



Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research

From Dialogue to Joint Programmes

Conference conclusions

**Achievements and perspectives of stakeholder coordination in science, technology and innovation
between the EU, Russia, the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia**

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Conference Conclusions

The conference, hosted by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), brought together stakeholders from the EU, Russia, the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia to share experience gained from collaboration in science, technological development and innovation and to jointly develop perspectives for future collaborative actions. It provided a platform to reflect on and evaluate the experiences to date regarding the coordination of national and bilateral activities, to develop scenarios for exploiting synergies between programmes and initiatives and to propose tangible measures for better partnerships between stakeholders from science administrations, the academic community and the private sector. Participants from 24 countries joined the conference including the European Commission, national Ministries and State Agencies, representatives from national Academies of Sciences and other research organizations, universities and nonuniversity research institutions. Reflecting the good practice presented, the conference has clearly shown the value of collaboration between the EU and its Eastern partners and has emphasized the potential scientific, economic and societal impact to be expected from a further advancement of the cooperation.

Achievements in the Collaboration between the EU and its Eastern Partners

Many success stories presented during the conference underlined the high level of bi- and multilateral collaboration already achieved. This is reflected in the high rate of participation in FP7 of the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia, but also in joint funding mechanisms that have also successfully been implemented between the EU and its Eastern partners, such as the ERA-NET RUS, the Black Sea ERA-NET and several thematic ERA-NETs.

Those joint mechanisms are in full operation and have proven to be a valuable asset for an advanced collaboration. Experience from the ERA-NETs as well as from INCO-NET and BILAT projects with Russia and the region of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia was considered a good basis to build on for future actions.

Finally, the case of the international research infrastructure FAIR in Darmstadt proved to be an excellent example, where joint large-scale research activities are currently

being put into operation by the combined efforts of different countries, among them EU countries and Russia. FAIR demonstrates how knowledge, skills and financial resources can be pooled effectively to plan, construct and run joint infrastructures for collaborative research. It is thus a very good approach to be multiplied, not neglecting, however, the fact that the details of implementation have to be carefully taken into consideration.

Areas and Perspectives for Cooperation

Societal challenges and innovation are core topics for joint agenda setting

The societal challenges faced by the global community were considered to be suitable fields for enhanced collaboration between EU, Russia, countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia. They are a central focus in national policy making and can clearly be tackled more effectively and efficiently by joining forces. The same is true for the field of innovation which is high on the agenda of all participating EU countries and their Eastern partners. Thus, societal challenges as well as innovation should be the core target areas for future joint agenda-setting between the EU, Russia and the Eastern Partnership as well as Central Asian countries in order to lift collaboration to a higher level.

Proposals were made to systematically develop cooperation within Humanities and Social Sciences (including Economics). This should also include further development of “Science for International Science Policy” as well as approaches to measure the influence of motivational factors on STI collaboration.

Also, the importance of training was stressed, especially training of young scientists and young managers, for example regarding the professional management of multilateral research projects; such capacities need to be further strengthened to make full use of the benefits of cooperation.

The impact of joint activities needs to be systematically enhanced and measured

Ongoing bi- and multilateral project activities (including coordination measures such as BILAT and INCONET projects) have established a sound basis for collaboration between the EU, Russia and the countries of the

Eastern Partnership and Central Asia. However, in order to secure sustainable results and benefits, dissemination of results and monitoring of joint activities should be intensified. Several ideas in this respect were discussed, for example the need to create stable and favourable frameworks for collaboration by building on existing instruments and structures (e.g. the 7th Framework Programme/Horizon 2020, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), sector policies, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), or the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC)). The development of good practice concerning framework conditions was considered especially vital in this context, e.g. the idea of developing common “standards” of framework conditions for cooperation in innovation. Whilst the term “standards” was considered to be difficult to comprehend, it was stressed in the discussion that there is certainly a need to agree on good practices for cooperation.

The participants agreed that joint funding and joint infrastructures are core elements to setting up sustainable frameworks for collaboration among the countries involved. A joint initiative based on Article 185 was proposed in order to provide a sustainable and medium term umbrella for public-public partnership building on the present success stories of the various ERA-NETs. However, it was mentioned during the discussion that such an initiative would need a very substantial political basis. It was also stressed that it will be necessary to systematically assess the impact of joint actions (INCONET projects, ERA-NET mechanisms, etc). In this regard, the discussion underlined the difficulties and limits of any impact assessment. It was agreed that the value of scientific cooperation lies above all in access to knowledge, markets and solutions to problems. It was stressed that simplifications should be avoided when assessing the impact and rating the results of collaboration, since quantitative aspects are sometimes misleading when talking about the impact and importance of patents and publications. On the other hand, the impact can in some cases be quantified: in the Eurostars programme, €1 of public funding leveraged €14 in the funded projects. For this reason, the economic impact of international collaborative research projects should also be considered. As an alternative to impact assessment, approaches such as policy mix reviews or benchmarking exercises were mentioned since they provide evidence for a well performing STI system.

