

ERAC 1203/21

**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations

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Subject: SFIC Opinion on the European Commission Communication „Global approach to research and innovation - Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world”

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Delegations will find attached the SFIC Opinion on the European Commission Communication "Global approach to research and innovation - Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world".

## SFIC Opinion

on the European Commission Communication „Global approach to research and innovation - Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world”

**The relevance of a reinforced European collaboration in international cooperation**

In order to tackle common societal challenges and to assure access to up-to-date knowledge and the best talents Europe needs to cooperate in research and innovation on an international scale. Preserving openness while protecting our interests is critically important to support Europe’s role as a global leader, drive scientific excellence and enable Europe to translate our research results into products and services that can compete globally, accelerate the recovery and improve the wellbeing of our citizens. However, the overall geo-political dynamics have changed substantially since 2012, the year the European Commission has launched its former international strategy on research and innovation “Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach”<sup>1</sup>.

The Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) welcomes the launch of the new European Commission communication on the “Global Approach to Research and Innovation Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world”<sup>2</sup>. The communication acknowledges the relevance of international cooperation for the research and innovation systems of the EU and its Member States as well as Europe's intention to keep a leading position in International R&I cooperation, consistent with/aligned with Europe's priority principles, values and interests. The European Commission has stated the following four key messages regarding the Communication:

1. The continuing spirit of openness while at the same time focusing on safeguarding European interests.
2. Research and innovation are tools to promote European values and reciprocity and a level-playing field with international partners are pre-conditions for a successful cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> (COM/2012/497)

<sup>2</sup> COM(2021) 252 final

3. An increased focus on rules-based multilateralism and global partnerships along the key EU priorities green transition, digitalisation and health.
4. A modulated, tailor-made approach to the cooperation with different countries and world regions, based on three categories (industrialised countries and emerging economies; developing countries; countries in the neighbourhood).

A number of types of potential activities in the communication are new, but there are also many that are based on existing collaborations that will be continued or intensified over the coming years.

### **Intention of the SFIC Opinion**

With this opinion SFIC intends to:

- underline the relevance and importance of international cooperation aspects in research and innovation for the European Research Area (ERA), the EU Framework Programme Horizon Europe and other multilateral research and innovation funding initiatives;
- highlight issues that require appropriate attention to deliver the goals and ambitions of the international cooperation strategy;
- consider the governance structures required to enable Member States and the Commission to co-design and align the processes to facilitate the efficient and coordinated implementation of the global approach, including the continuous exchange of information among MS/AC and EC (in a forum such as SFIC).
- in the immediate term, contribute to the Council Conclusions regarding the global approach communication and provide proposals for consideration by the ERA Forum for Transition for a coordinated approach across EU Member States and the European Commission as well as Associated Countries to increase the impact and ensure the coherence of policy design and implementation;
- give input for driving forward a joint EU Science Diplomacy agenda in the context of the global approach communication;

## Key messages

The Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), focusing on the communication on the “Global approach to research and innovation - Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world”;

recalling the regulation establishing Horizon Europe stating that<sup>3</sup> “The Programme should promote and integrate cooperation with third countries and international organisations and initiatives based on the Union’s interests, mutual benefits, international commitments, science diplomacy and, as far as possible, reciprocity”, and the related first Horizon Europe Work Programmes for 2021/2022<sup>4</sup>;

recalling the Council Decision establishing the Specific Programme implementing Horizon Europe, and especially Annex I<sup>5</sup> that specifies that “early advice from the ERA-related advisory structure will continue to be sought” within the science and technology cooperation dialogues with the Union’s international partners and policy dialogues with the main regions of the world;

recalling the October 2020 European Council Conclusions (EUCO 13/20) which states that “achieving strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy is a key objective of the Union”<sup>6</sup>; with view to the renewal of the European Research Area<sup>7</sup>, the work of the ERA Forum for Transition and the related Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe<sup>8</sup>, the ERA Policy Agenda and ERA Governance Structure currently under development;

having regard to the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research<sup>9</sup> as well as the SFIC Opinion on the implementation of the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research in International Cooperation in Research and Innovation”;<sup>10</sup>

acknowledging the OECD Recommendation of the Council on International Co-operation in Science and Technology of 23 June 2021;<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/695/oj> (Regulation /Rectial (50)),

