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**LIMITE**

**ERAC-SFIC**

**WORKING PAPER**

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**WORKING DOCUMENT**

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From:	SFIC Secretariat
To:	ERAC (SFIC)
Subject:	European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) - Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) informal videoconference on 9 December 2021

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Delegations will find in annex the agenda item 9 with view to the virtual SFIC plenary meeting on 9 December 2021.

December  
2021

# SFIC

## Strategic Forum for International STI Cooperation



### Our main areas of activity

International dimension of the ERA  
INCO perspective in Horizon Europe  
Information exchange & coordination  
Networking and communication

### Who we are

#### DELEGATES

- Ministries in charge of Science, Research and Innovation
- Research Funding Agencies
- Research Councils or similar Advisory Bodies
- Permanent Representations to the EU (Science Attaché)

### What is our mission?

- Through our work in SFIC we can support the EU's STI cooperation with partners worldwide
- These international cooperation activities and partnerships play a key role in finding joint solutions for today's global challenges such as the SDGs



## Putting a spotlight on international cooperation in science, technology & innovation

**SFIC is a dedicated configuration of ERAC with the objective to facilitate the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of the European Research Area (ERA). It does so by sharing information and by consulting between the partners with a view to identifying common priorities, which could lead to coordinated or joint initiatives, and coordinating activities and positions vis-à-vis third countries and within international fora and in relation to the EU Framework Programme for research & innovation.**

SFIC advises the European Commission (mainly DG RTD; in some cases other DGs or the External Action Service) on the one hand and the Member States (in particular the Competitiveness Council) & Associated Countries on the other hand. Principal addressees in the MS and AC are ministries responsible for science, technology and innovation and related funding agencies; in some cases also ministries of foreign affairs etc.). Some of the issues covered in SFIC are also of relevance for dedicated STI stakeholders as well as an interested wider public.

#### Advisory role of SFIC:

- How to develop the international cooperation perspective within the EU Framework Programmes
- How to develop funding mechanisms and instruments necessary for facilitating international STI cooperation
- How to link the activities of SFIC with other ERA-related groups or EU-funded projects and initiatives
- How to monitor the international cooperation perspectives with adequate indicators

#### Further activities of SFIC:

- Providing input for the implementation and further development of the ERA Roadmap
- Cooperating with / reporting to ERAC & other ERA-related Groups
- Contributing to the mainstreaming of INCO in the other ERA priorities
- Sharing / structuring information and good practice on international R&I cooperation
- Pooling relevant knowledge concerning third countries & ensuring regular consultation between the members



## New “global approach to research and innovation”

Reciprocity; Open strategic autonomy; Values & Principles becoming important features of international cooperation

With the 2012, EC Strategy on international cooperation in R&I and Horizon 2020 “Open to the world” has become the main slogan of international STI cooperation at EU level. Since then, the geopolitical landscape has changed significantly, with new countries and regions pushing forward to become leading global players and the economic & societal challenges becoming even more distinct.

The new EC communication on the “Global Approach to Research & Innovation” is therefore postulating a new strategic direction: While generally reaffirming international openness, focus is placed on reciprocity, a level playing field and the protection and advancement of EU interests and values. This means for example that researchers & innovators get access to the markets and funding opportunities in the 3<sup>rd</sup> countries, that intellectual property rights are respected, fair innovation ecosystems are encouraged and foreign interference prevented.

“Open strategic autonomy” points at the ability to act autonomously where

necessary, rely on own resources in key strategic areas & cooperate wherever possible.

More emphasis is also put on multilateral research and innovation partnerships with the aim of “bringing countries around the globe closer together, focused on finding solutions to global challenges” along the main EU political priorities such as climate change, the biodiversity crisis, pollution, resource depletion, global health, fair green and digital transitions and promoting innovation.