Dialogue formats dealing with the countries of the Eastern Partnership, Central Asia and Russia are still too fragmented

One major observation made by the conference participants was that the current dialogue platforms such as the policy stakeholders’ conferences, the various bilateral dialogue fora between EU Member States, Russia and Eastern Partnership or Central Asian countries, as well as the EC-based dialogue fora are rather fragmented. The participants’ view is that these platforms are not always consistent in their policy objectives and messages about the collaboration between the EU and its Eastern partners. Therefore, an increased communication among these fora should be envisaged in order to develop a coherent joint approach. It was noted that dialogue and mutual learning can still be advanced. The tools are available and have been tested within the projects (e.g. policy stakeholders’ conferences, policy mix peer reviews, benchmarking exercises). They should be used more widely in the future. The same is true for the “White Paper on Opportunities and Challenges in View of Enhancing the EU Cooperation with Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and South Caucasus in Science, Research, and Innovation”. This policy recommendation paper was developed within the INCO.NET-EECA, building on aspects such as results from different dialogue fora which took place within the project. It presents the current state of STI and STI policies in the region, reflects on the state of regional cooperation and its institutional environment, underlines the benefits of enhanced international STI cooperation, and recommends knowledge-based policy approaches to better address national/regional challenges.

As a strategic forum and an advisory body to the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) has an important role. This body was designed to facilitate the further development, implementation and monitoring of the international dimension of ERA by sharing information and consultation among the partners in order to identify common priorities which could lead to coordinated or joint initiatives. The participants of the conference expressed the wish that this forum might serve as a platform for adjusting political objectives and developing common goals and cooperation agendas with partners outside the EU. BMBF has already signalled its intention to endorse discussions and measures within SFIC addressing Russia and the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia.

At the same time, participants stressed the need to keep and even advance the bi-regional dialogue in order to create a common framework for activities of cooperation with Russia and the EU's Eastern partner countries. Considerably strong networks in the academic sector between the EU's Eastern partner countries (e.g. the network of academies of sciences) underline the importance of the EU's regional approach to cooperation. At the same time, the cooperation should be organised on a "variable geometry" principle in order to orient activities along the lines of scientific, economic or political relevance for the participating countries.

Next Steps

In order to maintain the momentum of the conference, it was agreed that the following steps towards a common space for knowledge and innovation need to be implemented:

1. It was recommended that the Strategic Forum for International S&T Cooperation (SFIC) should start a pilot action towards Russia and potentially other Eastern partner countries. In this respect, the political strategies in place (Partnership for Modernisation with Russia, Eastern Partnership with the neighbourhood region, Strategy towards CA) should be taken into account. BMBF volunteered to initiate this process in partnership with other EU Member States and the European Commission.
2. As suggested by the EC representatives, experiences, views and perspectives from the INCONET projects should be collected by the project coordinators regarding the lessons learnt and their visions for advanced collaboration mechanisms in Horizon 2020.
3. Policy stakeholders in Russia and in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia will be further encouraged to take into consideration the recommendations of the "White Paper", and also to reflect on other analytical documents and policy recommendations produced in the different INCONET, BILAT and ERA-NET projects. In this regard, it was recommended to foster targeted promotion of the recommendations of the "White Paper", taking into account the interests of the various stakeholder groups to be addressed.
4. Existing projects and other instruments shall be used as an umbrella to deepen the discussion and to develop new ideas (pilot cases) for enhanced collaborative approaches.
5. The results of the conference will be disseminated among policy makers at national and transnational level including EU programme committees, Council groups and SFIC.

Suggestions to the EC and Member States

Finally, the participants made concrete suggestions to the EC and to the EU MS:

1. The idea was raised to consider the establishment of an Executive Agency for International Cooperation at EU level to support promising bottom-up approaches in line with the EU strategy on international cooperation.
2. Instruments for supporting stakeholder coordination at different levels are a core prerequisite in ensuring sustainable impact. Thus, Horizon 2020 should offer practical instruments such as advanced ERA-NET, BILAT and INCONET actions.
3. Representatives from several countries of the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia reported that the term 'third countries' as used in EU documents for countries outside of the EU creates misunderstandings among political stakeholders due to its similarity with the expression 'third world countries'. It was proposed that the term 'partner countries' be used instead.

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