

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

Secretariat

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ERAC-SFIC 1353/15

NOTE

Subject: SFIC Work Programme 2015-2016

Delegations will find attached the Work Programme 2015-2016 of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), as adopted via written procedure on 12 February 2015.

SFIC WORK PROGRAMME 2015-16

This document sets out the Work Programme of the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) for the years 2015-2016.

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

SFIC is a strategic forum and an advisory body to the Council and the Commission with a view to implementing a European Partnership in the field of international scientific and technological cooperation (S&T cooperation). Member States and the Commission are members of the Forum while countries associated to the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme have an observership status. SFIC's objective is to facilitate the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of the European Research Area (ERA) by the sharing of information and consultation 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.

The rationale for such framework is provided by the Council conclusions concerning a European partnership for international scientific and technological cooperation of 2 December 2008¹.

In the past years, SFIC has played an essential role in driving forward the EU-MS partnership on international S&T cooperation as well as in contributing to the external dimension of the ERA, as shown in its Annual Reports², mainly by providing strategic advice to Commission, Council and ERAC, and committing to common priorities while developing joint EU/MS (AC) - SFIC initiatives.

¹ Doc. 16763/08

² Following ERAC-SFIC docs: 1354/10, 1353/11, 1353/12, 1354/13 and 1353/14.

2. STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

2.1 Structure: five priorities and areas of action

The SFIC Work Programme 2015-2016 is based on the previous and current SFIC work and it has been developed with the input from delegations, mainly emerging from debates at Plenary and Steering Board level, from the strategic discussions that took place at the third SFIC Strategic Workshop in Stockholm on 12-13 June 2014 as well as from the SFIC self-assessment exercise carried out in the context of the review of the ERA-related Groups³. With this background, the SFIC Work Programme 2015-2016 has its focus on **five different priorities and areas of action**, each one with its specific activities:

- Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation;
- Contribution to the further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap;
- Joint EU/MS (AC) initiatives and actions;
- Best practice, information sharing and monitoring;
- Networking and coordination.

This structure translates the strategic discussions and the objectives into a concrete work plan to be pursued during the next two years. The priority areas reflect SFIC's strategic mission and carefully balance ongoing SFIC initiatives with new activities deriving from a changing context (e.g. further development of ERA and its external dimension, the ERA Roadmap 2015-2020, ongoing process of Multi-Annual Roadmaps for international cooperation, implementation of international cooperation activities in Horizon 2020).

Although many of the SFIC activities contribute to the implementation of the ERA Roadmap, the approach followed has been to keep specific activities (e.g. related to information sharing or best practice) under the particular specific heading.

³ Doc. ERAC-SFIC 1361/14

2.2 Implementation

With regard to the implementation of this Work Programme, SFIC will take into account the past, current and future context in its activities and actions. SFIC activities will be implemented on a voluntary basis following the principle of variable geometry.

SFIC will match the level of ambition with the resources available when implementing its Work Programme for 2015-2016. The added value of SFIC will be created by optimizing the use of national, European and global resources and avoiding duplication of activities and efforts.

The various SFIC activities may be supported by specific Working Groups, rapporteurs and/or correspondents, where appropriate and when decided by the Forum.

3. PRIORITIES AND AREAS OF ACTION

3.1 Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation

SFIC will aim at being proactive with early strategic advice and evidence for policy formulation on international S&T cooperation and the external dimension of ERA. To enhance this role, SFIC will, where appropriate, submit opinions/advice to the Council and the Commission while also fostering the uptake of this advice nationally.

The development of a ‘toolbox’ gathering a list of instruments for the implementation of international S&T cooperation agreements and other international S&T cooperation activities at EU and national level will also be part of the strategic advice provided by SFIC. Specific target groups using these toolboxes will have to be identified prior to their development.

SFIC will also intensify its role in giving early strategic advice to Council and ERAC and will continuously search for synergies with other ERA groups. This means liaising and enhancing cooperation with Latvian, Luxembourgish, Dutch and Slovakian Presidencies, yearly reporting to the Council and yearly information to ERAC and other ERA groups about SFIC initiatives. In 2015-16, SFIC will propose to organise joint meetings or SFIC-led seminars with other ERA groups, when appropriate.

*Activities within the **Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation** priority may include:*

- *Propose advice/opinions to Council and Commission (e.g. ERA Progress Report, Multi-Annual Roadmaps, international cooperation activities within H2020, input for Presidencies, other EU external policies and work ahead of summits/policy dialogues, etc.)*
- *Foster uptake of SFIC's advice nationally*
- *Develop a toolbox for the implementation of international S&T agreements and other international S&T cooperation activities at EU and national level*
- *Search for synergies with ERA groups and propose joint meetings/seminars*

3.2 Contribution to further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap

With the foreseen adoption of the ERA Roadmap during the Latvian Presidency, the realisation of ERA enters into a new phase. SFIC will contribute to the implementation of the ERA Roadmap in order to make full use of the external dimension of ERA and its potential for strengthening Europe's position in the world. SFIC activities will therefore be in line with the actions included in Priority 6 of the foreseen ERA Roadmap.