**“ To make sure that this openness works, and that researchers can cooperate across borders as easily as possible, we do not only need support from major funders like the EU, but also a clear framework that creates a level playing field ”**

Commissioner Mariya Gabriel

SFIC reacted on the EC communication with a dedicated opinion. While largely supporting the arguments and lines of actions, the opinion also sets out a number of issues that need careful reflection in the implementation phase. These issues include Science Diplomacy, the SDGs, the integration of INCO into Horizon Europe, the dialogue with third countries, Research Infra-

structures, Foresight, Monitoring and Global Standards.

### SFIC outcome – document - WK 11121 2021 INIT

#### Values and principles:

The EC’s global approach communication points out that international STI cooperation needs to be underpinned by fundamental values such as academic freedom, research ethics and integrity, gender equality, open data and open science & evidence-informed policies. These principles and their understanding should be agreed and promoted in dialogues with partner countries and international fora.

Moreover, the Council’s Recommendations for a R&I Pact in Europe include reference to the values and principles for the global outreach.

SFIC has held two workshops to discuss the key values and principles in the context of international STI cooperation to advance the dialogue and first find common ground among EU Member States and a related working document will be adopted in December 2021.

### SFIC outputs:

Between October 2019 and December 2021 SFIC has produced eight extensive opinions, around twenty reports mainly from the Working Groups and Task Forces as well as around 100 internal working documents.

Examples of the work beyond the ones cited specifically in the text are:

“SFIC Opinion on a New European Research Area” ERAC-SFIC 1359/20

“SFIC Opinion on “Relevance of International Cooperation in research and innovation for the EU – boosting the international dimension of the ERA & Horizon Europe”  
ERAC-SFIC 1356/20 “

SFIC opinion on International R&I cooperation in view of the global COVID-19 pandemic”  
ERAC-SFIC 1354/20

“SFIC opinion on international research and innovation cooperation”  
ERAC-SFIC 1360/19

„Final report of the SFIC Benchmarking Working Group”  
ERAC-SFIC 1359/19



## Focused regional activities

### Who we are?

In the **SFIC Africa Working Group** Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Finland, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain (coordinator), as well as the European Commission (DGR&I and DGEAC) are participating.

### What are our objectives?

1. Work in an impact-driven way to maintain a fluid dialogue on African issues between the WG members and any other interested stakeholders.
2. Develop an effective outreach strategy
3. To reach the "Horizon Europe" main stakeholders.
4. To contribute in **understanding innovation activities** with Africa and their support.
5. In the context of science diplomacy efforts, to monitor and **analyse the position of EU R&I in Africa vis-à-vis other global powers.**

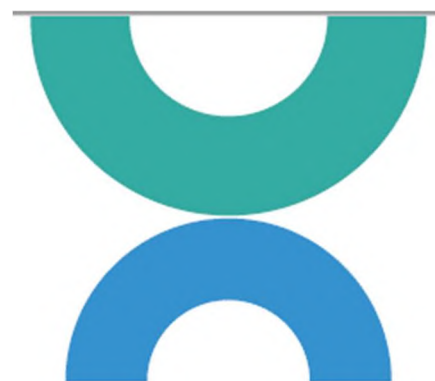
### Africa

Since the relations with Africa are at the forefront of the international cooperation priorities of the European Union, the SFIC Africa Task Force (October 2019 -September 2020) and the **SFIC Africa Working Group (October 2020 – now)** decided its work to enhancing the collaboration in research, innovation and higher education policy between Europe and Africa.

Through its monthly meetings, the group has **energised the collaboration among European countries and the European Commission, and with African partners.** It has supported the work of the High Level Policy Dialogue in Science Technology and Innovation between the European Union and the African Union, and it has contributed to the Innovation Agenda preparations for the EU-AU Summit in 2022.

**SFIC Africa WG has created joint opinions** and analysis on topics of interest that can boost the understanding of **Multilateral cooperation** between the two continents. Its **Strategic Report** on joint priorities and **Innovation Report** on recent developments are the two public documents that encompass the contribution of most of European countries and consultation with stakeholders.

