

NOTE

From:	SFIC Secretariat
To:	SFIC delegations
Subject:	SFIC Opinion on “Relevance of International Cooperation in research and innovation for the EU – boosting the international dimension of the ERA & Horizon Europe”

SFIC recommendations regarding the “Relevance of International Cooperation in research and innovation for the EU – boosting the international dimension of the ERA & Horizon Europe”

The European Commission is currently working on a number of strategic documents related to the European Research Area (ERA) and Horizon Europe (HE). Both, within the ERA and HE international cooperation issues and the position of the European Union as a global actor in research and innovation (R&I) will play an important role. International cooperation is a precondition for excellent science and innovation and for solving the great challenges of today and tomorrow. It is in this context, that the Strategic Forum on International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) has developed a set of recommendations to strategically integrate the international cooperation (INCO) perspective in these fields.

For easier access to the recommendations, you will find upfront the summary of the recommendation with a more extended background and explanation in the Annex.

Recommendations:

A. General

- A.1. The EU and EU Member States (MS) with all their higher education institutions, research funding and performing organizations and companies need to take an active role in the global STI environment to foster excellence and competitiveness for Europe and contribute to the pressing societal challenges. The MS and the Commission have to work together on providing the best possible framework-conditions and support mechanisms in this respect.
- A.2. An increased focus on the impact, benefits, barriers and risks of international cooperation also has the potential for a more efficient work on joint positions and for jointly advocating the EU's values and standards in the collaboration with third countries. This includes further work on common guidelines or a code of conduct on the use of 'good principles' in international STI cooperation as well as international foresight activities.
- A.3. The current coronavirus pandemic has shown that in its initial phase coordination and collaboration beyond Europe did not happen as fast or to the extent expected for such a crisis. The collaboration with international partners still needs a more systematic integration at national and EU level and the structures and formats of international STI cooperation in times of crisis need to be revisited in order to be more effective.

B. European Research Area (ERA) and International Cooperation

- B.1. ERA needs a new impetus with revised goals and priorities that take into account the lessons learned and involve a broader range of actors to increase the overall commitment. As international cooperation will stay in the limelight and the Commission has committed to being "geo-political" with a stronger role in the world, a dedicated platform - like SFIC - on international STI cooperation between the EC and MS/AC is vital.

- B.2. The Member States /Associated Countries/ Regions play a pivotal role in the implementation of the ERA with regard to the internationalisation of STI and their efforts need to be coordinated, sustained and strengthened to achieve the desired impact. International cooperation strategies or roadmaps should follow an intervention logic-based approach to increase their effectivity and impact and a strategic alignment with overall regional/national/EU STI instruments, programmes and regulations as well as cross-governmental coordination and stakeholder involvement should be reinforced.
- B.3. International STI cooperation has huge potential to support the EU Green Deal and the EU Framework Programme is already preparing the launch of a first dedicated “Green Deal” Call in Horizon 2020 that will also feature specific international cooperation aspects. Such dedicated activities should also be replicated in bilateral and multilateral programmes on MS/AC level as relevant. Moreover, a strong presence of the EU in international fora could help to boost topics advancing the green transition.

C. International Cooperation (INCO) Strategy

- C.1. For the revision of the Commission’s INCO strategy in STI, it should be acknowledged that the goals and priorities set out in 2012 are largely still relevant and should be further pursued, such as reinforcing the challenge-based approach of international cooperation activities including the SDGs and also taking into account the digital transformation. Another focus should be to strengthen the collaboration of the EU and MS in the formulation and alignment of positions and priorities vis-a-vis third countries and regions, while respecting national/regional specificities. The establishment of country/region roadmaps are one element in this respect. This will allow a better flow of information and coordinated efforts between the EC and MS vis-a-vis third countries and regions. Moreover, evaluation and monitoring aspects need to be strengthened jointly at EU and national/regional level in order to better assess the impact of INCO activities in the future.

C.2. The potential of Science Diplomacy should be given explicit consideration in the new INCO Strategy and explicit efforts to leverage the benefits through a joint EU/MS approach should be made.