A strategic approach will be developed, in close dialogue with ERAC and the other ERA-related groups, on how to strengthen and streamline the external dimension of ERA in line with the ERA Roadmap. Monitoring and mapping of international policies and activities at national level is one of the core elements of SFIC's work. In this respect, focus will be given to mapping of existing international S&T agreements.

Following the Council Conclusions on the 2nd ERA Progress Report from 5 December 2014⁴, SFIC will contribute to the initial work on indicators to analyse and measure the impact of the external dimension of the ERA, in close collaboration with the Commission and the work in the context of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism and the R&I Observatory. SFIC will also explore the possibilities of using the EU R&I Observatory and play an active role in providing input to its development (e.g. formulation of needs) and, where appropriate, in contributing to the definition of indicators for international R&I cooperation. This work may draw on the complementarity with existing sets of planned or current indicators covering various aspects of international cooperation in operation within Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission.

⁴ Doc. 16599/14.

*Activities within the priority **Contribution to further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap** may include (subject to the final adoption of the ERA Roadmap):*

- Produce analysis of opportunities to streamline the international dimension in the other five ERA priorities*
- Produce advice/opinions on good examples of national strategies for international R&I cooperation strategies*
- Engage with ERA stakeholders and research organisations on joint approaches for international cooperation*
- Contribute to the work on indicators for international S&T cooperation in the context of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism and the R&I Observatory, drawing on planned or existing sets of indicators for international cooperation used in Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission*
- Developing a proposal for enhancing multilateral S&T cooperation approaches and mapping of S&T agreements at EU/MS level and related exchange of practices*

3.3 Joint EU/MS (AC) initiatives and actions

SFIC will continue its ongoing work on the different SFIC country initiatives with Brazil, China, United States and Russia. In this respect, the SFIC Working Groups dealing with the aforesaid countries will continue their work in line with the specific mandates adopted by the SFIC plenary and the respective activities highlighted therein⁵. The SFIC Working Group on common principles will continue its work towards the development of common principles and guidelines for international R&I cooperation in line with its mandate⁶.

SFIC will also analyse on a case-by-case basis the need and added value for SFIC initiatives focused on other countries/regions than the ones previously mentioned or for SFIC's potential work on specific thematic areas. Moreover, the need for financial resources (e.g. in the context of necessary studies, mapping exercises and expert workshops) and possibilities to support SFIC initiatives and actions will be explored (e.g. by using appropriate policy support and coordination instruments offered in Horizon 2020).

⁵ The following SFIC Working Group mandates are applicable: Brazil (ERAC-SFIC 1354/14), China (ERAC-SFIC 1355/14), Russia (ERAC-SFIC 1356/14) and USA (ERAC-SFIC 1357/14) and they may be updated and renewed by the SFIC plenary if decided.

⁶ Doc. ERAC-SFIC 1358/14.

Moreover, in 2015-16, SFIC will continue to pursue close collaboration and exchange of information with INCO projects of FP7 (ERA- and INCO-Net, BILAT projects, etc.) and of Horizon 2020 (INT-1/-2, etc.) INCO projects targeting Brazil, China, USA and Russia as well as relevant national activities and projects with a strong international focus.

*Activities within the **Joint EU/MS (AC) initiatives and actions** priority may include:*

- *Development of each initiative by the respective SFIC Working Group via the activities highlighted in their mandates*
- *Analyse the need for SFIC initiatives in other countries/regions than the existing ones*
- *Analyse the need and possibilities for financial resources to support SFIC initiatives and actions*
- *Collaborate and exchange information with and about INCO-projects targeting SFIC initiatives and Working Groups*
- *Other initiatives/actions*

3.4 Best practice, information sharing and monitoring

For managing and sharing information effectively, SFIC members and observers will contribute to peer-learning activities and exchange of best practices, mainly via exchange of information between delegations (e.g. on a bilateral basis, within SFIC Working Groups, via presentations at the SFIC plenary). SFIC will also promote presentations at plenary level on EU/national STI strategies as well as R&I cooperation activities and projects.

In addition, for the purpose of addressing the need of having an overview of R&I international cooperation activities in EU and national funding programmes in operation in the Union, its Member States and Associated Countries, the possibilities for SFIC to contribute with input to an accessible online solution will be explored.

SFIC will also reflect on and contribute to the monitoring of the external dimension of the ERA and the overall assessment of the international dimension of Horizon 2020, focusing on impacts of both international S&T cooperation policies and SFIC activities. The impact of SFIC activities may be measured, with the work being based on the implementation and delivery of the SFIC Working Groups' mandates.

Enhancing the visibility of the external dimension of ERA is essential. For this purpose SFIC will publish regularly reports and results of SFIC's work on the Council and Commission specific webpages, where appropriate and when agreed by the SFIC plenary. Moreover, the SFIC Secretariat will continue providing its SFIC bi-weekly information e-mails with relevant documents and information to delegations.

