

**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘Enhancing and focusing international cooperation in research and innovation’**

(2013/C 139/09)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- points out that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in the European Research Area (ERA). Regions and cities bring together, within their territory, the main players of the innovation triangle, a mix of academia, universities, research players and several economic and industrial communities along different innovation value chains and value networks. They are key players in developing regional research innovation strategies and creating the right framework conditions for innovative environments;
- appreciates specific mention in the communication of regional and international dimensions of instruments in the FP7 Capacities programme, and calls for visibility of international research collaboration in the next programming period, taking into account the positive experience with the Regions of Knowledge programme and linking it to future ERA-NET initiatives;
- stresses that international cooperation must be based on common principles on research integrity, the gender dimension, corporate social responsibility, open access and intellectual property. The climate and environmental dimension, which ties in with ‘sustainable development’ also has to be taken into consideration;
- underscores the regional relevance and significant (potential) benefits of research infrastructures, including e-infrastructures. They provide the facilities (high performance computational and communication resources, remote instruments and data-sets) needed to carry out world-class R&I collaboration regardless of country and geographical location.

<b>Rapporteur</b>	Markku MARKKULA (FI/EPP), Member of the Espoo City Council
<b>Reference document</b>	Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Enhancing and focusing EU international cooperation in research and innovation: A strategic approach  COM(2012) 497 final

## I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### *Relevance to the local and regional levels and the CoR*

1. points out that local and regional authorities have a key role to play in the European Research Area (ERA). Regions and cities bring together, within their territory, the main players of the innovation triangle, a mix of academia, universities, research players and several economic and industrial communities along different innovation value chains and value networks. They are key players in developing regional research innovation strategies and creating the right framework conditions for innovative environments. They play an important role in creating a regional environment that encourages innovativeness and entrepreneurial discovery. Further to this, in many cases, regional and local administrations have legislative powers and manage financial resources for research, innovation and internationalisation;

2. local and regional authorities are important stakeholders in international cooperation as well as in coordinating research and innovation activities. Their policies have a significant impact in developing research infrastructures and establishing innovative environments (universities, technology centres, business incubators, science parks and venture capital-friendly milieus) able to attract scientists and innovators and to create the substantive and operational conditions for robust growth of intellectual capital.

#### *General remarks*

3. recognises that the communication complies with the principle of subsidiarity, considering that objectives of the proposed actions cannot be fully achieved by Member States in the framework of their national constitutional systems and action at EU level is likely to bring a clear benefit. Maximising the impact of international research and innovation activities, while avoiding costly fragmentation efforts, requires the Union to complement the openness of Horizon 2020 with targeted actions in order to ensure optimal scale and scope;

4. recalls that knowledge and innovation are becoming more international within global value networks and appreciates the importance of combining thinking globally with acting locally;

5. recalls that the Europe 2020 strategy underlines the importance of research and innovation in delivering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Innovation Union, as part of Europe 2020, emphasises the important role of international cooperation in realising Europe's innovation potential;

6. emphasises that international cooperation is an essential ingredient in the realisation of the ERA and its five key areas;

7. appreciates specific mention in the communication of regional and international dimensions of instruments in the FP7 Capacities programme, and calls for visibility of international research collaboration in the next programming period, taking into account the positive experience with the Regions of Knowledge programme and linking it to future ERA-NET initiatives;

8. supports an ambitious budget for Horizon 2020 and recalls that synergies with other financial instruments dealing with internationalisation are needed. Using the right instruments of Horizon 2020 for cooperation with third countries will be important;

9. welcomes the thorough effort made by the European Commission in preparing a clear, concise and comprehensive framework as a basis for a more strategic approach enhancing international cooperation in research and innovation in Europe;

10. commends the well-structured and concise overview in the communication of instruments and (potential) counterparts for international research collaboration;

11. underlines that international cooperation must always have an added value for the EU;

12. stresses that international cooperation must be based on common principles on research integrity, the gender dimension, corporate social responsibility, open access and intellectual property. The climate and environmental dimension, which ties in with 'sustainable development' also has to be taken into consideration;

13. identifies three overarching issues of regional relevance in the communication, namely science diplomacy, smart specialisation and research infrastructures.