D. Horizon Europe and International Cooperation

D.1. The strong message of internationalisation in the European Commission's proposal for HE has to be brought to life by anchoring international cooperation and international mobility aspects throughout the programme and its implementation.

D.2. Association agreements are a strategic tool of providing full or partial access to the EU Framework Programme to specific countries. With an increased focus on International Cooperation the cooperation with AC on joint positions will be an added value in EU's International Cooperation actions. The Association policy offers a possibility of association towards countries beyond the EU's geographical proximity and towards strategic partners which share common values and strong STI capacity, and where there can be benefit from a closer cooperation. Association should be based on mutual benefits and appropriate reciprocity. For the EU the potential contribution of the third country's participation to the goals of HE and moreover the EC political priorities should be a guiding principle. Therefore a country by country assessment and individualised association agreements are necessary. The Commission should be transparent about ongoing and future discussions and negotiations with third countries on association agreements. Moreover, increased efforts should be made regarding reciprocity (incl. framework conditions) and information to researchers, companies and innovators about the possibilities of access to programmes and funding in third countries. SFIC should be timely informed of all ongoing and future consultation processes regarding negotiations and would provide strategic advice according to its mandate.

D.3. After the exit of the UK from the European Union, close cooperation in STI with the UK would be seen as in the EU's interest and of benefit for both sides. Without prejudice to ongoing negotiations on the future relationship between the EU and the UK and UK participation in Union programmes, a potential association of the UK to programmes in the field of education, science, research and innovation should be considered.

- D.4. Those countries that will not be associated to HE, but are relevant for collaboration, should actively be encouraged to participate in the relevant parts of Horizon Europe and adequate co-funding mechanisms should be agreed to facilitate the collaboration possibilities of researchers from those countries. Providing transparent access conditions for participation and a stable environment for cooperation is important to ensure sound possibilities for active collaboration.
- D.5. It may be necessary to develop dedicated instruments to further stimulate international cooperation, mobility and brain circulation that go beyond the standard set provided in HE. Such instruments could be inspired by global outreach activities of existing Public-Public-Partnerships (P2Ps) such as ERA-NETs and Joint Programming Initiatives, international partnerships of funding organizations such as the Belmont Forum or other multilateral initiatives such as the EUREKA network or the or the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).
- D.6. SFIC invites the Commission and Member States to jointly support the strengthening of the knowledge base of the EU related to third countries, the active coordination and promotion of EU priorities & topics of relevance and incentives of bringing together the EU and MS for increased collaboration and joint activities. Moreover, a specific sub-configuration of MS and the EU overseeing the implementation of the INCO aspects should be considered.
- D.7. All the different parts of HE have dedicated international cooperation and/or international mobility aspects, which need to be developed with sufficient coherence. This is especially true for pillar II and the new instruments of the missions as well as for most of the partnerships envisaged, where such international cooperation activities can also bring in additional budget to the activities foreseen. International cooperation elements thereby need to be included in the whole chain of activities: from foresight to the ex-ante assessment of the topics and the state of the art, the formulation of topics, the inclusion of international experts as relevant and the monitoring and evaluation.

D.8. Once Horizon Europe is launched and the first set of Work Programmes have been adopted, it is vital for its optimal implementation to ensure easy access to updated information for applicants about the concrete possibilities for international cooperation within Horizon Europe, such as flagging calls and providing information on potential funding for third partners via different co-funding arrangements etc. Furthermore, increased efforts should be made regarding reciprocity and information to researchers and regarding research organizations about the possibilities of access and funding in third countries.

E. Future of SFIC

E.1. With view to the future tasks of SFIC work, the exchange and mutual information activities stay important, while efforts need to be stepped up to counter the still existing fragmentation among MS as well as between the MS and the EC e.g. via the development of joint positions, the definition of joint priorities or an improved coordination of the numerous bilateral and multilateral platforms and activities. SFIC moreover sees significant potential for developing a joint tool where MS and the EC could in the future effectively coordinate their bi-lateral, multi-lateral and bi-regional platforms and actions.

