

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

Secretariat

Brussels, 25 June 2021
(OR. en)

ERAC-SFIC 1355/21

NOTE

From: SFIC Secretariat
To: Delegations

Subject: Summary conclusions of the informal videoconference of the members of the ERAC-SFIC on 10 June 2021

The meeting was chaired by Martina Hartl (AT) and the Vice-Chair Tiina Vihma-Purovaara (FI). All presentations made during the meeting are included in document WK 7676/21.

1. Welcome and agenda

The Chair welcomed participants to the informal SFIC Plenary session. The agenda was approved¹.

2. Presentation of the “global approach communication”

The Commission (Director Russo) presented the Communication on the global approach for Research and innovation – Europe’s strategy for international cooperation in a changing world² adopted on 18 May and thanked SFIC for its support in its preparation.

¹ IS, NO and TR participated as observers in items 1 to 7.

² COM(2021) 252

The strategy has four main axis: 1) it reaffirms the EU commitment to openness in research and innovation, while safeguarding EU interests where necessary. 2) R&I cooperation should promote European fundamental values and should achieve balanced cooperation based on reciprocity and level playing field. 3) Global partnerships and multilateral activities should focus on the implementation of the main EU policy objectives, such as the Green Deal and digital transition and health. 4) Cooperation should be tailor-made per category of country (industrialized countries, developing countries, neighbourhood countries) and modulated according to the specific interests of the EU. To maximise impact, the Commission proposes to implement the Communication through a *Team Europe* approach combining actions and fostering synergies between the EU and Member State, including the ERA Forum for Transition where also the dialogue with the partner countries will be sought. COM specified that implementation is already ongoing on some of the points mentioned in the Communication, which provides a useful policy framework. SFIC will prepare an opinion on the document.

3. Tour the Table

Ahead of the meeting, delegations were invited to send comments in a written format (WK 6957/21) on their bilateral or multilateral collaboration with third countries, strategic activities and national coordination. The main responses are available in the presentation. An additional week (deadline 17 June) was given for further countries to provide comments/inputs.

The Commission provided an update on recent INCO-activities:

- EU-CELAC: The Commission informed that a 'Strategic Roadmap' (a Non-Binding Instrument - NBI) was prepared last year. It was adopted by COM on 30 April. It is now discussed in Council.
- The joint Steering Committee with Brazil took place in March and confirmed commitment to step up cooperation, with a new cofunding mechanism to support Brazilian participation in Horizon Europe being currently negotiated.
- The EU-US summit is taking place on 15 June, key objectives on R&I cooperation will be confirmed, with focus on climate change, global health and Mission Innovation.
- The EU-Canada summit will also include the important role of R&I as Canada is interested in associating to Horizon Europe (Letter of intent has been received by COM from CAN).

- EU-Mediterranean: the next meeting of senior officials will take place on 7 July, with a focus on PRIMA contribution to policy priorities, on adopting the roadmap on future R&I agenda and on future implementation possibilities.
- G7: the Science Track and Research Compact have been prepared.
- Japan Summit on 27 May: R&I has been discussed, also in the context of the letter of intent from last year striving to link Horizon Europe missions and the Japan moonshot programme. Japan is interested in a possible association to HE and there is cooperation in the Arctic and within the EU-Japan Green Alliance.

The Commission provided an update on the negotiation for association to Horizon Europe that will start next week with the first countries and signing agreements is expected by year end. The template for categories (b) and (c) countries has been prepared. A transitional measure is introduced to ensure continuity between H2020 and Horizon Europe: for all calls of this year, all countries are treated as if they were already associated. The association agreement should be signed before the grant agreements.

NO and IS obtain association through the EEA Protocol 31 amendment, expected by end of September and which will be retroactive. The UK association is included in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, where Protocol 1 will be adopted. UK entities are treated as if UK was associated to Horizon Europe.

Faroe Islands (category d) exploratory talks are ongoing and the Council will soon adopt the authorisation to negotiate. CH stopped negotiating the general framework agreement, so all associations are on hold, pending assessment. Ukraine was associated to H2020/Euratom and this should continue. Exploratory talks can start with Kosovo, Morocco and Canada that have already sent letters of intent. Further countries potentially interested (no LoI yet) are Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Japan.

The PT Presidency gave an update on ongoing activities and achievements.