#### ***Need for added value from Research, Development and Innovation (RDI)***

14. is convinced that the multitude of initiatives from Member States and regions without coordination with other Member States on occasion results in initiatives that are not internally connected and do not lead to the necessary critical mass. It is therefore important for the European research and innovation agenda and national and regional innovation strategies to be coordinated;

15. recognises that there is a need to further align individual Member States' activities in international cooperation and, in this context, additional added value can come from cooperation with regions. It is in regions' and cities' own interest to provide the ERA with concrete support and use their unifying role in a triple-helix setting to help to create the right framework conditions to attract international research investments and excellent foreign researchers;

16. in order to be a global player, Europe needs to concentrate on researching innovative solutions that help respond to societal challenges. The CoR stresses that it is important to take a market-oriented and demand-led approach, and that SMEs have a crucial role in translating (international) academic research into practical applications and placing them on the market;

17. stresses the role that European national governments and regional and local authorities are called to play in order to transform Europe into a large integrated reality, able to compete in a globalised world and engage in dialogue with more industrialised countries (such as the USA and Japan), new emerging economies (such as BRICS), neighbouring and developing countries;

18. calls for a more explicit definition of 'region' in the communication, possibly designated as supra-national and sub-national region;

19. believes that regions are in a privileged position to link research and innovation activities to horizontal and thematic policies: managing their territories, taking care of environmental and security issues, developing plans and providing

services – added value can be created in terms of new ideas, approaches and innovative technology solutions.

#### ***Globalisation of industry and RDI: instruments and their regional relevance***

20. recognises that global competition concerns not only countries but also large regional systems where districts, industrial research-driven clusters, business networks and business parks are located: the regional dimension is called to compete and cooperate internationally with similar systems in other parts of the world;

21. considers that Horizon 2020 could be an important opportunity to rethink the role and contribution that regional governments can make to the construction of a European system able to withstand global competition;

22. underlines the need to support the concept of multilevel governance for international RDI cooperation in which regions and local authorities can play a key role together with Member States and the Union;

23. stresses the importance of regional networks for inter-regional and international collaboration between regions and local authorities on RDI. Regional networks give regional and local players the arena to gather the necessary critical mass of ideas, competences and financial means to participate in RDI cooperation and join international large scale endeavours. Networks are powerful means to pull together resources, expertise, knowledge and different capabilities. Well-connected RDI operators and their stakeholders create favourable ecosystems for international cooperation thanks to the need to be increasingly connected globally and the gravitation towards territorial place-based realities.

#### ***Strategic Forum for International Cooperation (SFIC)***

24. recognises the added value of the Strategic Forum for International Cooperation, optimising the use of national, European and global resources, avoiding duplication of activities;

25. appreciates the effort of the SFIC in providing a well-structured overview of international cooperation activities developed by Member States, as part of their own policies and programmes;

26. recalls the contribution that regional and local authorities can make to the SFIC, when they have institutional competencies and resources to take initiatives and cooperate at international level. Several EU regions are quite active through agreements, representations abroad and co-funded activities. European Business and Technology Centres abroad are an example of initiatives outside the EU where regional players are actively involved;

27. considers that since the cooperation of European regions with countries outside the EU often takes place regardless of the availability of EU funding, in order to be compatible and strive towards the same aims, a coordination strategy with the SFIC should be explored;

28. recalls that, from the subsidiarity standpoint, regional and local authorities are the closest players able to detect research players and innovative companies that – with a bottom-up logic – decide if it is useful to be present in certain countries or regions and cooperate with local players;

29. believes that coordination of the national/federal/regional/local level in international activities is important but that the Member States (or the regions that frame and implement policy) should remain the principal players responsible in this field; where common priorities vis-à-vis third countries/regions are identified, the added value of European joint coordinated initiatives is evident;

30. considers that having a strategic approach, with multi-annual roadmaps, is important but it must not be too rigid: flexibility is needed in order to allow Member States or regions to make justified adaptations in the allocation of national/federal/regional means.

