DECISION

Subject: **COST Communication Strategy 2015-2017**

The CSO approved the COST Communication Strategy 2015-2017 at its 194th meeting held on 12-13 May 2015 in Stockholm (Sweden).

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COST Communication Strategy 2015-2017

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a pan-European intergovernmental framework. Its mission is to enable breakthrough scientific and technological developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contribute to strengthening Europe's research and innovation capacities.

It allows researchers, engineers and scholars to jointly develop their own ideas and new initiatives across all scientific and technological fields through trans-European coordination of nationally funded research activities. Through its networks (called COST Actions) it promotes trans-disciplinary, original approaches and topics and addresses societal questions. It fosters better access and integration of less research intensive countries' researchers to the knowledge hubs of the European Research Area.

COST is implemented through the COST Association, an international not-for-profit Association under Belgian Law, whose members are the COST Member Countries.

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The Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) approved the COST Communication Strategy 2015-2017 at its 194th meeting held on 12-13 May 2015 in Stockholm (Sweden).

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Introduction

This document sets out the "COST Communication Strategy 2015-2017" for the COST Association. It takes into account recommendations from various reviews and considers brand strategy and identity, communication goal and objectives, target groups, communication principles as well as key communication tools and activities, including events and conferences.

Context

Since its establishment in 1971, COST has been financing the coordination of Science and Technology (S&T) activities in Europe by supporting networks (called COST Actions) aiming to join research efforts and offering collaboration opportunities to researchers, engineers and scholars as well as knowledge users across the continent. The coordination of nationally funded research activities is strongly motivated by avoiding duplications and leveraging research investments. Since it was established, COST has expanded from an intergovernmental structure supported by 19 countries to an organisation comprising today 36 Member Countries[1] allowing it to emphasise its pan-European dimension. Every year, on average 45.000 participants benefit from COST networking activities for their cooperation needs via its unique instrument, the COST Action. Senior Officials from national ministries responsible for research and innovation as well as science and technology govern COST.

Over the course of its history, the COST Framework has become a synonym and reference for creating distinctive, high-level Science and Technology networks allowing for an optimised use of nationally funded research and, consequently, a faster achievement of objectives and outcomes. The COST Member Countries are strongly convinced that allowing researchers to freely choose and jointly develop their own ideas, to foster knowledge sharing and build trust while promoting interdisciplinary approaches and facilitating new talents development allows research communities to find the best ways to tackle essential scientific, technological or societal questions, driving forces of research and innovation. These are activities that COST has sustainably and successfully supported, constantly adapting to the changing environment defining research policy in Europe. The main idea is that connecting excellent researchers, engineers and scholars, operating from diverse locations in Europe, is a source of progress and wellbeing for a country, a continent, and society.

For more than 30 years, COST Member Countries entrusted the European Commission services with the management of COST activities, before they were entrusted to the European Science Foundation (ESF) in 2004 as its implementing agent. ESF provided the COST Office dedicated to running the COST activities as decided by the CSO. In 2013, the COST Member Countries created the COST Association, to whom the ESF transferred activities, staff and assets on 30 September 2014,

Number of other frameworks, programmes and funding organisations have been created either by European countries or by the EU. Today, the COST Framework and Association are positioned in a

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[1] For COST Member Countries see: http://www.cost.eu/about_cost/cost_countries; COST has currently one COST Cooperating State, Israel.

growing and increasingly competitive environment. Other intergovernmental initiatives such as EUREKA or the Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs) were born, other programmes with similar objectives such as Future Emerging Technologies (FET), Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) have been supported and over the last 10 years new organisations with similar roles were created, such as the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA), the Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs) or the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).

As a consequence, today, the COST Framework and its Association are positioned in a growing and increasingly competitive environment.