<sup>4</sup> [wp-1-general-introduction\\_horizon-2021-2022\\_en.pdf](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf) (europa.eu)

<sup>5</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021D0764&from=EN>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> “A new ERA for Research and Innovation”, Commission Communication COM (2020) 628 final; Council conclusions on the New European Research Area Nr. 13567/20

<sup>8</sup> COM(2021) 407 final

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.bmbf.de/files/10\\_2\\_2\\_Bonn\\_Declaration\\_en\\_final.pdf](https://www.bmbf.de/files/10_2_2_Bonn_Declaration_en_final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> ERAC-SFIC 1356/21, 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2021

<sup>11</sup> <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/133/133.en.pdf>

having regard to the work done by the SFIC Africa Working Group and more specifically its Strategic Report<sup>12</sup> and the European Countries' Innovation Collaboration with Africa Report;<sup>13</sup> highlights the following points with view to the global approach communication and the further implementation of the new strategic approach and envisaged activities expressed within: SFIC supports value- based, mutually beneficial international cooperation in coherence with the EC Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a “Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe”<sup>14</sup>. Safeguarding the EU's strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy should be the cornerstone of Europe's new strategy on international R&I collaboration.

The strategy as described, is very relevant, important, looking at external relations of research, multilateral dialogue to make the European R&I landscape wider. However, attention should be attributed to the need to focus on where international R&I co-operation truly represents an added value for the European Union and its competitiveness.

SFIC supports an EU approach promoting rules-based bi- and multilateralism, pursuing reciprocal openness and shared priorities in research and innovation cooperation to facilitate global responses to global challenges and exchanging best practices. SFIC welcomes the idea of promoting such principles and values including those explicitly mentioned in the “Bonn declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research” in a multilateral dialogue with partner countries and international fora. SFIC recognizes the crucial role of multilateral research and innovation partnerships that can be considered central instruments to tackle the global challenges and move towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), e.g. the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance<sup>15</sup>.

As for geographical areas, attention should be given in this regards to neighbour countries, the Mediterranean Area, to the African Continent in general as well and to the Indo-Pacific and CELAC regions as well as other established R&I partnerships with high-technology countries and regions. Synergies with European higher educational and other international cooperation/development programmes should be considered.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1355-2020-REV-1/en/pdf?fbclid=IwAR0OkWOWscLsqfLOB\\_yk65KXSUybChcXTeo1X\\_WWu\\_vc682vpRm3RFS0z\\_A](https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1355-2020-REV-1/en/pdf?fbclid=IwAR0OkWOWscLsqfLOB_yk65KXSUybChcXTeo1X_WWu_vc682vpRm3RFS0z_A)

<sup>13</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1353-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>14</sup> COM(2021) 407 final

<sup>15</sup> <https://allatlanticocean.org>

SFIC takes positive note of the modulated approach towards international cooperation and considers very timely and important aspects of the strategy the intention to implement this global approach through initiatives modelled on a Team Europe approach, which combine actions by the EU, its financial institutions and Member States to maximise the effectiveness and impact of the actions.

SFIC has also observed that there are **several topics relevant in the international cooperation context that could and should be given more attention in the further development phase of the global approach** (such as Science Diplomacy, Research Infrastructures or Foresight). Moreover, the governance and concrete implementation need careful attention and calibration in the collaboration between Member States, Associated Countries as relevant and the European Commission and their external partners. It is in this context that SFIC states the **following observations and recommendations**:

**Sustainable development goals:**

1. Highlight, in the EU and MS international cooperation activities, the importance of achieving all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the resulting significance of science, technology and innovation as central levers. Special focus should be on the ecological dimension of the SDGs and their close relation to the European Green Deal - also in the context of the decently published IPCC Working Group I report “Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis” and the related forthcoming recommendations<sup>16</sup> - and Digital EU objectives.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr>

