

ERAC-SFIC 1352/17

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: SFIC delegations
Subject: SFIC opinion on international cooperation in the context of the mid-term review of Horizon 2020 and the preparation of the 9th EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

Delegations find below the SFIC opinion as approved by written procedure on 3 February 2017.

1. INTRODUCTION

International cooperation in Research and Innovation (INCO) is a key horizontal priority of Horizon 2020. The collaboration with scientific teams from all over the world is necessary to ensure the competitiveness of European research and the attractiveness of the EU as a whole. It is also a prerequisite for tackling the societal challenges contained within the Framework programme: imperatives as diverse as climate change mitigation or food sustainability cannot be apprehended properly without a global approach.

However, the statistical information currently available points at a significant drop in participation of third countries in Horizon 2020. At this date, around **2.4% of participations** are composed of entities from outside the EU and its associated countries. This is a **steep regression** in comparison with the average yearly participation (4.9%) in the Seventh Framework Programme for Science and Technology (FP7).¹

The present opinion aims at identifying some of the major shortcomings and proposing corrective measures, both in the perspective of the mid-term review of Horizon 2020 and the preparation of the 9th Framework programme for Research and Innovation (FP9).

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF THIRD COUNTRIES' LACK OF INVOLVEMENT

a) **Financial eligibility of emerging and high-revenue countries**

While Horizon 2020 is open to the whole world, the majority of Europe's main partners in S&T – emerging and high-revenue countries – are not automatically eligible for EU funding. This introduces a factor of uncertainty during the constitution of the consortium and deters project coordinators from selecting consortium members outside the EU and its associated countries.

¹ 4,3% if the results of the countries currently associated to Horizon 2020 are removed.

Measures implemented by EC:

Successful negotiation with the EU's main partner countries and regions regarding the implementation of matching funds for Horizon 2020.

Comments and further suggestions:

This approach should be encouraged and further pursued (i.e. extended to other high-potential partner countries that have not yet implemented a dedicated instrument).

Among the countries that have implemented a co-funding mechanism, only China, Hong Kong & Macao, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia and Taiwan currently provide funding in most or all parts of Horizon 2020; further efforts should be undertaken for a broader coverage to be provided.

Although many of the co-funding mechanisms are new and expected to bear fruit next year, statistical evidence so far suggests that there is no mechanical correlation between the existence of matching funds and an increase in participation of entities from a given country. Other factors than funding – such as international visibility, administrative workload, legal implications, etc. – are at play and should be explored in detail to explain the drop in third country participation.

b) Visibility of international cooperation within Horizon 2020

Measures implemented by EC:

Creation of country fiches (detailing matching funds and the general context of cooperation) on the Participant portal online manual.²

Targeted information on international openness (including specific INCO tag in the participant's portal search engine).³

² http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/international-cooperation_en.htm

³ http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/ftags/international_cooperation.html#c,topics=flags/s/IntlCoop/1/1&+callStatus/asc

Comments and further suggestions:

The measures implemented by the EC have contributed to confer greater visibility to international cooperation and to provide clearer and up-to-date information for prospective participants.

However, access to the information still leaves much to be desired as it remains spread out over a number of sources (DG RTD website, participant portal, Horizon 2020 online manual, various national portals). A centralised portal (building on all existing information) would help to unify the actions of NCPs and provide a valuable tool for prospective users in Europe and beyond. Visibility should further be enhanced via information sessions and the advertisement of the benefits of participation at international events. Furthermore, steps should be considered to fully reflect third country participation in the eCorda database (i.e. in the case of joint calls or of US entities that have not signed a grant and consortium agreement).

c) Strategic approach

Measures implemented by EC:

Regular reporting via biennial reports and the publication of multi-annual roadmaps (MAR) for the EU's main partner countries and regions⁴, following the Communication of the Commission of 14 September 2012.⁵

Comments and further suggestions:

The implementation of a biennial reporting process on the EC's strategy for international S&T cooperation has provided clear added value in terms of transparency and links with Member States' (MS) and Associated Countries' (AC) strategic approaches.

⁴ Link to 2014 version : http://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/annex_roadmaps_sep-2014.pdf

⁵ Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach, https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/com_2012_497_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en.pdf

- In order for the process to be effective, there should be a clear proactive connection between the priorities of the MAR and the international flagging of the upcoming work programme. The implication of the MAR should be stressed more clearly within the relevant thematic programme committee meetings.
- The consultation between MS/AC and EC should be as early and interactive as possible. The 2016 report as well as the set of roadmaps are the subject of a separate SFIC opinion.

As a **conclusion** an **in-depth analysis** of third country involvement should be part of the mid-term revision of Horizon 2020, and taken into account in the preparation of FP9. For each of the countries prioritised in the MAR, an in-depth analysis shall be undertaken, investigating the causes for the drop in their participation in Horizon 2020 compared to previous Framework programmes and defining mitigation measures. Given the tight timeline for the preparation of WP 2018/19/20 and the already ongoing work on FP9 this has to be done with urgency.

3. **SUGGESTED CORRECTIVE MEASURES**

a) *Increased cooperation between MS/AC and EC in the EU's bilateral and biregional dialogues*

- Extending SFIC's role as a platform of prior consultation for the Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs)

The EC conducts a range of S&T dialogues with third countries and regions. While Horizon 2020 is not the only focus of attention, it represents the main instrument for cooperation. **SFIC is prepared to intensify its role as a platform to enhance MS/AC-EC coordination**, so that a coherent position can be represented and the SOMs may have the highest possible impact and relevance (e.g. in the case of the High-Level Policy Dialogue with Africa and the EU-CELAC Dialogue).

