africa. Ms Russo indicated that the Commission is currently working on a revamped strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation. The previous strategy on international cooperation in research and innovation was adopted in 2012 and guided activities under H2020. An internal group on matters relating to international cooperation in research and innovation has been established within the Commission, and this will allow better coherence within the Commission services as well as cross-fertilisation between internal and external coordination. The aim is to focus the strategy better on the key priorities of the new Commission and to have focussed actions. It is however not yet clear how the strategy will be formalised, as a separate Commission Communication or perhaps within the ERA Communication expected during the first half of 2020. Ms Russo underlined the importance of cooperation with the Member States and mentioned that the work done by SFIC will work as an inspiration for this internal group.

To the questions asked by the FI, FR and HU delegations, Ms Russo replied that the Commission will circulate the documents relating to the Innovation Partnership EU-Africa to SFIC delegations. She stressed that the Partnership is open to all innovation ecosystems in the EU and Africa and that several memorandums of understanding have already been signed. Relating to the possibilities for the Member States to participate in the meetings on international cooperation in research and innovation, she indicated that it was difficult to give fixed dates well in advance, as it sometimes takes time to agree on them with the international partners. She agreed that it would be a good idea to have a coordination meeting with the Member States before the EURO-MED meetings. Referring to the China Meeting at Directors-General level that took place the same day as the SFIC plenary, Ms Russo regretted the overlap with the dates but indicated that it had not been easy to find a suitable date to gather the Directors-General in Brussels. There was however a new meeting already in the planning, and she assured the Commission would try to avoid a similar overlap. As to the question by the Vice-Chair concerning similar meetings such as the Destination Europe in Seattle in February 2020, Ms Russo promised that the Commission would come back shortly with additional information.

3. Future of SFIC

a) SFIC visibility/communication

The DE delegation presented the draft final report on behalf of the task force. Social media was not taken up in the report because of the restrictions due to the Council policy on the use of professional social media accounts. Moreover, because of restrictions due to the Council website policy, links to SFIC documents cannot be added on the Council webpage that contains the information on the ERA-related groups. All official SFIC documents are however available in the Council's Public Register. Austria has agreed to update its ERA Portal to include more links to the documents of the ERA-related groups, including SFIC.

The MT delegation regretted that social media was not included in the plan. The SFIC Chair explained that only personal social media accounts could be used and that she would still have to reflect on the possibility for her to engage in this.

SFIC adopted the final report without objections. It will be circulated to SFIC as adopted and also forwarded to ERAC for information.

The DE delegation presented the draft SFIC presentation on behalf of the task force. Delegations inquired about whether it would be possible to use the Council logo in the presentation and whether the presentation could be translated by delegations into their own languages so that it could be used also at national level. The Chair replied that the use of the Council logo was not possible as SFIC is an advisory group of the Council. As for the translations, the Chair welcomed delegations to do them and also to circulate the different linguistic versions to other delegations.

SFIC delegations were given until 10 January 2020 to send their comments on the presentation.

4. SFIC activities in the context of the ERA

The Chair reported back from the ERAC plenary that took place on 17 December 2019. The most important item had been the discussion on the final report of the ERAC Ad-hoc Working Group on the future of the ERA. The report had been adopted with two changes, namely the addition of a reference to open innovation and the inclusion in one of the titles of wider European policy objectives "in a global context". ERAC had also agreed on the ERA motto "Mobilising knowledge for a better and a more sustainable future".

The Commission will now continue its "Tour des capitales" on a "new revamped ERA" until March 2020, and the new ERA Communication is expected before summer. The incoming Croatian Presidency and the next trio of Presidencies (DE, PT, SI) committed to keeping the ERA high on their agenda.

The Chair also referred to the topics of the ERAC workshop of 16 December that were consequently the topics of the strategic debate at the ERAC plenary: R&I investments and brain circulation. The latter will also be one of the priorities of the incoming Croatian Presidency. Moreover, over lunch ERAC discussed the role of research and innovation in the Green Deal. The Chair wondered whether SFIC should also tackle one or more of these topics and issue an opinion. The MT delegation considered that SFIC should indeed be more proactive and issue an opinion. The Chair concluded that SFIC should reflect on this and step up work on these topics. She also mentioned a possible lunch discussion at the end-February Competitiveness Council on international cooperation and considered that SFIC should issue an opinion with a view to this discussion.