*Activities within the **Best practice, information sharing and monitoring** priority may include:*

- *Foster peer-learning activities and presentation of best practices at SFIC plenaries*
- *Follow-up and measurement of SFIC activities and their impact*
- *Reflect on and contribute to the monitoring of the international dimension of Horizon 2020*
- *Publication of reports and results of SFIC input/events in Council / Commission webpages*
- *Information sharing by the SFIC Secretariat*

3.5 Networking and coordination

To assure the visibility and the effectiveness of SFIC's work, SFIC will implement cross-cutting and horizontal activities covering all other priority areas. SFIC will closely liaise with the EU Presidency in office and will invite and/or engage with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and other stakeholders to SFIC-organised events or SFIC meetings. As done in the past with EEAS, COST or Science Europe, this will be done, for instance, by inviting stakeholders to any 2015-16 SFIC plenary, when agreed, or by promoting links with networks of main stakeholders at EU and national level while involving them through consultations and workshops. Moreover, the use of social media and more interactive ways of working will be explored to increase the visibility, efficiency and effectiveness of SFIC's work.

SFIC delegates will endeavour to coordinate at national level on issues relevant to international R&I cooperation and the external dimension of ERA to facilitate a common (national) position in different fora and ERA-related groups.

Appointing correspondents for specific events, themes or regional initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean region will be considered, with the purpose of exchanging information and having an up-to-date follow-up on initiatives in these areas. A second step could be examining the potential SFIC added value to regional cooperation.

SFIC will continue liaising closely with EU and MS/AC science counsellors in third countries.

During 2015-16, seminars and workshops on priority areas, countries and themes should include topics such as indicators for international R&I cooperation, amongst others. They will be used as instruments to achieve progress in any of the five priority areas of this Work Programme.

*Activities within the **Networking and coordination** priority may include:*

- Engagement with EEAS and other stakeholders in SFIC work/events*
- SFIC correspondents*
- Promotion of coordination at national level*
- Links with EU/MS science counsellors*
- Workshops and seminars*

4. REPORTING AND DISSEMINATION

The 2015 and 2016 SFIC Annual Reports to the Council and the Commission will take stock of the state-of-implementation of this Work Programme and the progress made in the different priority areas and themes.

SFIC will also inform the European Research Area Committee (ERAC) about its activities, in particular concerning the preparation and implementation of the ERA Roadmap.

The Annex attached to this Work Programme gives a Work Plan overview for 2015 and 2016, taking into account the different activities to be carried out during this period.

ANNEX: WORK PLAN OF ACTIVITIES 2015-2016

Priority / Area of Action	Activity	2015	2016
Strategic advice on international S&T cooperation	<i>Propose advice/opinions to Council and Commission (e.g. ERA Progress Report, Multi-Annual Roadmaps, international cooperation activities within H2020, input for Presidencies, other EU external policies and work ahead of summits/policy dialogues, etc.)</i>	X	X
	<i>Foster uptake of SFIC's advice nationally</i>	X	X
	<i>Develop a toolbox for the implementation of international S&T agreements and other international S&T cooperation activities at EU and national level</i>	X	X
	<i>Search for synergies with ERA groups and propose joint meetings/seminars</i>	X	X
Contribution to further development and implementation of the ERA Roadmap	<i>Produce analysis of opportunities to streamline the international dimension in the other five ERA priorities</i>	X	
	<i>Produce advice/opinions on good examples of national strategies for international R&I cooperation strategies</i>	X	X
	<i>Engage with ERA stakeholders and research organisations on joint approaches for international cooperation</i>	X	X
	<i>Contribute to the work on indicators for international S&T cooperation in the context of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism and the R&I Observatory, drawing on planned or existing sets of indicators for international cooperation used in Member States, Associated Countries and the Commission.</i>	X	X
	<i>Developing a proposal for enhancing multilateral S&T cooperation approaches and mapping of S&T agreements at EU/MS level and related exchange of practices</i>	X	X
Joint EU/MS (AC) initiatives and actions	<i>Development of each initiative by the respective SFIC Working Group via the activities highlighted in their mandates</i>	X	X
	<i>Analyse the need for SFIC initiatives in other countries/regions than the existing ones</i>	X	X
	<i>Analyse the need and possibilities for financial resources to support SFIC initiatives and actions</i>	X	

	<i>Collaborate and exchange information with and about INCO-projects targeting SFIC initiatives and Working Groups</i>	X	X
	<i>Other initiatives/actions</i>	X	X
<i>Best practice, information sharing and monitoring</i>	<i>Foster peer-learning activities and presentation of best practices at SFIC plenaries</i>	X	X
	<i>Follow-up and measurement of SFIC activities and their impact</i>		X
	<i>Reflect on and contribute to the monitoring of the international dimension of Horizon 2020</i>	X	X
	<i>Publication of reports and results of SFIC input/events in Council / Commission webpages</i>	X	X
	<i>Information sharing by the SFIC Secretariat</i>	X	X
<i>Networking and coordination</i>	<i>Engagement with EEAS and other stakeholders in SFIC work/events</i>	X	X
	<i>SFIC correspondents</i>	X	X
	<i>Promotion of coordination at national level</i>	X	X
	<i>Links with EU/MS science counsellors</i>	X	X
	<i>Workshops and seminars</i>	X	X