- Horizon Europe, the Specific Programme, the Euratom programme entered into force on 12 May.
- The EIT and its Strategic Innovation Agenda entered into force on 28 May
- Council approved a General Approach on the European High Performance Supercomputing Joint Undertaking (EuroHPC) at the Competitiveness Council on 28 May.

- Conclusions on Deepening the ERA adopted at the Competitiveness Council.

The SI Presidency presented their priorities.

- Follow-up on the negotiation of the European institutionalised Partnerships
- Adoption of the Pact for R&I and of Council Conclusions on ERA governance and ERA policy agenda
- Association of third countries to Horizon Europe and adoption of Council Conclusions on international cooperation
- Gender equality
- Missions in Horizon Europe (depending on the COM preparatory work)
- Synergies between higher education and research and innovation
- Research infrastructures with the ESFRI Days 6th–8th of December
- Research careers and reintegration with the MSCA Conference 15th/16th November

4. International innovation activities

The tour de table presentation related to innovation activities was distributed. A number of calls and programmes are ongoing in the MS/AC with view to international innovation cooperation. A Task Force on innovation may be created after summer. HU suggest to include innovation in the usual tour de table.

5. Report on Africa related activities

The WG Rapporteurs reported on the last two meetings, covering Higher Education with guest speakers from the Guild and the African Education Initiative. The COST association was also invited on promotion of African entities in COST actions. The innovation survey of the working Group was already circulated. Discussions also took place on EU-Africa-China relations linking with the work of the EU-KNOC. The COM website for Africa will soon be ready for outreach activities. The work plan was reviewed: monthly meetings with speakers will continue; contribution to the international cooperation conference under FR Presidency; continue outreach activities and discussions on China.

The Commission confirmed the website is ready. On a 6 May HRPD meeting, it was agreed to prepare a common innovation agenda so this will be discussed with the African Union commission. The first Horizon Europe work programme will soon be published and includes the Africa initiatives with 30 dedicated call topics to foster participation and specific webinars with the African research community will be organised. At the end of June the final meeting of the EU-African innovation partnership will take place focusing on the impact and lessons learned.

6. Report of the Science Diplomacy Task Force

The Chair presented the main results to SFIC. The taskforce prolonged its work until October 2021. The “Science Diplomacy” survey is finalised. The identification of key Actors and networks is being finalised. Recommendations on a European Science Diplomacy Agenda will be prepared and a dialogue with the EEAS representative is foreseen for the next Task Force Meeting at the beginning of July.

7. Ad-hoc Task Force on the Bonn declaration

The Rapporteur presented the 14 recommendations prepared by the Task Force, proposing a coordinated approach to promote scientific freedom, and to feed ideas to the ERA Forum for Transition and the R&I Pact. The document will be adopted by written procedure with the adapted version of the text going out to delegations next week.

8. ERA related activities and updates

The Chair gave the following information concerning ERA-related activities:

1. ERAC Plenary, 3-4 June 2021

Present and forthcoming Presidencies: (see item 2)

FR presidency: The three main priorities will be:

1. Synergies ERA/EHEA, with an informal meeting of ministers for research and for higher education in the second half of January back-to-back with a flagship event on "Forum of universities for the future",
2. Future of higher education,
3. INCO issues, with a flagship conference planned in Marseille in March 2022.

The Commission has launched a study on evaluation of the ERA policy framework, with a workshop on 18 June. A mutual learning exercise on citizens' science is under preparation.

II. Current ERA-related developments – news regarding the ERA-Forum for Transition and the ERA Governance

The ERA-Forum for Transition has worked on the Pact for R&I, so the Commission should publish a document mid-July. On the ERA policy agenda, the selection of actions to be covered is ongoing. The ERA-Forum for Transition will be key for the future ERA governance while the role of other groups is unclear. It had a first presentation and discussion on the draft guidelines for foreign interference, prepared by the Commission.

III. Report on the activities of the ERA-related groups

The Human Resources Management (HRM) Standing Working Group is updating the Charter & Code, keeping the existing pillars and streamlining the document.

Open Science and Innovation (OSI) Standing Working Group: a Task Force on research integrity started recently.

ESFRI will adopt a new roadmap and approved its stakeholders' strategy.

Gender in R&I (GRI) Standing Working Group already has a Task Force on Gender Equality Plans, on Digitalisation and on Intersectionality, diversity and racism.