5. SFIC Work Programme 2019-2020

The Chair presented the document that had been prepared for this agenda item. For most areas of action, the activities of SFIC have followed the planned timeline. Only for two areas there is a delay. Relating to the strategic advice on international S&T cooperation, the discussions on Article 12 (International cooperation) of the draft Horizon Europe Framework Programme Regulation have not yet started and therefore the potential SFIC Opinion has not yet materialized. As for the activity relating to the RIO observatory under the area "Sharing and structuring information and good practices on international R&I cooperation activities", the Commission indicated that it would aim to present more information at the next SFIC plenary on 2 March 2020.

The Chair expressed her opinion that SFIC would have to step up its work and to be able to adopt opinions, reports etc. at a quicker pace than what the yearly planning of 4 plenaries allows. She therefore pleaded for the flexibility of SFIC delegations to use electronic means (written procedures) to adopt opinions etc. There were no objections from delegations.

6. Exchange with key Stakeholders on the international dimension of the ERA

Representatives of five key R&I stakeholder organisations took part in this exchange of views: EARTO (represented by Fraunhofer), EUREKA, European University Association (EUA), The League of European Research Universities (LERU) and Science Europe. Each of the organisations made a presentation (which are available on the delegates portal) about their activities, focusing on the international dimension of the ERA and the role of international cooperation in Horizon Europe.

Following the presentations, some questions and comments were directed to some of the organisations:

- EARTO: the DE delegation inquired about EARTO's view on the role of innovation in the future ERA; the ES delegation asked about the influence of government actions on the activities of EARTO; and the FR delegation wondered how SFIC could cooperate in the work on China and Africa. The EARTO representative considered that the role of innovation is becoming more important for the European competitiveness as especially Asia is developing fast in this field. As for the different national systems, they offer different kinds of opportunities and challenges. Relating to the cooperation with SFIC, the future of the ERA could be a possible area, as well as some topics within Horizon Europe.
- EUA: the ES delegation wondered how European universities will be able to compete and fight brain drain in the international scene; and the FR delegation pointed out that the European Higher Education Area is becoming more and more important in the future for the ERA.
- EUREKA: the ES delegation asked about the cooperation with the European Innovation Council (EIC) under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme; and the Maltese delegation inquired about the topics of the INNOWWIDE project. The EUREKA representative indicated that cooperation with the EIC is in its strategy and that concretely this would happen in the framework of the Eurostars 3 project. As for the INNOWWIDE project, it is fully bottom-up and the topics are defined by the participants.

The Chair thanked all organisations and indicated that the first steps for a follow-up to the discussion would be taken by the SFIC task forces on Africa, China and Science diplomacy.

7. Information on the Mutual Learning Exercise

The FR delegation made a presentation on the state of play of the MLE. The third and last country visit took place in Sweden mid-November, and the final meeting of the MLE will take place in Brussels on 3 February 2020. The dissemination workshop is foreseen for 26 May 2020 (back-to-back with the SFIC plenary on 27 May). The report on topic 3 should be shortly available on the MLE website.

8. Working groups

a) Benchmarking Working Group

The Chair thanked the Benchmarking Working Group members for their intensive work and dedication. The FR delegation presented the final report of the Working Group. There were no comments from delegations, and the final report was thus adopted. It will be circulated to SFIC in its final adopted form, together with the updated Excel table containing the country specific data used for the drafting of the report.

The FR delegation presented the draft SFIC Opinion on international research and innovation cooperation that had been circulated to SFIC delegations on 25 November 2019 for comments by 9 December. The NO delegation had made some comments, and the FR delegation proposed a way to incorporate them in the text of the draft SFIC Opinion. The draft Opinion as modified was adopted by SFIC.