E.2. SFIC is prepared to keep investing the expertise and time of its delegations to further advance the international cooperation perspective. The effectiveness of the group's work should be boosted by support initiatives to the collaborative work.

Annex 1 – Elaborated background for the recommendation:

A. General

A.1. International Cooperation in Research and Innovation (R&I) is already for a long time the standard modus operandi. Researchers and innovators are looking for the best partners anywhere in the world and the modern ICT infrastructures have given an additional boost to “borderless” cooperation. Moreover, it is the complexity of current societal challenges and our willingness to address them e.g. via the Sustainable Development Goals, that necessitates collaboration across regions, countries and continents. European researchers, universities, research organisations and companies have to take an active role in this global environment to foster excellence and competitiveness in the EU. The MS/AC and the EU have to work together on providing the best possible framework conditions and support mechanisms in this respect. Policy makers on regional, national and European level should create the best and adapted framework conditions to facilitate researchers’, research organisations’ and companies international cooperation activities, taking into account the global context and geopolitical considerations. This means that administrative and bureaucratic barriers to effective international cooperation need to be reviewed whenever possible.

A.2. However, while international cooperation in STI is often indispensable, there is also an increasing awareness regarding the potential risks of such collaborations - e.g. when it comes to data protection and data sovereignty, exploitation of research results, intellectual property rights, restricting academic freedom, compliance with ethical guidelines, brain drain, the refusal of reciprocity etc.

Moreover, recent months have seen a push towards focusing on the impact and benefits of international cooperation for the EU, its actors and its economies. This has also led to an understanding among MS and the EU that developing common positions when collaborating with third countries is necessary to strengthen the position of the EU and to advocate its values and standards on a global level. One example for such a joint approach is the current work on common guidelines for higher education institutions and research organisation when it comes to possible interferences in collaboration with third countries. Moreover joint foresight activities could be developed.

A.3. The current coronavirus pandemic has shown that intensive national research and innovation efforts have been the first and predominate response by Member States, while in a second step coordination on EU level has started via the short-term ERAvsCorona Action Plan. However, although the pandemic has a clear global scale, coordination and cooperation with third countries and international organisations initially has not happened to the extent expected and has only picked up with significant delay¹. Therefore, in a medium-and long term, this international cooperation component needs to be strengthened at EU as well as national level and a critical review of the communication- and cooperation structures needed to fulfil this should be made in order to improve the global response for future challenges².

B. European Research Area (ERA) and International Cooperation

B.1. Implementing a unified European Research Area (ERA) has proven to be a long-term endeavour that cannot be achieved in a few years³. Although progress has been made in a number of areas, the ERA is still not achieved in all its dimensions and a new impetus is needed to focus and concentrate on future activities.

Taking into account the shared competences of Member States and the EU in the field, exchanges within joint committees have proven to be vital to create a common understanding and to realize the objective of a European Research Area according to the Treaties. It seems important in this context to stress the significant added value of maintaining a joint platform on international cooperation issues like the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation for the following reasons:

- Exchange of information on running and planned international cooperation activities, thematic and regional priorities etc. on MS and EU level;

¹ For current efforts in the global response to COVID 19 see https://global-response.europa.eu/index_en

² Please also see the specific COVID-19 related SFIC opinion (WK 4151/2020 REV 1)

³ Initial communication of the EU and the endorsement by the Council in 2000, Green Paper “The European Research Area: New Perspectives” 2007; Council Conclusions on the “Ljubljana Process - Towards realisation of ERA” 2008 and on “A reinforced European research area partnership for excellence and growth” in 2012 and the “Governance of the European Research Area” in 2018.

- Addressing the currently still existing fragmentation with MS and the EC signing various bilateral agreements with the same third country on various priorities and potential alignment of activities and approaches towards third countries;
- Developing joint actions on policy and implementation level, especially regarding common priorities such as the SDGs etc.;
- Strategic reflection on the added value / potential pitfalls of international cooperation
- Pooling resources to increase the strategic intelligence about foreign STI systems;
- Open up and create synergies to other policy areas related to STI, such as higher education and development.