**The SFIC Africa WG has hosted several workshops** on prioritisation (March 2020), on science diplomacy in Africa (March 2021) and on the power of the networks COST actions (November 2021). It has liaised with **distinguished stakeholders** such as The Guild-Arua Network, the Union for the Mediterranean, the Missions Unit of DGR&I, and ESFRI. It has **contributed** to the EU HLPD Bureau and the China Core Group.



Strategic Forum for International Cooperation (SFIC)

#### SFIC Africa Task Force Strategic Report

This document includes the SFIC Africa Task Force's analysis and orientations for future European-African cooperation in science, innovation and higher education.

#### EUROPEAN COUNTRIES' INNOVATION COLLABORATION WITH AFRICA

SFIC Africa Working Group - Innovation Survey Results

#### SFIC documents:

**WK 14891/21 (Activity Report & Report on trilateral relations)**

**ERAC-SFIC 1353/21 (Innovation Report)**

**ERAC-SFIC 1355/1/20 REV 1 (Strategic Report)**

**WK 13588/2020 INIT (Work Plan)**





## Focused regional activities

### China

Within the last decade China has become one of the world's science and innovation powers. The new 14th Five Year Plan of the Chinese Government seeks to reinforce this position focusing on realizing "self-reliance in STI" and "becoming a global STI leader by 2035". In the last years, China has also substantially revised its regulatory framework on data, which has a direct impact on STI cooperation between European and Chinese partners and led to a high degree of uncertainty regarding data security and the possible cross-border transfer of data (including scientific data).

At the same time the EU has, in its strategic outlook on China (JOIN(2019) 5 final), acknowledged the ambivalent and complex relation between the EU and China, labelling China as a key cooperation partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival, requiring "a flexible and pragmatic whole-of-EU approach enabling a principled defence of interests and values". China will remain a key partner e.g. for tackling global challenges, and cooperation should be pursued in areas that are jointly agreed and mutually beneficial.

To bring forward this nuanced line, a strategic dialogue between research actors is needed, firstly within the EU to create a common understanding and then with Chinese partners to promote a new joint approach.

At the same time, EC's DG RTD has also set up the "EU-Research and Innovation Knowledge Network on China – EU-KNOC", co-lead by SFIC to discuss issues related to China and STI in depth among experts & with Member States representatives. Based on the extensive work of EU-KNOC, SFIC has prepared recommendations, summarizing the main elements of these discussions with the aim to increasingly translate ideas into implementation at both the EU and Member State level:

1. Continuous monitoring of Chinese STI activities in the EU and China
2. Information sharing about China considering specific needs of EU-MS
3. Network of China related actors
4. Securing long term and independent expertise on contemporary China
5. Strengthening transparency of bilateral and European cooperation activities with China
6. Identifying common possible thematic priority areas for cooperation
7. Developing a toolbox for supporting STI cooperation with China
8. Ensuring the free access of European researchers to China
9. Counterbalance China's ambitions as a global STI power
10. Focus on Managing R&I Value-Chain interdependencies with China

### EU-KNOC:

The objective of EU-KNOC was to connect European networks, centres, and experts working on China. Beyond expert level discussions, Member States have exchanged their views in the China-Core Group. The following impacts were achieved:

- Awareness raising impact in the Member States
- Mobilising effect for concrete activities at EU and MS level
- Support for deepening the work within the MS
- Fostering exchange and synergies on China between the R&I related ministries and other relevant ministries
- Contribution to trainings on risk management in international collaboration.
- Increased sharing of information on the individual MS collaboration with China

#### SFIC documents:

**WK 13193/2021 INIT**  
**(Recommendations)**  
**WK 4905/2020 REV 1**  
**(2nd survey)**  
**WK 14458/2019 INIT**  
**(1st survey)**



## Focus Topics

### Who we are?

In the **SFIC Science Diplomacy Task Force** Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Finland, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Spain (co-ordinator), as well as the European Commission (DGR&I) are participating.

