

Working Together to Strengthen Research in Europe European Research Area Conference 21-23 October 2009, Brussels

Summary of discussion and conclusions of individual session

1.7. "How can the European partnership for international science and technology cooperation be driven forward?"

The issue and context:

The world is facing global societal challenges such as coping with climate change, ensuring energy security and safeguarding the environment, which require answers from science and technology. The complexity of these challenges requires the involvement of the best expertise from various disciplines from all over the world.

In its Communication on a Strategic Framework for International S&T Cooperation of September 2008 (COM(2008)588) the Commission pointed out that in view of increased globalisation, economic interdependence and common challenges international cooperation becomes ever more important to improve Europe's position as an attractive place to perform S&T.

Increased international cooperation by research funders and performers is largely driven by those developments. It is therefore crucial that stakeholders are substantially involved in realising the new European Partnership for international S&T cooperation which was initiated by the Competitiveness Council in December 2008. The Council invited EU Member States to facilitate consultation between interested stakeholders in order to identify opportunities for and, where appropriate, obstacles to the development of scientific and technological cooperation activities between the European Union and the rest of the world.

While EU Member States and the European Commission have already started to work in partnership in the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC), the engagement with stakeholders needs to be improved. To this end SFIC has set itself the objective to identify and develop regular contacts with relevant stakeholders worldwide.

The purpose of this workshop was therefore to identify ways and means to better engage S&T stakeholders, such as public and private research organisations, agencies, universities, and industry, with the strategic discussions of Member States and the European Commission within the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC).

Analysis of the challenges and European dimension:

The global research landscape has changed substantially. S&T policies and strategies at national and European level are entering to a new phase where international cooperation will play a key role. While Europe is still a major S&T player on a global scale there is nevertheless a need to move forward in joining forces and acting in a coordinated manner to improve efficiency and to generate a higher impact for European research.

S&T stakeholders must be at the core of developing such a strategy as they form the backbone of the European Research Area (ERA). When referring to stakeholders - also within the context of international cooperation - it refers to research funding organisations and agencies, research performing organisations, universities, scientific societies, and their national and European umbrella organisations, technology platforms, the private sector, and others.

To generate a critical research mass vis-à-vis our third country partners requires that S&T stakeholders define together, rather than in isolation, priority research and technology areas where a coherent EU effort would have more impact.

At the same time enhanced strategic political priority-setting at national and European levels triggers top-down approaches. This challenges S&T stakeholders with their own distinct priorities and bottom-up activities need to be reconciled with such top-down approaches.

Summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations:

There was general agreement that:

- Opening the ERA to the world' requires a more systematic and broader involvement of stakeholders whenever strategic policy decisions are prepared, discussed and implemented (such as in the Strategic Forum for International cooperation and its related Task Forces)
- the policy level (for example the Member States and the European Commission) ensures strong interactive links and communication channels with major actors at all levels (national, European, global as well as between different scientific areas/disciplines)
- a longer term perspective to define what to do with whom needs to be developed and necessary resources need to be allocated
- more evidence based policy making, with systematic data collection, indicators and statistics are needed at Member States and European level
- International S&T activities with our major partner countries need to be based on mutual interest and mutual benefit.

Furthermore it was stressed that this new European partnership for international S&T cooperation must be based on a joint ownership by all those who will be actively involved in its implementation. This can be developed by:

- building on what already exists, what works well and learning from good practice;
- using and enhancing existing national, sectoral and European mechanisms and instruments. This includes cooperation in multi-national research activities, sharing research infrastructures, joint doctoral programmes and double degrees, joint institutes established with major partner countries, etc.;
- expanding bi-lateral cooperation to a multi-lateral level and reconciling top-down and bottom-up initiatives;
- providing funding streams designated for fostering international cooperation activities of scientists ;
- making further progress in removing barriers for international mobility for starting and advanced scientists;
- stimulating and facilitating actions which support the identification of international research agendas.

Panellists and participants put forward the following recommendations:

- National policy makers should ensure that the international dimension is taken into account in national policies and programmes and reflected in the respective legal and regulatory frameworks, e.g. opening up national programmes, adapting IPR and tax systems.
- National funding agencies should allocate resources for international S&T cooperation. So far, joint activities between national funding agencies involve mainly two countries with the exception of the European Science Foundation (ESF), the Nordic countries in the context of NordForsk and the German-speaking countries in the frame of D-A-CH. The latter multi-lateral examples might form models for the extension of bi-lateral partnerships into broader cooperation initiatives. Opening of funding programmes, establishing common pots and "funding follows researcher approaches" are some of the means supporting cross-border cooperation. The EUROHORCs, ESF and also TAFTIE are appropriate platforms for discussing such developments.
- European universities and other research performing organisations and their European umbrella associations should be key actors in international S&T cooperation. This holds for individual universities and their associations but

increasingly also for university partnerships such as e.g. the International Alliance of Research Universities, the Global Alliance of Technical Universities, the World University Network or the Alliance for Global Sustainability. However, it has to be ensured that such networks are not closed clubs.

- Technology Platforms and Joint Technology Initiatives are developing international strategies and activities and should be taken as examples of good practice. This would also allow for enhancing links to the business sector.
- Scientific societies are well positioned to analyse grand challenges and to define S&T roadmaps for international cooperation. They should therefore be involved in strategic discussions at an early stage. An example of best practice is the European Plant Science Organisation (EPSO).

An example of structured stakeholder involvement is the recently formed European Energy Research Alliance (EERA) which is part of the SET-Plan and e.g. has already become active in cooperation with the US. The European University Association (EUA) is a partner in the Executive Committee of EERA. In addition, EUA has launched a University Platform for Energy Research in that context.

The Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation will, hence, not work in a vacuum. It will involve S&T stakeholders actively to identify appropriate priorities and harness research cooperation for the mutual enhancement of European and our major international partners and also to identify most appropriate topics and instruments for joint initiatives.