#### **Information gathering systems**

31. asks to be kept informed about and possibly involved in the proposed information gathering system, which could be used as one source of input for strategic research and innovation agendas in the framework of smart specialisation;

32. acknowledges that world scientific specialisation and relative quality opens up international cooperation opportunities based on complementarities, and commends the efforts presented in the communication for mapping scientific strengths and weaknesses on a supra-national level;

33. calls for this mapping exercise to be extended to the sub-national level as well, possibly building on existing information systems; notes the importance of exchanges with global partners regarding the configuration and use of information systems such as, for example, the European ERA-watch and North American databases such as STAR metrics, COMETS and ORCID;

34. recognises the potential of such information systems with regard to identifying comparative (technological) advantages, and in providing input to the definition of smart specialisation strategies with regard to synergies, complementarities and partnerships; for regions interested in cooperation with non-EU regions or countries, such information could provide relevant input for defining smart specialisation strategies;

35. recalls that interconnected European networks, behaving as a networked community, continuously improving their performances thanks to peer reviews, 'bench-learning', permanent benchmarking and geographically mapping of European innovation can provide a relevant contribution.

#### **Other overarching issues of regional relevance**

36. recognises that the idea of focusing on themes where international cooperation makes a difference is positive, in particular within global research infrastructure. Science diplomacy and specialisations are other relevant issues for EU international R&I activities;

37. recalls that global collaborative models based on open innovation, internet and online social networks, clusters, joint international activities, shared technology platforms, Living labs and communities' collaborative initiatives are outstanding tools for open and collaboration-based international activities.

#### **Research infrastructures**

38. agrees that the development of strategic research infrastructures has an inherent international cooperation dimension. Setting up coherent (physical and non-physical) infrastructures for enhancing the innovation potential of territories in a global dimension is crucial;

39. underscores the regional relevance and significant (potential) benefits of research infrastructures, including e-infrastructures. They provide the facilities (high performance computational and communication resources, remote instruments and data-sets) needed to carry out world-class R&I collaboration regardless of country and geographical location;

40. recalls that global e-infrastructures constitute a key element of a digital European research area open to the rest of the world: they can provide a contribution to tackling global research challenges;

41. recommends the consultation of regions and local authorities in the elaboration of the ESFRI (European Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures) roadmap.

#### **Science diplomacy**

42. recognises that international cooperation in research and innovation is an important instrument of 'soft power' and a mechanism for improving relations with key countries and regions;

43. emphasises the role of science diplomacy, particularly but not necessarily limited to ensuring the local and regional dimension of the new European neighbourhood policy. Bi-regional S&T partnerships with developing countries can complement the Union's external policies and instruments by building partnerships for sustainable development able to address global challenges;

44. recalls that international cooperation in research and innovation with industrialised countries and emerging economies can create business opportunities and open new markets for business and regional and local players. ERA-Watch database with its country-based information on internationalisation of S&T cooperation can help regions to identify topics for research and innovation cooperation as well as regions outside the EU where collaboration in this field could be mutually beneficial;

#### **Specialisation**

45. recalls the potential of scientific specialisation able to open up international cooperation opportunities based on complementarities;

46. points out the crucial importance of the international dimension of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), as an important driver for further investments and opportunities for both European regions and third countries;

#### **Global societal challenges**

47. recognises that global cooperation in science and innovation is important and that Horizon 2020 can enable an effective scientific response to global challenges;

48. underlines the important contribution that regions can bring to tackling societal challenges, through policy, coordinated programmes and joint activities conceived in a synergic framework with national and EU external instruments;

49. recalls the importance of regions and local authorities as crucial players for effective and efficient research and innovation ecosystems where clusters and the best European expertise (local universities, industry, SMEs, regional research/development agencies, etc.) can be the drivers for demand and opportunity-driven innovation, solving real world problems and addressing major international societal challenges.

Brussels, 12 April 2013.

*The President*  
*of the Committee of the Regions*  
Ramón Luis VALCÁRCEL SISO

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