B.2. Strengthening international cooperation in the European Research Area also needs continued and strategic efforts in the Member States and Associated Countries and, where relevant, on regional level. Although the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation is an important coordination and collaboration instrument for internationalisation, the main bulk of activities is happening in the MS/AC/regions. This includes the integration of EU and international cooperation aspects in national/regional STI strategies, the development of specific international STI cooperation strategies and the support of dedicated international exchange as well as networking and cooperation activities. International cooperation strategies or roadmaps should follow an intervention logic-based approach to increase their effectivity and impact and a strategic alignment with overall regional/national/EU STI instruments, programmes and regulations as well as cross-governmental coordination and stakeholder involvement should be reinforced.

In this context cooperation within the EU should increasingly be seen as “internal cooperation” with efforts to open-up participation and further increase collaboration.

Enhancing and monitoring these activities in a long-term perspective is necessary to continue the positive path and allow for a better coordination between the different levels.

B.3. The European Green Deal sets out to “transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emission of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use”⁴. The document explicitly states, that the environmental ambitions of the Green Deal will not be achieved by Europe acting alone and that mobilising research and fostering innovation are key to achieving the goals. This huge potential to support the EU Green Deal via international STI collaboration could be realised by:

- Launching dedicated calls/topics within the EU Framework Programmes - this is already being prepared for Horizon 2020 and should be pursued in HE, where also the relevant missions and partnerships need to be taken into account for addressing those issues. A particular attention should be paid to cooperation with countries and regions that are most affected by climate change, especially with Africa and the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean Areas. The EU’s outer-most regions and overseas countries and territories could be considered as gateways to increased international cooperation with these areas.
- Complementary activities need to take place on MS/AC level, where topics contributing to the Green Deal and to green transition should be prioritised within international STI cooperation activities. To align activities a joint EU/MS thematic RTI roadmap towards supporting the Green Deal could be envisaged, which should also feature concrete international collaboration programmes and projects.
- Further strengthening the EU presence in and commitment in international fora like the Arctic and Belmont Forums, the World Science Forum, the Global Research Council or G7 / G20 could help to boost topics advancing the green transition.
- Foster the exchange of best practise and current strategies with other regions and countries in the world affected by similar challenges as the EU to improve the preparedness and response of the EU and fast-track the way to potential solutions and innovations.

C. International Cooperation (INCO) Strategy

⁴ COM(2019), 640 final, 11.12.2019

C.1. After having launched the Communication "Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: a strategic approach"⁵ in 2012, that has sets out a new strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation, the European Commission is currently working on a revision of that strategy, most likely in the context of its communication on revising the European Research Area.

The objectives of 2012, namely strengthening excellence, tackling societal challenges and supporting the Union's external policies are still valid and should further be pursued and reinforced. The same is true for the other main principles and areas of action mentioned in the paper, such as openness, need for targeted INCO activities and instruments, promoting common principles and – most importantly from our point of view - strengthening the partnership with the MS and major stakeholder e.g. through joint Union-Member States strategic research and innovation agendas or common guidelines for engaging in agreements with third countries.

To demonstrate the commitment of MS toward the strategy, INCO should be addressed in the Council Conclusions on the Commission Communication on the future of R&I and the ERA.

One specific aspect that has been introduced with the strategy of 2012 are the multi-annual roadmaps for cooperation with key partner countries. While in principle this could be a good opportunity for collaboration between MS/AC and the Commission, some improvements in the approach and process are needed:

- the different country roadmaps should better emphasize the EU added value and indicate the analytical basis for the selection of the priorities, taking into account the existing collaboration and needs of the Member States and Associated Countries with those partner countries;
- the approach to identifying joint priorities should be challenge-based, focusing also on framework conditions of the cooperation and plan for follow-up and monitoring. SFIC should be integrated in the formulation of the roadmaps to guarantee the joint visions of the Commission and MS and AC, while respecting national/regional specificities in this context.

⁵ (COM(2012) 497).