- Strengthening SFIC’s role in relation to the EC’s Joint cooperation committees for Science and Technology (JSTCC) with third countries

Strand 1 of SFIC’s work programme for 2015-16⁶ focused on the exchange of information prior to Joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committees (JSTCC) between the EC and third countries. Bolstering this activity in the future would increase the synergy between MS/AC and EC cooperation and help tailoring the international flagging of Horizon 2020’s work programmes to the requirements of the various national researcher communities.

b) Structure of the Framework programme

The “mainstreaming” throughout the three pillars was the main change for international cooperation in Horizon 2020 in comparison to FP7. As a side effect, issues related to INCO suffered from a dilution, both at a strategic level (no more dedicated PC configuration) and an operational level (no more dedicated mandatory National Contact Points (NCPs) in MS, AC and third countries). Despite the role of the strategic configuration, there is insufficient coordination between programme committees, and international cooperation as a whole suffers from a lack of visibility and coherence.

- In the context of Horizon 2020, issues related to international cooperation should be the subject of increased focus (e. g .through systematic information points during thematic programme committees);
- In the perspective of FP9, alternatives for a more structural solution must be considered so that the cooperation with third countries can be adequately addressed. Without pre-empting the definition of Member States’ priorities in the preparation phase of FP9, this could be achieved via a dedicated sub-committee under the strategic configuration, or via a dedicated budget heading on which the various Directorates could draw in order to implement ambitious initiatives across several thematic areas of the future Framework programme.

⁶ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-1353-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

c) Joint calls/coordinated calls/teaming with third countries within the FP

Even though 27% of the calls for proposals have been flagged for international cooperation in 2016-17, the lack of possibilities in terms of third party input in the programming phase – other than through the JSTCC meetings – has proven to be a deterrent to the involvement of research teams from outside Europe. **Synergies in R&I priorities should be more actively exploited so as to foster the idea of a joint ownership.** There can be different levels of involvement: from the “opportunistic” cooperation (teaming of an EU project consortium with another project exploring complementary aspects of a same object of study) to a full-fledged joint call (partnership between EC and funding agencies from non-EU countries (common text, virtual “joint pot”, common procedures).

d) Strengthening MS/AC-led S&T initiatives and exploiting synergies with third countries

In general, synergies between the FP and the existing panorama of **MS/AC-operated structures** (e.g. Research Performing Organisations’ representation bureaus, joint labs), instruments (e.g. mobility schemes, bilateral/multilateral funding schemes) and networks could be strengthened. The funding of Centres/Networks of European Research and Innovation⁷ in 2016 constitutes a step towards that goal. The SFIC working group on a “toolbox” for international cooperation will help map out the precise panorama and identify relevant synergies.

COST, EUREKA, Joint Programming and Art. 185 TFEU Initiatives are successful examples of MS-driven activities that are open to third country participation.

The FP7 has funded successful instruments in that regard, among which the **INCOLAB scheme**, designed to open up to further European partners a joint laboratory operated by a European RPO in a third country. The six projects funded in 2011 have met with great success, and there is definite demand to renew a similar scheme within the current of the next FP.

⁷ Main target countries : Brazil, China, United States;
<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/2310-eng-globally-09-2016.html>

e) Dedicated support for international cooperation

- BILAT/INCONET and INT 1-2 projects

These projects, which have been the main specific instruments in support of bilateral and biregional S&T dialogue from 2007 to 2015, will be progressively phased out. The gaps they will leave should be anticipated and the remaining active projects exploited to their full extent, both as tools of the EC's international cooperation strategy and the joint activities carried out within SFIC.

- Service Facility in support of the strategic development of international cooperation in research and innovation ⁸

The Service Facility is designed to progressively become the main supporting tool for international cooperation. As such, it bears a great responsibility in the successful implementation of the European strategy for international cooperation in research and innovation. A close monitoring should be conducted during 2017-2020, to determine whether this instrument should be renewed in the future. At any rate, there should be a structured involvement of MS/AC (both in terms of proposals for service requests and in terms of feedback regarding the EC's own agenda), e.g. via a standing information point at each SFIC Plenary meeting.

⁸ <https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/cft/cft-display.html?cftId=1509>

f) Science diplomacy

Along with European competitiveness and the successful tackling of global challenges, science diplomacy is part of the rationale for international cooperation within Horizon 2020. It is also part of EU Commissioner's Moedas "Open to the world" strategy.⁹ Such a strategy requires dedicated tools within the Framework Programme in order to be successfully implemented, whose governing principles need to be more diversified than scientific excellence alone. **Specific actions for international cooperation** with mandatory third country participation (in the spirit of the FP7's SICA actions) should be considered in key areas where there is common interest and specific added value for the EU. Synergies between Horizon 2020/FP9 and the initiatives of DG DEVCO (EuropeAid) should also be more fully exploited.

⁹ Two calls for proposals are specifically dedicated to that subject : INT-11-2015 - European cultural and science diplomacy: exploiting the potential of culture and science in the EU's external relations, which selected the EL-CSID project, and ENG-GLOBALLY-01-2017 - Situating Europe into the global context: science diplomacy and intercultural relations.