## Science Diplomacy:

2. SFIC reiterates the relevance of Science Diplomacy as an instrument for addressing global challenges and jointly achieving the SDGs. Mechanisms for science-based advice in EU and MS foreign policy benefit from advances in research (e.g. Azores Declaration<sup>17</sup> contributing to the All Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance; new climate models). Moreover, research can also offer opportunities for foreign policy impact. Science Diplomacy can make use of these opportunities, when emphasizing aspects of open science, freedom of scientific research and innovation. SFIC underlines that a broader approach to Science Diplomacy by integrating education and youth (“Education Diplomacy”) has the potential to strengthen the synergies between international policy, education, research and innovation, and highlight the role of young people in building sustainable and trustful partnerships between countries.
3. The SFIC Task Force on Science Diplomacy has highlighted several potential activities within its latest documents<sup>18</sup> as well as the need for continuous support. With the recently initiated “EU Science Diplomacy Alliance”<sup>19</sup>, a pan-European Science Diplomacy platform is developing, bringing together relevant actors in the field and allowing for regular exchange. Close collaboration with the Alliance should hence be sought and its work supported by complementing activities such as the development of additional training activities and the organisation of an annual European Science Diplomacy Conference or awarding a SD Prize. Furthermore, the Alliance’s endeavours should be backed by the development of a coherent Science Diplomacy Agenda, jointly elaborated by the Commission, the EEAS as well as the Member States and the Alliance.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://www.allatlantic2021.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Azores-Declaration\\_04jun2021-1.pdf](https://www.allatlantic2021.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Azores-Declaration_04jun2021-1.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Notes of SFIC Science Diplomacy Task Force:  
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1352-2020-INIT/en/pdf> (March 2020);  
[https://era.gv.at/public/documents/4323/st01357\\_en20.pdf](https://era.gv.at/public/documents/4323/st01357_en20.pdf) (September 2020)

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.science-diplomacy.eu/>

4. Science Diplomacy for global challenges comprises a set of values, especially global scientific freedom. The Commission should consider setting up a dedicated fellowship scheme, or reinforcing the existing possibilities under the Marie Skłodowska Curie part of Horizon Europe, open to non-EU researchers whose freedom of scientific research is under threat in third countries, to position the European Union as a ‘safe haven’ for freedom of scientific research. The fellowship scheme could build on the proposal by the InSPIREurope consortium, make reference to the categorisation of threats developed by Scholars at Risk and complement national fellowship schemes.

**International cooperation as a two-way process:**

5. International cooperation in R&I is a two-way process, where the European Union cannot merely choose whom to work with but where it also has to demonstrate that it continues to be an attractive partner for third countries.

For that we need to promote European scientific excellence for example along the lines of the “Study in Europe” initiative. Moreover, this has to be complemented with information and success stories of companies, products etc. demonstrating the innovative and entrepreneurial competences in Europe.

6. While on the one hand the European Union itself seeks to mitigate issues arising in the context of brain circulation by establishing itself as the key area for talent attraction and by providing established and predictable research careers, there may also be consequences for those countries from where we seek and gain skills/talents. The European Union needs to act in a responsible and sustainable way in this context.

**Horizon Europe:**

7. The role of Horizon Europe as an enabler of international STI cooperation and stimulator of new and co-funded collaborations is unique and should be reinforced.



8. Attention should be given to ways in which international cooperation via Horizon European partnerships and R&I missions could be strengthened. Existing partnerships such as PRIMA for the Mediterranean Area that have demonstrated the possibility to cooperate with non-European countries in co-designing and strategy setting. It should be considered whether the impact of such programmes could be increased, e.g. via as: more horizontal activities in the priority areas: climate change, renewable energies and health also fostering a holistic crisis management approach; and vertical activities involving more stakeholders such as innovation related ones and the civil society in order to increase impact on society (e.g. job creation).
9. Horizon Europe's great potential for facilitating international R&I cooperation is clearly linked to the possibility of association of non-European countries to the Framework Programme as well as the facilitation of participation for entities established in non-EU / non-associated countries. It is important to promote these possibilities and clearly flag any topics of particular relevance for international cooperation. Any limitations on such participation should be clearly explained where relevant.