Both the final report of the Benchmarking Working Group and the SFIC Opinion on international research and innovation cooperation will also be forwarded to ERAC for information.

b) China

The Vice-Chair reported from the China meeting at Directors-General level that took place on the same day as the SFIC plenary. All Member States, many DGs from the Commission and the EEAS were present at the meeting. The main messages from the meeting were the following:

- According to the Joint Communication by the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of March 2019, China is simultaneously, in different policy areas, a *cooperation partner* with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives (global challenges!), a *negotiating partner* with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an *economic competitor* in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a *systemic rival* promoting alternative models of governance. The same applies for cooperation in science and technology;
- The best science in the world is in Europe, the US comes second (by impact) but the EU needs to recognize the capacity of knowledge in China;
- The Commission and the Member States need to have a joint agenda for a more strategic framework with China;
- Unity of the EU is important systemically in China cooperation;
- Reciprocity is needed in all dimensions (trade, all sectors)
- Cooperation with China can offer a “shared future”, the EU needs to engage with China and maintain a rules-based cooperation;
- Pragmatic solutions and a common framework for actors are needed in all international cooperation; next steps are common mechanisms (such as the UK handbook for trusted research: <https://www.cpni.gov.uk/trusted-research>), guidelines and strategies;

- a new China meeting is already planned to be held soon, and a "27+1" summit is envisaged to be held in September 2020 to discuss the above;
- there is also a role for the ERA-related groups to play, especially for ERAC and SFIC, as the ERA framework will be important.

The Commission will shortly provide a document as a follow-up to the meeting. The Vice-Chair also indicated that the China survey done by SFIC had been appreciated by the participants to the meeting. The Chair gave a brief presentation of the main results of the China survey. At the request of the HU delegation, the Chair will check if it would be possible to share with SFIC some examples of good practices of monitoring.

The Chair invited delegations to indicate by 10 January 2020 if they are ready to lead the China task force.

c) Africa

The ES delegation, on behalf of the SFIC Africa task force, and the Commission made a joint presentation on the state of play of the current activities on Africa. The Africa task force has had two virtual meetings since the October SFIC plenary and is planning to draft a strategic report and to have a work shop on 3 March 2020, back-to-back with the SFIC plenary of 2 March. The next virtual meeting is planned for January 2020, and the task force would welcome new members.

The Chair thanked the ES delegation for the work done so far. The Concept Note of the Africa task force was endorsed by SFIC.

d) Science diplomacy

On behalf of the AT delegation, the Chair made a presentation of the state of play of the Science diplomacy task force. The new version of the Concept Note includes a Work Programme for the next 18 months. The main working areas include the identification of key actors, networks and practices, enabling dialogue and collaboration between relevant communities, the EU institutions and the Member States and Associated Countries regarding Science Diplomacy and exchanging current practices of Science Diplomacy strategies or activities developed at national and regional level, including work on the ERA National Action Plans.

The Commission indicated that, at the workshop in October, very concrete examples of actions were given. New actions are also planned, and SFIC's input would be valuable. The Commission agreed that the exchange of current practices is very important and proposed to organise a new workshop in March, back-to-back with the SFIC plenary. To the inquiry by the MT delegation whether the Commission could in its revamped strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation take into account SFIC's work (eventually an opinion) on this topic, the Commission replied that the work on the strategy is already on-going and that the approach is rather thematic. However, science diplomacy will without doubt play a role and a SFIC opinion could of course inform the Commission in this aspect. It should however be ready by February in order to be timely. The Chair indicated the readiness of the AT delegation to reflect on this as the leader of the task force.

The Concept Note of the Science diplomacy task force was endorsed by SFIC.

9. Any other business

The Chair informed delegations that the next SFIC plenary would have to be moved from 4 March 2020 to 2 March, due to the unavailability of interpretation teams on 4 March. Back to back workshops on the following day (3rd of March 2020) are encouraged.

The Chair also informed delegations that the current Vice-Chair's term comes to an end soon and that the SFIC Secretariat will launch the procedure in the beginning of January to elect a new Vice-Chair at the SFIC plenary on 2 March 2020.

The MT delegation suggested to have a discussion at the next SFIC plenary on the strategic future of SFIC and how to keep it relevant. The Chair considered this a timely topic. The Chair also indicated that she has invited a representative of the OECD to the next SFIC plenary.