### What are our objectives?

The Task Force on Science Diplomacy has been established in 2019 aiming to

1. contribute to raise / fulfil EC's Science Diplomacy ambition;
2. identify key actors, networks, communities of practice;
3. enable dialogue & collaboration between relevant EU institutions and the MS/AC;
4. learn about EC's status of Science Diplomacy policies, strategy developments, initiatives, priorities and actions;
5. exchange current practices of Science Diplomacy strategies and activities developed at national and regional level.

### Science Diplomacy

Based on a first workshop including experts from the H2020 funded Science Diplomacy projects S4D4C, InScide and EL-CSID the mandate and work of the Task Force was defined.

In a first input paper key activities to strengthen Science Diplomacy at EU level in a short-medium and long-term perspective have been developed.

This was followed by a document outlining concrete topics that could be integrated into the Horizon Europe Work Programmes to cover the depth and breadth of Science Diplomacy.

As a next step, the Task Force has collected information via a survey regarding the way Science Diplomacy is integrated in the strategies and activities on MS/AC level.

The Council Conclusions on the Global approach to Research and Innovation "call on the Commission and the European External Action Service to develop a European Science Diplomacy Agenda and to present it to the Council" (12301/21).

In dialogue with the EU External Action Service, the EC Joint Research Centre, the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance and other external stakeholders the SFIC Task Force has worked on a first document outlining important elements for such an agenda along a roadmap and impact pathway.

The key impacts suggested to be achieved are establishing the EU as a STI system role model and a key actor to deliver innovative solutions as well as promoting values and principles in collaboration.

Moreover, the following specific outcomes (long-term results) have been defined:

- Greater and better use of evidence
- More versatile EU Scientific and Diplomatic careers
- More interdisciplinary approaches for SDGs
- Technology respecting ethics & Human Rights
- Hybrid Science Diplomacy platforms built and strengthened
- Integration of principles and values in research cooperation

Members of the Task Force have participated in a number of international conferences and meetings to further promote the work on Science Diplomacy.

#### SFIC documents:

**WK 14789/2021**

**(Roadmap and impact pathways)**

**ST 1354 2021 INIT (Survey Analysis)**

**ERAC-SFIC 1357/20 (Horizon Europe Anchor)**

**ERAC-SFIC 1352/20 (Input Paper)**





## Academic Freedom

The German Presidency of the EU Council has presented the so-called **"Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research"** on 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 at the ERA-conference. The declaration states "freedom of scientific research is a universal right and public good. It is a core principle of the European Union and applies to all types of research organisations and scholarship and to all academic disciplines".

Up until now all 27 EU Member States as well as the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth have signed the declaration and by endorsing the principles of the Bonn Declaration, several international partners – such as Israel, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Switzerland and Ukraine – have contributed to the international dimension of this document.

Within SFIC, we have worked on an opinion addressing the European Commission, the EU Member States, the Associated Countries to Horizon Europe and Third Countries as cooperation partners. We have invited the EC, MS and AC to integrate aspects of academic freedom as a visible norm in their various official documents – from national strategies and guidelines to joint roadmaps to bilateral and multilateral agreements etc. Moreover, research and funding organization as well as universities

could consider that in their respective EU and extra-EU collaborations.

It may also be necessary to establish a European-wide fellowship scheme to help those researchers at risk finding a secure place to continue their work within the EU. A possibility should be provided to report breaches of academic freedom to a "neutral" ombuds-person and an EU-wide solidarity mechanism could provide for joint action at EU level as necessary.

Awareness & training are essential elements in promoting academic freedom and research- and research funding organisations and universities can play an important facilitating role.

While for us many of the principle values underlying academic freedom are "self-evident and fundamental", they may need negotiation with some third countries. In principle, partners should not refrain from collaborations with researchers in those countries, but establish mechanisms and procedures for risk assessment & management.