The Triangle Task Force (HRM, OSI, GRI) report is finalised with several recommendations, which are not really linked to SFIC.

The Group on joint programming (GPC) is affected by the general change of partnerships landscape from H2020 to Horizon Europe. A comprehensive report is finalised on impact of joint programming of national level.

9. Debriefing from the Thematic Workshop

The Vice-Chair provided an overview on the workshop to prepare the SFIC opinion on the Global Approach Communication (WK 7738/2021). Participants recognised the changed environment. Comments were gathered from participants and the main issues that appeared. Missing elements include research infrastructure or attractiveness of Europe, or two-way road of collaboration. Cooperation with Member States is even more crucial.

The work was divided into three groups that structures their discussions around the topics Missing elements, most valuable elements; cooperation between EU and MS, reöevance for Horizon Europe). The output of the workshop is available on the SFIC How-space platform but comments are still welcome, in particular to point at the most important elements.

Comments can be sent / provided directly to the How-space site until 17 June.

The draft SFIC opinion will be shared for comments. The Chair called for a drafting group and DE, ES, FR, HU, IE, volunteered, also possibly BE, IT and SI.

A summary of the workshop is available (WK 7738/2021).

10. International dimension of EU partnerships

Presentation from ERA-Learn (Michael Dinges / Austrian Institute of Technology)

The presentation focused on the transition of partnerships to Horizon Europe. ERA-Learn is a service provider with a hub, database, guidance and toolkits on joint calls. The internationalisation of partnerships has strongly increased since FP6. A policy brief on globalisation will soon be published, providing the rationale for internationalisation in partnerships and the differences in approach. The ties and trust have built up in existing collaborations and should be transferred in the future partnerships, hoping that the increase in participation will continue.

Current status in the discussion of the HE partnerships (Davide Valitutti /EC)

The Commission presented the new approach to European Partnership. There were about 120 partnerships under H2020, so streamlining was needed. Currently a list of Key features will need to be respected: delivering on strategic orientations, a common set of rules and common simplified architecture (three types: co-programmed, co-funded and institutionalised). Details were provided on how third countries can participate, whether or not they are associated to Horizon Europe. the Commission contacted 16 potential associated countries for them to decide whether they want to participate in partnerships. Member States and third countries will be contacted again when new partnerships are set up.

Responded to ES, the Commission clarified that promoting participation in the EIT (KICs) is done by the EIT themselves, not by the Commission. As to Co-funded partnerships, many low to middle-income countries participate easily as they can receive funding. For high-income countries, those already participating could share their best practices with others.

11. Update on China

The Commission informed on the R&I Knowledge Network on China (EU-KNoC). The last meeting took place about outreach of China in Africa. Other ad hoc meetings (with dedicated experts / guests) took place on researchers' situation in China; on bilateral cooperation modalities between funding agencies; and on research networks on/in China. The next meeting will be on establishing institutional presence in China. The next China Core Group meeting will take place on 28 June on resilience of value chains.

The Vice-Chair presented the work of the drafting group which will prepare a short recommendation paper synthesising the most important recommendations of the KNoC work. The recommendations will be posted on the SFIC How-space platform to comment and to continue drafting. The objective is to finalise before summer. AT, BE, NL and DE supported this work.

The Commission confirmed that the network should continue and that one topic of interest is that large companies are moving their R&D departments to China.

12. Any other topics (including news related to the OECD)

The R&I days take place on 23-24 June with specific sessions on international cooperation on 24 June. Volunteers could report back on these sessions.

The draft recommendation on international cooperation in S&T will be on the agenda of OECD Council on 30 June and should be adopted then. The recommendation on innovation will be on the agenda early next year.

13. Conclusions of the meeting and date of the next meeting

- The Bonn declaration document will be approved by written procedure soon.
- On the R&I Knowledge Network on China recommendation, comments can be provided on the SFIC How-space platform. The draft will then be sent to delegations.
- Concerning the Global Approach opinion, comments can be provided on the SFIC How-space platform. A draft will be developed in the coming weeks.
- Concerning inputs to the Tour de table, the deadline for additional comments is 17 June.

The next Plenary session is envisaged as a full day meeting on 7 October 2021 with a half-day workshop foreseen for the 6 October afternoon. As SFIC will from 1st of July on not be a Council Preparatory body anymore but a Staning working group we will rely on the availability of rooms outside the Council if we foresee a physical meeting.