In this new context, COST is facing the following challenges:

- Profiling COST in Europe and beyond as a leading pan-European Framework in Science and Technology and guaranteeing its visibility;
- Ensuring that the 'new' COST lives up to its ambitions in terms of performance and output orientation;
- Strongly involving and engaging with research and innovation communities from Inclusiveness Target Countries, encouraging early career investigators, young talents and next generation leaders and ensuring gender balance;
- Increasing outreach to Near Neighbour Countries;
- Further strengthening its relationships with EU Institutions, EU research funding agencies;
- Promoting dialogue among universities, research centres, companies, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as other relevant legal entities.

To achieve the ambitions and goals of COST, communications will have an important role to play. Hereunder the COST Association sets out how the communications efforts are planned over the next two years.

Strategic Background

This section presents the different elements of the COST brand.

COST Mission

The COST Mission Statement[2] represents the overarching objective of the COST Association: Enabling breakthrough scientific developments leading to new concepts and products and thereby contributing to strengthening Europe's research and innovation capacities.

COST strategic Action Plan

To fulfil the COST Mission, a strategic Action Plan has been set for the next seven years, as signed in the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA)[3]. It has defined four specific objectives:

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[2] COST 4152/11 **"COST Mission Statement"**
[3] FPA ID 633054 – project acronym "COST H2020"

- Joining research efforts and developing common S&T programmes through coordination of nationally funded research activities led by pan-European, high quality, collaborative S&T networks.
- Building Capacity by providing networking and leadership opportunities for emerging talents and thereby strengthening and building up excellent S&T communities.
- Addressing Societal Questions by promoting trans-disciplinary, new approaches, and topics and identifying early warning signals of unforeseen societal problems aiming at contributing to Societal Challenges.
- Strengthening the COST Inclusiveness Policy by ensuring that researchers from less research-intensive countries have better access to and are integrated within the European Research Area's knowledge hubs, also aiming to contribute to the Widening Pillar of Horizon 2020.

Founding Elements for Communication

Communication Goal

COST to be recognized as a highly relevant and performing Framework in the European Research Area (ERA), due to a unique commitment to stimulating open dialogue, trust, interaction and cooperation among researchers, engineers and scholars from various backgrounds, scientific and technological fields and horizons.

To achieve this goal, the following communication objectives have been identified.

Communication Objectives

Communication objectives aim at translating and demonstrating the COST Mission and positioning in the European funding and research landscape and sharpening its profile among all target groups, building on the momentum generated by the new COST Association.

- Contribute to building the credibility of COST and to demonstrating its added value to EU and national policy makers, in order to ensure future political support and gain influence on the European research agenda;
- Highlight the scientific and technological contributions of the COST Framework by showcasing COST Action results and outcomes and by placing high level researchers in the spotlight;
- Ensure a positive brand experience among all target groups;
- Create a more aspiring 'brand', inspiring its key target group to propose and actively participate to COST Actions;
- Increase outreach to Inclusiveness Target Countries, thereby stimulating these countries' involvement and active participation in COST activities and COST Actions from these COST Member Countries;
- Actively promote COST opportunities among young talents and next generation leaders in science and technology, as well as working opportunities for early career investigators, while ensuring gender balance in all fields of science and technology;
- Enhance the private sectors' awareness and interest in the COST Framework, stimulating SME participation.

Target Groups

Target groups represent groups of individuals or organisations that COST wants to incite to 'act' in a specific way, e.g. motivating early career investigators, young researchers and engineers from Inclusiveness Target Countries to participate in COST Actions or persuading policy makers to take up COST outputs, backup and support the COST Framework. Stakeholders, on the other hand, are those individuals or organisations that can actively support COST in achieving its mission, e.g. research organisations, universities, private companies, partner organisations in conferences, conference organisers, scientific media, etc. All target and stakeholder groups combined represent COST audiences involved in both broad, horizontal and more targeted, vertical communication activities.

External Target Groups

Research & Academia

This very dynamic and rather diverse target group encloses representatives from public, semi-public or private universities or research institutes, research performing organisations and academies, in Europe. This target group's diversity is due to the variety of scientific disciplines and technology fields, the variety of educational backgrounds and research communities with their specific cultures. Their umbrella associations, such as the European University Association (EUA), the League of European Research Universities (LERU), European Association of Research and Technology organisations (EARTO) or Science Europe, but also the Informal Group of RTD Liaisons Offices (IGLO), will allow to intensify the dialogue, to multiply and amplify outreach activities.

