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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: International R&I cooperation in a geopolitical world: the Global Approach two years on

ERAC delegations will find in Annex the document "International R&I cooperation in a geopolitical world: the Global Approach two years on", with a view to the ERAC meeting on 21-22 June 2023.

Agenda point for the ERAC Plenary Meeting on 21/22 June 2023, Lund (SE)

“International R&I cooperation in a geopolitical world: the Global Approach two years on”

Why this topic in ERAC?

Two years ago, the Commission published its communication on the Global Approach to Research and Innovation (R&I).¹ The Council welcomed the Communication and set forth its vision on the topic in its conclusions of 28 September 2021.²

The Global Approach reaffirms the EU commitment to preserve openness in international research and innovation cooperation while promoting a level playing field and reciprocity, in a world that is increasingly defined by geopolitical tensions and in which fundamental values and principles come under pressure and hence need to be defended. The Council has adopted the Pact for Research and Innovation³, defining these values and principles. The Council also approved conclusions on principles and values for international cooperation in R&I and invited the Union’s key R&I partners to engage in a multilateral dialogue on values and principles,⁴ which is currently ongoing.⁵

Against the backdrop of a situation that made strong European collaboration and joint action in international R&I more important than ever, a Commission report on the implementation of the Global Approach will be published before summer which will provide insight in progress made since. The report is expected to conclude that, against the backdrop of a complex geopolitical environment, exacerbated by Russia’s war of aggression as well as other global conflicts, the Global Approach continues to be the appropriate strategic framework for international R&I cooperation.

¹ Communication, 18/05/2021

² Council conclusions, 28/09/2021

³ Council Recommendation on Pact, 16/07/2021

⁴ Council Conclusions, 10/06/2022

⁵ On 28 June, a high-level meeting is being organised to take stock of the first five workshops that have taken place to date and to discuss with third countries what approach should be followed to contribute to a robust and common framework for balanced and mutually beneficial international R&I cooperation. A Ministerial event is currently planned in the first half of 2024 to consolidate the findings of the multilateral dialogue.

The Union has made significant progress in executing the actions identified in the Communication. It is successfully implementing the new provisions for the association of third countries to Horizon Europe and, where needed to guarantee the protection of the strategic interests of the Union and its Member States, it applies the possibility to exclude entities from non-EU countries from participating in certain specific Horizon Europe projects.

Through the Global Approach, the EU has worked towards preserving openness, promoting values and principles, and safeguarding assertively its strategic assets, interests, and security, thereby enhancing its strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy. However, more work needs to be done to maintain the role of an international science and innovation powerhouse and for the EU to be perceived as a strong STI collaboration partner worldwide.

ERAC is invited to assess whether it still supports the direction as set out in the Global Approach and the need to for an appropriate balance between openness and safeguards. It is suggested to focus the debate on two topical issues: (1) advancing on our joint science diplomacy endeavours and (2) the strategic rebalancing of our R&I cooperation with China.

You will find the note on cooperation with China in a separate document.

Science diplomacy

In the Global Approach, science diplomacy is presented as a means to project soft power and pursue our economic interests and values more effectively, allowing the global role of the Union to be reinforced. In the absence of an EU framework, science diplomacy efforts in Europe remain largely uncoordinated and potential synergies untapped. This happens against the background of a rapidly changing geopolitical as well as scientific-technological environment, with countries like the US and China using science diplomacy in a much more targeted manner.

In its conclusions on the Global Approach of September 2021 the Council therefore called on the Commission and the EEAS to develop a European Science Diplomacy Agenda. Tackling science diplomacy at European level is challenging, as it falls in-between two policy areas with different legal and institutional setups as well as cultural mindsets: foreign policy and R&I policy. At the same time, the concept of science diplomacy itself is changing, for instance through the application of diplomatic tools in science such as sanctions. The importance of systematic, focused, coordinated, and directed approach to science diplomacy should be practiced promoting a holistic course of actions that also translates beyond science diplomacy to other policy areas.

The report on the implementation of the Global Approach is expected to acknowledge the need to further reflect on mechanisms to promote science diplomacy in Europe, in particular with a focus on four pillars: (1) how to use science diplomacy strategically to tackle geopolitical challenges in a fragmented, multipolar world; (2) how to make European diplomacy more strategic, effective, and resilient through scientific evidence and foresight; (3) how to strengthen science diplomacy in EU and Member State diplomatic missions and foster the EU's global science diplomacy outreach; and (4) how to build capacity for European science diplomacy.

In view of an envisaged discussion about science diplomacy at the informal meeting of Research Ministers scheduled for 27-28 July (tbc), ERAC is invited to reflect -from the perspective of R&I- on our aspirations for joint action at EU level in this field and the points the Research Ministers should address to have a fruitful discussion paving the way forward so that swift progress can be made.

Guidance and follow-up

ERAC is requested to discuss the questions included in this note and give guidance on how to proceed, using the ERA governance structures, as well as to reflect on its own role in driving forward the Global Approach to R&I in the coming months and years.