A dedicated monitoring system needs to be established and it is suggested that beyond EU-MS all countries having endorsed the declaration could participate in that system on a voluntary basis. Finally, it is envisaged that the European Commission publishes state-agnostic guidelines on foreign interference in January 2022.

## Researchers at risk

Recent geo-political dynamics and science-policy related developments have contributed to a situation where scientists around the globe are facing challenges in performing their work unhampered. They can cover issues such as:

- Physical integrity of the scholars and their families
- Free speech and thinking
- Freedom to challenge existing ideas
- Freedom to share ideas
- Freedom to cooperate
- Freedom to share and access data
- Access to funding...

Two dedicated activities supporting the cause are:

Inspireurope:

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe/inspireurope>

Scholars at risk:

<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/>

**SFIC document:**  
**ERAC-SFIC 1356/21**

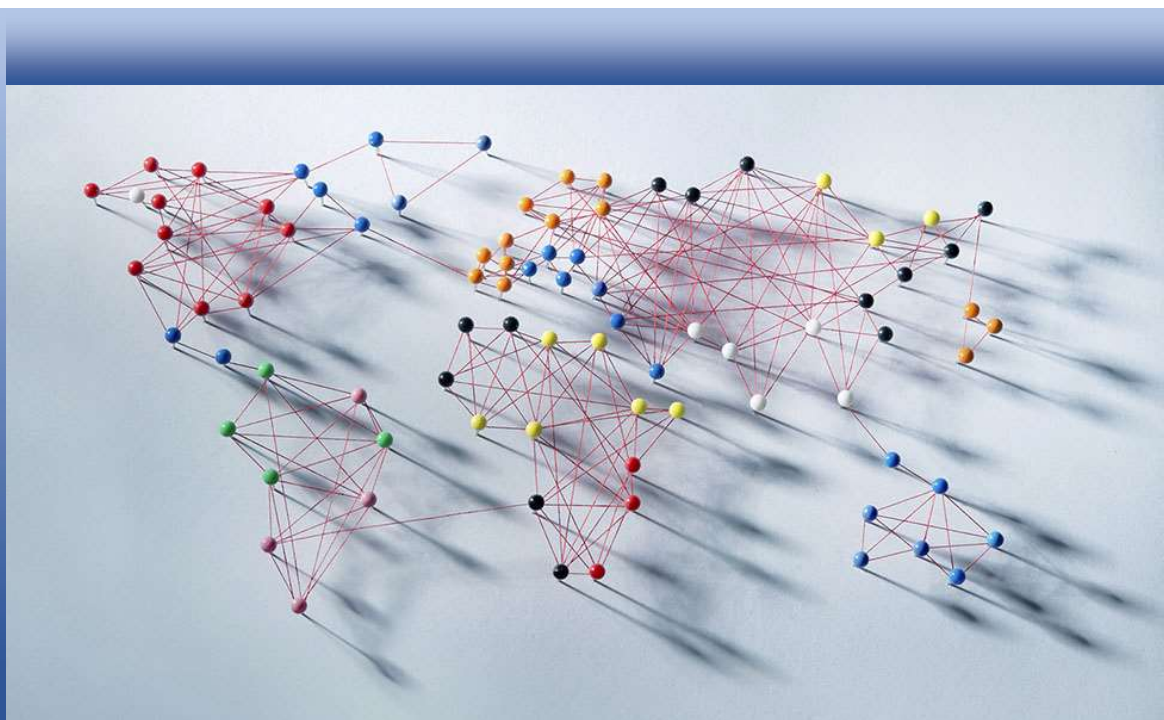
## Spotlight on STI Counsellors:

Many EU countries have dedicated Science, Technology or Innovation Counsellors located at their Embassies abroad. The EU itself also has Permanent Representations in third countries with experts dedicated to STI.

With the diverse roles they are fulfilling they are not only bridge-builders between the EU and third countries but are also important information sources regarding the STI landscapes and policies abroad.