**Co-creation, cooperation between MS, the European Commission and Third Countries:**

10. There is a clear need for continuous concertation between the European Commission and the Member States and Associated Countries as appropriate in co-designing, implementing and evaluating approaches and actions of international cooperation in research and innovation with the objective of maximizing the impact of the external action of the Union and avoiding duplication and fragmentation<sup>20</sup>. This not only concerns activities of Horizon Europe and immediate RTI policies, but also policy areas such as Neighbourhood Policy, Development Policy or Foreign Affairs. The “one-stop-shop platform” for Africa cooperation is a good-practise example in this respect, giving comprehensive and transparent information accessible to all could be replicated for other regions or key partner countries.
11. As the core activities in international STI cooperation is done on national level by key national players such as universities, research organisations, research funders and research companies, a stakeholder forum discussing international STI policy developments with them on a regular basis could be established.

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<sup>20</sup> On positive example in this respect is the EU Knowledge Network on China and the China Core Group

12. Within the global approach communication the regional dialogues that combine policy dialogue with project-based and bottom-up cooperation are not referred to in detail (except for Africa and ASEAN). Moreover, the multi-annual roadmaps for cooperation with key partner countries and regions introduced in the 2012 communication<sup>21</sup> will be phased out - to be replaced by biannual reports from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council<sup>22</sup> and complemented with targeted roadmaps for research and innovation cooperation with non-EU countries with a strong research and innovation base (implemented as non-binding instruments)<sup>23</sup>. This raises the question on how the alignment will take place between MS and EC strategies and interests. SFIC is strongly of the view that the Member States and the Commission should systematically co-design and -define the envisaged roadmap's framework conditions, timetables and milestones for implementation.

**Link to Higher Education and other policy fields:**

13. Synergies with and interaction among other EU programmes with an international dimension (such as: Erasmus+, NDICI and IPA III) need to be ensured with the aim of creating a genuine European policy for international cooperation supporting collaborations in higher education, research and innovation economic, social and industrial policy and other policy areas.

**Research Infrastructures:**

14. The set-up and running of research infrastructures, especially of those that are large scale, often requires cross-border collaboration. Access to these infrastructures is also necessary for researchers around the globe. It is therefore important to raise relevant international cooperation activities in the area of research infrastructures and ESFRI – including links to science diplomacy, and learn from past and present initiatives in this arena, such as EU-CELAC RESINFRA coordinating the European and Latin American infrastructures, or the G7 Research Infrastructure coordination activities.

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<sup>21</sup> COM/2012/0497 final

<sup>22</sup> COM(2021) 252 final, page 19

<sup>23</sup> COM(2021) 252 final, pages 5 and 7

### **Further implementation of the global approach strategy:**

15. For further detailing the implementation of the different aspects in the global approach strategy it is necessary to formulate an implementation plan containing concrete steps and laying down the roles and commitments of all the relevant partners. Such an implementation plan could also serve the goal of aligning MS, AC and EU positions and of clarifying necessary governance structures (e.g. in the context of the ERA Forum for Transition”, to detail the “Team Europe” approach for research and innovation and to spell out the division of work.
16. Although the EU level activities in international STI cooperation are strategically, politically and financially relevant, the bulk of international cooperation activities is designed and implemented by the Members States and Associated Countries, which also needs to be reflected. This is not only about increasing coherence and impact but also about presenting in a clearer way to our partner countries the combined efforts we are making in our collaboration with them.
17. Careful consideration of the governance structures required to successfully implement the new global approach to international collaboration is also essential. Ensuring that Member States, and as appropriate the Associated Countries, are centrally involved in the design and implementation of the new global approach will be vital.