More emphasis should be given to the monitoring and impact of international STI cooperation, where further work is needed to improve the related indicators, especially when it comes to impact-orientation.

C.2. Finally, with reference to the topic of Science Diplomacy, where SFIC has issued a separate input paper in March 2020⁶, it is important that the new EU strategy acknowledges the role and impact of Science Diplomacy in the international STI cooperation activities of the EU. In this context the strategy should make clear reference to the need of developing a coherent Science Diplomacy approach and a joint and coordinated EU/MS and as appropriate AC Roadmap (including different EC Services and the European External Action Service) in this respect to make full use of its potential.

D. Horizon Europe and International Cooperation

Although the European Commission has published a dedicated communication on international STI cooperation and widely promoted the concept of the 3 O's⁷, participation of third countries in Horizon 2020 started at a very low level compared to FP7, due to different reasons such as the new financing modalities. In the wake of the mid-term review of Horizon 2020, the European Commission has made number of efforts to boost international cooperation, e.g. through introducing dedicated international flagships. Recent statistics show that participation in projects has risen beyond FP7 levels (4.3% at the end of 2019 compared to 3.6% in FP7), while funding for third countries remains rather low (at around 1.0% at the end of 2019 compared to 1.3% in FP7). However, around 230 million Euros (end of 2019) were leveraged through the co-funding mechanisms and own contributions of participants from third countries according to European Commission information.

⁶ ERAC-SFIC 1352/20

⁷ “Open Innovation, Open Science and Open to the world – a vision for Europe”
<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/open-innovation-open-science-open-world-vision-europe>

D.1. The EU Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation are the largest instruments for fostering STI cooperation with third countries at EU level. The design of Horizon Europe (HE) as the next Framework Programme for the 2021-2027 period is therefore of strategic importance for the positioning of the European Union in a global research and innovation context. The proposal of the European Commission regarding HE states:

*“**Horizon Europe will significantly strengthen international cooperation** which is crucial to ensure access to talent, knowledge, know-how, facilities and markets worldwide, to effectively tackle global challenges and to implement global commitments. The Framework Programme will intensify cooperation and extend association agreements to include countries with excellent science, technology and innovation capacities. The Programme will continue to fund entities from low-to-mid income countries, and to fund entities from industrialised and emerging economies only if they possess essential competence or facilities.⁸”*

SFIC is convinced that to bring this strong message to life, it is essential to strategically anchor international cooperation aspects throughout the Framework Programme, the most important of which are detailed below.

D.2. Through concluding association agreements, the EU has the strategic possibility to provide full or partial access to the EU Framework Programme to specific countries. Those countries can participate, with a few exceptions, under the same conditions as the Member States. In earlier Framework Programmes, association agreements have been concluded with countries in the EU neighbourhood that in many cases also have strong economic ties to the EU and with countries that are candidates to become EU Members⁹.

⁸ COM(2018), 435 final, 07.06.2018

⁹ In Horizon 2020 the following countries are associated: Iceland, Norway, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey Israel, Moldova, Switzerland, Faroe Islands, Ukraine, Tunisia, Georgia, Armenia

With an increased focus on International Cooperation, the proposal of the European Commission for HE foresees a new category of association for a group of third countries with “a good capacity in STI, commitment to a rules-based open market economy, backed by democratic institutions and an active promotion of policies to improve the economic and social well-being of citizens”¹⁰. This offers a possibility of association towards countries beyond the EU’s geographical proximity and towards strategic partners which share common values and strong STI capacity, and where there can be benefit from a closer cooperation.

With view to that new category of countries the current discussions centre on the perceived added value of their participation in the different parts of HE and potential limitations of access to especially mono-beneficiary parts and the pillars/programme parts that are close-to market (like the different instruments within the EIC).

In that respect, SFIC considers that benefits of collaboration need to be mutual.