SFIC, together with the EEAS, has conducted a mapping of STI counsellors that MS/AC and the EC have placed around the globe. It is impressive to see that more than 100 countries are covered by the dense network of science counsellors.

**SFIC document:**  
**WK 14791/2021 INIT**  
**STI counsellor mapping**



## Communication and visibility

The ERA-review of 2018 stated that “SFIC needs to consider ways to increase the quality and impact of its opinions and reports (ERAC Rec. 42)”. Building on the review, ERAC drafted the ERAC Action Plan 2019-2021. It asked SFIC to draft a Communication and Visibility Plan in the second semester of 2019. As requested SFIC adopted a related “Communication and Visibility Plan” in December 2019 (ERAC-SFIC 1358/19).

For easier access to the documents of SFIC, a dedicated sub-page at the Austrian ERA-Portal has been created, where regular updates of SFIC are posted <https://era.gv.at/governance/strategic-forum-for-international-st-cooperation/>. Moreover, the Chair of SFIC has created a LinkedIn Group “Facilitating International Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation” and has informed the interested public about SFIC activities and documents as well as news in the field of international STI cooperation. A standard set of PPT slides explaining the functioning and the aims of SFIC has been created that all SFIC delegates were able to use for internal and external presentations.

SFIC Members have also participated in various external events to explain and promote the work done by SFIC e.g. COST Session at the Science Summit at UNGA76 etc.

## Dialogue with stakeholders

Another way to increase visibility and impact is related to the dialogue with dedicated stakeholders in international STI cooperation. This dialogue has taken place via three strands of work: Firstly, SFIC has invited ERA-related stakeholders such as LERU, EUA, EARTO, and Science Europe or INCO-related stakeholders such as COST, EUREKA or ERA-Learn to its plenary sessions and workshops. A dedicated exchange has also taken place with representatives from the OECD in the context of the renewal of their documents related to international research cooperation.

Secondly, the dedicated Task Forces and Working Groups have regularly integrated stakeholders in their meetings and work: Beyond cooperation with DG Research experts, the Africa Working Group for example is in regular exchange with the EU-AU HLPD STI Bureau, while the Science Diplomacy Task Force has collaborated with the External Action Service of the EU and the three Horizon 2020 funded Science Diplomacy projects.

Finally, SFIC has developed contacts with the other ERA-related groups, appointing dedicated rapporteurs to report from the latest activities of the different groups. Moreover, the Chair- and Vice-Chair of SFIC have followed the ERAC Plenary Meetings to report as adequate.



## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN STI

### The way forward in a new ERA Governance – what “legacy” of SFIC we would like to see continuing

Within this part of the document we would like to highlight those issues that we believe will still be relevant in the coming years and that therefore should be explicitly tackled also in the new sub-group on the “global approach to research and innovation” within the European Research Area Forum.

#### Cooperation between the EU / Member States / Associated Countries

We appreciate that the Council Conclusions on the “Future Governance of the European Research Area (ERA)” adopted on 26th of November 2021 (14308/21) specifically “recommends setting up a standing sub-group of the ERA Forum, co-chaired by Member States and the Commission, to take into account and continue the work done by SFIC”. International cooperation in STI can profit from a coordinated approach between the MS and the EU level and an exchange of information, best practises etc. However, to exploit the full potential of coordination, more efforts will be needed, defining concrete actions and activities such as those now included in the first Policy Agenda 2022-2024.

#### Global dimension of the European Research Area and the R&I pact

The Council Conclusions on the future governance of the ERA clearly state the importance of including Associated Countries and Third Countries in our activities in different parts of the document.

The ERA Policy Agenda 2022 – 2024 includes not only a dedicated action to “Promote a positive environment and level playing field for international cooperation based on reciprocity” but many of the other actions defined do have international relevance and linkages, such as sharing of knowledge and re-use of research outputs, advancing the reform of research assessment systems or promoting attractive research careers etc.

