**Council of the
European Union**

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	*Preparation of the Council (Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space)) on 22-23 May 2023*
	Knowledge security and responsible internationalisation
	- Policy debate

Delegations will find attached a Presidency note on "Knowledge security and responsible internationalisation" with a view to the policy debate at the Competitiveness Council on 23 May 2023.

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PREIDENCY NOTE FOR THE POLICY DEBATE ON "KNOWLEDGE SECURITY AND RESPONSIBLE INTERNATIONALISATION"

Research integrity and research security in a polarised world

International research collaboration is of great importance for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and Research Performing Organisations (RPO) to maintain high quality and relevance. International cooperation helps create networks among the world's best talent, provides access to new markets for innovative companies, promotes standardisation and builds critical mass to tackle global challenges. Scientific advances, discoveries and innovations take place in an interactive, interdisciplinary, and international ecosystem, where researchers can cooperate on the basis of shared principles and values, such as academic freedom, research integrity and openness.

Having said that, openness and collaboration also require awareness and knowledge of the existing security threats and risks, as well as systematic efforts to counteract them. In an increasingly uncertain and polarised world, new geopolitical tensions and challenges arise where the open research environment and international research collaboration risk being unfairly exploited and skewed by foreign powers to suit their own interests. Threats from foreign states and non-state actors can lead to unwanted knowledge transfer and interference in research and innovation (R&I) activities, including support to policymaking. These security risks threaten to seriously damage the international research ecosystem. Ethical issues arising from cooperation with countries that do not respect fundamental rights and academic freedom also need to be highlighted. Alerts from security services and incidents that have become public in the media highlight the need for actors in the European R&I system to avoid being naïve.

Research internationalisation needs to be based on rigorous research ethics, including research integrity and responsibility. Researchers, support services and HEI management need to assess the challenges and opportunities related to international collaboration. Examples of how the research community can manage suspicions and fear of hidden agendas include increased transparency, awareness-raising on broader geopolitical tensions, sound risk management that balances due diligence with practices conducive to relationship-building, and education on responsible internationalisation.

Maintaining the balance between open and restricted international research collaboration

Responsible internationalisation implies a structured process for identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring opportunities and risks in research collaborations. Such an approach leads to better preparedness and awareness as well as increased knowledge of foreign interference, while also safeguarding fundamental rights and values of academic freedom, integrity and autonomy.

Openness, transparency, security, freedom and integrity are crucial elements for responsible internationalisation. Openness and security should therefore not be seen as contradictory but should rather be balanced and complementary. However, maintaining the balance between open, trust-based scientific collaborations on the one hand and protective, restrictive regulations on the other hand is a major challenge. Over-regulation or excessive intervention can undermine the freedom of scientific inquiry and exchange.

In September 2021, the Council adopted conclusions on a 'Global approach to Research and Innovation, Europe's strategy for international cooperation in a changing world', emphasising the EU's commitment to upholding openness in international R&I cooperation. The conclusions also emphasise the promotion of the EU's shared values and securing its interests, including building R&I leadership and competitiveness, and strengthening measures to counter foreign interference.

In June 2022, Council conclusions on 'Principles and values for international cooperation in research and innovation' were adopted. The conclusions acknowledged the importance of risk management and security, and recommended that the European Commission and the Member States take measures to counter foreign interference and manage the inherent risks in international R&I cooperation. This included providing adequate precautions concerning the security of the EU and safeguarding intellectual and industrial property rights, as well as the rules for the protection of privacy, personal data and infrastructures.

Furthermore, the Council conclusions invited the Commission and the Member States to draw on and further develop identified good practices, such as those in the Commission Staff Working Document on 'Tackling R&I foreign interference' in order to support their implementation. Following this, a mutual learning exercise (MLE) on tackling foreign interference in R&I has been initiated, focusing on topics such as awareness-raising and stakeholder engagement, understanding and identifying foreign interference threats and measures to counter them.

Questions for discussion

In light of the above, ministers are invited to give their views on the following questions:

1. Many Member States have established national approaches and measures for safeguarding research and international collaborations. What experiences and best practices would you like to share with regard to addressing foreign interference and raising awareness of threats and risks, while also continuing to promote openness and international cooperation? What additional measures can be taken?

2. Responsibilities for research security and integrity, including identifying and understanding foreign interference threats, are distributed across multiple actors, such as governments, higher education institutions and funding agencies. What measures can be taken to further strengthen coordination and the exchange of best practice between the stakeholders involved, including the research community?

3. Since the type of risks vary greatly between individual universities and disciplines, developing a singular approach can be ineffective. In this regard, what main challenges do you see in reaching successful and efficient implementation of guidelines and checklists with concrete actions and methods to tackle foreign interference?

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