For the EU, the potential contribution of the third country’s participation to the goals of HE, appropriate reciprocal access to equivalent research and innovation programmes and the Commission’s political priorities¹¹ should be the guiding principles. Therefore, a country by country assessment and individualised association agreements seem necessary, as too broad a priori restrictions may have the pitfall of missing out on potential valuable contributions of a country for a specific problem/topic. Moreover, the Commission should be transparent about ongoing and future discussions and negotiations with third countries on association agreements.

¹⁰ Commission Proposal, Article 12 d – currently under negotiation

¹¹ Green Deal, Economy that works for people, Fit for the digital age, Promoting the European way of life, A stronger Europe in the world, Push for European Democracy.
https://ec.europa.eu/info/priorities_en

- D.3. One of the immediate challenges facing the EU when it comes to STI cooperation with third countries is the future relationship with the United Kingdom (UK) after Brexit. Without prejudice to ongoing negotiations on the future relationship between the EU and the UK and UK participation in Union programmes, considering the strong links between our higher education, research and innovation systems, it seems in the EU's interest to consider an agreement regarding the future relations with the UK that enables a close cooperation in that field. Many of the leading European academic institutions and research organizations are based in the UK and advancing scientific excellence and the EU innovation potential requires the exchange and collaboration with the UK in an adapted manner. Negotiations should emphasise those joint interests.
- D.4. Independent from the currently ongoing negotiations regarding association, there will also be numerous third countries participating in projects of HE that are not associated to HE. It will be equally important to extend a clear invitation for collaboration to those countries and provide transparent access conditions for participation and a stable environment for cooperation. Moreover the practise of Horizon 2020, that in general low and middle income countries and in exceptional cases also other third countries are eligible for funding, should be continued.

Negotiations regarding the continuation/expansion of co-funding mechanisms established in Horizon 2020 should start immediately for those countries where an association is unlikely. Here, the lessons learned and problems encountered regarding evaluation mechanisms, timing, coverage, transparency of processes, etc. should be clearly communicated and solutions should be sought with the partner countries, even if their national decision processes are taken independent from the EU.

- D.5. Beyond the standard set of funding instruments proposed for HE, SFIC argues that the European Commission should make every effort to provide instruments/mechanism specifically geared towards international cooperation. It is not enough to “just” flag topics within a call that are suitable for international cooperation. We also have to think of additional, flexible measures such as:

- for establishing STI relations with countries the EU has not worked with intensively yet,
- for fostering cross-border calls comparable to existing Public-Public-Partnerships (P2Ps) such as ERA-NETs and Joint Programming Initiatives, international partnerships of funding organizations such as the Belmont Forum or other multilateral initiatives such as the EUREKA network or the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT),
- for the coordination of MS/AC towards international partner countries,
- for jointly solving specific, also local, challenges (green transition, health...) e.g. via awarding prizes.

D.6. Another essential point is the one of how to actively coordinate international cooperation across HE and the ERA. While it is clear, that within the different pillars/clusters/missions etc. in HE there is respective expertise, as there is in SFIC as an ERA-related group, it is also necessary to actively develop all those individual parts in a coordinated way to be able to get a full picture and respectively make use of the full potential of INCO activities happening. Such an active coordination is also necessary when it comes to assessing the progress against the strategic goals and targets formulated.

While the roadmaps with third countries mentioned above (point 8.) are one element of such a coordination effort, they are by no means sufficient. Firstly, they only tackle parts of the third countries the EU is collaborating with; secondly they may not cover all possibilities of cooperation (e.g. currently partnerships) and thirdly they currently fail to have a mobilizing effect of coordination between the Member States and the EC level.

What is needed is a much stronger and strategic coordination within the EU that goes beyond monitoring thematic coherence within HE and between the EU and MS level in order to

- strengthen the knowledge base of the EU related to third countries,
- actively promote EU priorities & topics of relevance (within HE and in third countries)
- bringing together the EU and MS for increased collaboration and joint activities.

This would include continuous communication and collaboration mechanisms with other DGs and the EEAS to strengthen the EU position on a global scale and to leverage the inputs and investments made across the European Commission's programmes.