#### Horizon Europe

Beyond monitoring the general participation of third countries, the global cooperation within the Missions and European Partnerships will be an important topic to follow. More impact-related assessments of international cooperation should be considered (contribution to the SDGs, impact on society and global challenges, economy etc.) and attention should be given to the follow-up of the new global approach strategy elements within Horizon Europe.

#### Values and Principles

Based on the relevant documents such as the Council conclusions on the “global approach to research and innovation”, first discussions have taken place within SFIC and with relevant stakeholders, working towards a common understanding of the manifold elements within the MS to then enter into a dialogue also with the third countries on that beginning in 2022.

#### Academic Freedom

The ERA POLICY AGENDA 2022-2024 includes a specific ERA Action on “Deepening the ERA through protecting academic freedom in Europe”. But of course academic freedom is also a topic highly relevant in the cooperation with our international partners as it represents one of the European values going beyond the mere avoidance of foreign interference (see section Academic Freedom).



### Why an effective coordination is more important than ever:

The challenges for international cooperation are rising and the new global approach to research and innovation calls for a strategic and modulated way to cooperate with 3<sup>rd</sup> countries. Coordination among Member States and the European level therefore remain important to:

- speak with one voice vis à vis 3<sup>rd</sup> countries
- support multilateral activities together to add impact
- set common thematic or regional priorities also in line with the big political priorities related to health, fair digital and green transition and digitisation.



## Further regions and topics of relevance:

For the SFIC Work Programme of 2021/2022 delegations had the possibility to state additional countries/regions as well as topics of special interest.

The top three countries/regions were:

- Indo-Pacific Region
- USA
- United Kingdom

For additional topics of interest delegations wanted to prioritise:

- Strategic Autonomy
- Knowledge Triangle
- Follow-up of the Bonn declaration

**SFIC document**

**ST 1352 2021 INIT**

**Work Programme 2021/22**

# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN STI

## The way forward in a new ERA Governance – what “legacy” of SFIC we would like to see continuing

### Science Diplomacy

The ERA POLICY AGENDA 2022-2024 includes a specific ERA Action on “Promoting a positive environment and level playing field for international cooperation based on reciprocity”. As a dedicated outcome, the “Development of a European Science Diplomacy Agenda” is explicitly mentioned. Within the SFIC Science Diplomacy Task Force, a number of concrete proposals were made to support different elements for such an agenda that could be further developed (see section Science Diplomacy).

### EU-Africa

Cooperation with Africa has been a dedicated focus of the first calls of Horizon Europe with around 40 topics with a budget of around €350 million launched. Moreover, the EU and the African Union are working towards a joint innovation agenda, hopefully being adopted in early 2022. With these elements in place it will be important to keep up the dynamic cooperation environment that has been created over the last years, jointly address existing/upcoming societal challenges and monitor the impact and results achieved through the cooperation activities.

### EU-China

The extensive work of the EU-KNOC experts and network as well as the SFIC recommendations derived from that work, provide a solid basis for further steps to be taken in different areas such as network-creation, creating independent China expertise, strengthening transparency or securing free access of EU researchers to China. We do hope that these topics will be further explored not only through granting related R&I projects in Horizon Europe, but also on policy level, deepening the cooperation among MS and with the EU level to work towards joint approaches in the collaboration with China.

### Innovation dimension

The innovation aspect is gaining on importance both in the MS and on the EU level with the appearance of the third pillar of Horizon Europe focusing on innovation. Such a focus not only means a new approach to scientific cooperation but also the involvement of new stakeholder-groups like SMEs or large enterprises, associations representing companies. Innovation has also become a key element and crosscutting issues of STI cooperation with many third countries. Sharing best practise examples for coordination, the changing work of science attachés, new types of collaborative programmes and projects need further elaboration. As an example, the EU-China Joint Roadmap for the future of STI co-operation will include both the research and the innovation dimension.