### **Foresight:**

18. It is important to enable foresight exercises to identify priorities through a process of revision in real time of the needs of EU research and innovation; especially given the speed of STI dynamics of certain 3rd country partners and the need for rapid policy decision making to respond to unexpected challenges demanding STI cooperation. In a medium-term perspective it seems recommendable to set up a system for regular review of thematic and geographical priorities for R&I cooperation (on a 3 or 5 years base).
19. There are already a number of initiatives in place and resources available such as the JRC Megatrend Hub, the Scenario Exploration System, the Commission’s strategic foresight network or the Competence Centre on Foresight that could, at least in parts, be used for STI specific questions. Emphasis should also be put on the collaboration between the EU and MS e.g. via the further development of the Foresight Initiative Group.

### **Measurement and Monitoring issues:**

20. Given the ambitions stated in the strategy, attention should be given to measurement and monitoring of impact of international STI cooperation from the beginning and adequate indicators need to be included in the ERA Scoreboard. Beyond the monitoring of scientific impact (with publications as main indicator) and of the progress in reciprocity, attention should be given to the impact for Society (uptake, job creation, circularity, etc.) and to the impact on Europe's and Member States' competitiveness in the world with regard to innovation (e.g. patents), inter-sectoral initiatives and projects) and the image of Europe as a “seal of excellence” in research and innovation.
21. An international cooperation observatory or a network of observational institutions from MS's and EC (like a dynamic INCO 'platform') is important as a baseline common intelligence bringing together the knowledge of the EU and MS for cooperation exploration and priority setting. Among others this may be important for reinforcing partnerships with like - minded or Associated Countries in order to jointly reach our common goals. SFIC can be instrumental to this purpose for gathering and sharing MS information with regard to particular regions or countries of interest, in order to complement other intelligence sources.

### **Global standards:**

22. Regarding competitiveness, particular attention should be given to Europe's global standard setting competences and efforts in certain (technology) areas - in particular with regard to the Green Deal, circular economy, the digital and IoT transformation, and in some health areas, as well as in ethical values. Here too further building on initiatives from the JRC<sup>24</sup> and others is suggested.

### **Geographic focus:**

23. When it comes to developing new partnerships and geographic focus areas, beyond those explicitly covered in the communication, attention should also be given to recent and emerging overall developments at EU level and to allow for flexibility to react. One example in this context is the Indo-Pacific Region where Council Conclusions on the “EU Strategy

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<sup>24</sup> [https://pq-ue.ani.pt/brochuras/h2020/jrc/jrc\\_science\\_for\\_standards\\_reports.pdf](https://pq-ue.ani.pt/brochuras/h2020/jrc/jrc_science_for_standards_reports.pdf)

for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific“ have been adopted in April 2021<sup>25</sup> that include specific points on research and innovation and also invite the Commission and EEAS to present a joint communication by September 2021.

**Concluding remarks:**

**SFIC is looking forward to engage in a dialogue about the issues mentioned in the opinion with the relevant stakeholders and institutions and will set according steps within its work.**

Moreover, SFIC would be glad to support the upcoming French Presidency focus on international cooperation in R&I and the envisaged international conference in the first half of 2022 that would also be dedicated to the launch of a multilateral dialogue involving key international partners on shared fundamental principles and values in international R&I cooperation. SFIC highlights the relevance of international collaboration to help solving urgent societal challenges and for European competitiveness. Joint European action in international collaboration is of utmost importance and of high priority also in the new European Research Area.

**SFIC intends to continue its work around the core issues of mapping R&I landscapes (strengths, challenges, cooperation opportunities and thematic priorities etc.) in key 3<sup>rd</sup> countries.** This seems vital since, as outlined in the paper, the STI developments are fast and sometimes unexpected and we want to be able to fully tap in to the cooperation potential, in line with our interests, values and priorities.

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<sup>25</sup> 7914/21