On the level of FP coordination the Strategic Programme Committee currently has an overall responsibility of monitoring international cooperation in Horizon 2020, while in the different challenges have launched dedicated internationalization topics and challenge 6 especially has feature some geopolitical and region-specific INCO topics. Also here changes are needed – we suggest that a sub-configuration is set-up, involving the MS/AC (e.g. as a sub-group under the strategic configuration), that would dedicate its work to the INCO dimension of HE. Such a sub-configuration could be handled without a lot bureaucracy, aiming at two meetings per year + virtual working methods for the rest of the time.

D.7. Openness to collaboration with third countries is a cross-cutting topic and all of the pillars and parts of HE do have dedicated INCO aspects. However, these aspects do need careful reflection and development and a clear flagging for raising the awareness of the research community. And while it is overstretching the scope of this paper to go into each of the pillars and clusters of HE, we would like to specifically make reference to the missions and partnerships¹². Combined, these instruments will likely absorb a quite significant amount of the budget of Pillar II and are therefore of strategic importance to achieving the goals of HE.

At the moment, there are five selected mission areas, all of which bear an important international cooperation component that needs to be incorporated in the further specification of the missions as well as the respective calls within the Work Programmes of HE and the monitoring of the missions. Moreover, the success of achieving those missions needs a continuous and careful reflection of the international developments and advancements in the related research and policy fields.

¹² <https://www.era-learn.eu/partnerships-in-a-nutshell/type-of-networks>

<https://www.era-learn.eu/partnerships-in-a-nutshell/r-i-partnerships/european-partnerships-under-horizon-europe/general-information-on-european-partnerships>

<https://www.era-learn.eu/news-events/news/era-learn-focus-on-global-research-cooperation-1>

Although called “European Partnerships” the current list of envisaged partnerships features a number of topics that have a clear international context and need a global partnership dimension in order to be successful. It is essential that all partnerships develop a state of play in their field, taking into account the global context of the research and innovation field, as well as an international cooperation dimension for their partnership (which international partners are essential for delivering results) – or a transparent rationale why no international cooperation seems necessary.

- D.8. To fully exploit the potential of international cooperation it is necessary to raise the awareness of researchers regarding the possibilities available, regarding content as well as funding. This can be done through defining international flagship collaborations as in H2020 or through flagging INCO relevant calls and by providing links to guidance on potential funding of partners from third countries. Furthermore, increased efforts should be made regarding reciprocity and information to researchers and regarding research organizations about the possibilities of access and funding in third countries.

E. Future of SFIC

- E.1. With view to the further contribution of SFIC the following considerations are made: While continuing the work with view to exchange and pooling of knowledge and best practices as well as the collection of country relevant internationalisation activities is important, efforts need to be stepped up to counter the still existing fragmentation of international cooperation activities among MS as well as between the MS and the EC.

This concerns for example:

- the joint development of positions regarding the collaboration with third countries
- the definition of joint priorities & communication of these priorities vis a vis third countries (via the Joint Committee Meetings, SOMs etc.) for a strong European position
- an improved coordination and streamlining of the many existing bi-regional platforms and bilateral, regional and multilateral activities.

Moreover, SFIC also sees significant potential for developing a joint tool, where MS and the EC could in the future effectively coordinate their bi-lateral, multi-lateral and bi-regional platforms and actions. MS could be invited to label national projects from bi-lateral, multi-lateral and bi-regional actions with the targeted countries to similar EC initiatives. This would help to invest our efforts in the same directions. This would also give the Third Countries a sense of structure and remove the idea that Europe is so fragmented when it comes to different layers of governance in R&I. Such a mechanism and managing structure would of course need the joint EC/MS agreement or mandate via ERA (if handled via SFIC) or the Framework Programme (e.g. Strategic Configuration).

- E.2. SFIC is prepared to keep investing the expertise and time of its delegations to further advance the international cooperation perspective. The effectiveness of the group's work should be boosted by support initiatives to the collaborative work. This includes the launch of accompanying studies, IT support for collecting, sharing and evaluating information/ data from MS, possibility to invite a restricted number of external experts to meetings and workshops etc.