Enterprises

This very heterogeneous target group encloses but is not limited to industrial players such as large companies and SMEs involved in research and innovation, but also private research laboratories, federation of industries, etc. As COST is a natural platform where research and business meet and build mutual trust enabling collaboration, discussion opportunities will be created with enterprises, including through JTIs, to get in closer contact with specific industrial sectors and SMEs, such as innovative medicines, embedded computing systems or nanoscience. In addition, COST will liaise with representative associations where appropriate to guarantee an effective outreach.

Other Stakeholders

COST seeks to build stronger relations with other members of the European research and innovation community and existing science and technology initiatives. Three types of target groups will be considered. Firstly, initiatives and entities with similar philosophies in terms of giving researchers the creative freedom they need to express or achieve excellence, such as the ERC, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and FET; secondly, PPP promoting the use and exploitation of results, such as the JTIs, but also the EIT; finally, intergovernmental initiatives such as EUREKA and the JPIs, but also the CERN. These stakeholders' communications policies will be analysed to allow for a strategic approach to communication partnerships.

Policy makers at EU and COST Member Country level

This target group covers policy makers at European and national levels, those parties that influence decision-making in research and innovation and help set the agenda and other science and technology policy stakeholders. Policy makers are a very heterogeneous target group composed of individuals involved in decision-making (political level), having different political opinions and cultural origins, as well as groups of people and organisations that have more administrative or implementation roles, e.g. governing bodies and public administrations. In focus are on one side European Institutions, in particular the European Parliament (including STOA), the European Commission's in-house science service, EU Agencies and Joint Research Centre (JRC), on the other side national and regional governments in COST Member Countries, governmental agencies

and other public bodies.

Internal Target Groups

Internal target groups are actors having an active role in the COST Framework. The COST Association and the COST organisation are clearly differentiated. The COST Association covers the COST governance, management and implementation functions, while the COST organisation includes COST National Coordinators (CNCs), the Scientific Committee (SC), the Review Panel pool of experts and COST Actions participants.

The COST organisation actors - strongly related to COST without being part of the COST Association - have key responsibilities, especially with respect to the external perception of the COST Framework and organisation. From a communications perspective, they 'transport' the brand and should act as brand ambassadors. Some groups should be leveraged more actively, especially when it comes to liaising with national institutions, research communities and media (for example in the Inclusiveness Target Countries where COST requires a more active promotion).

The COST Association will involve CNCs more actively to achieve its communication objectives. They should act as brand ambassadors - spokesmen and spokeswomen in their respective countries - and help establish selected media contacts and build more intensive stakeholder relations with research and innovation communities as well as with the national and regional policy makers. The purpose would be to increase COST outreach, which often implies being able to communicate in the local languages. COST will build on CNCs when organising 'road shows' or national events, in particular Info Days promoting the COST Framework and opportunities.

Media is a lever to reach above target groups; it is not a target group per se.

Communication Principles

These principles will guide work in communications, the choices make and the priorities set.

- Avoid any jargon (governmental, administrative, scientific or technological);
- Search for a clear language and clear messages. Be to the point;
- Be timely and audience appropriate in content and tonality;
- Be engaging and motivating;
- Be in tune with European cultural diversity and sensitivity;
- Be integrative and inclusive;
- Defend the idea of open access.

The principles above should be respected in all communication activities.

To achieve the corporate communications goal of COST, main areas of initiatives have been identified and are described in detail below.

Brand Strategy

In view of a brand strategy to be developed, and as a first step, a brand exercise will be conducted. In this context, a series of internal and external stakeholder interviews will be conducted and a brand workshop realised which will help clarify the COST brand today, and more importantly, define how COST should be perceived in the future to achieve its communication objectives. The result will be a brand platform (benefits, positioning, brand differentiators, brand values, proofs points) as well as the definition of key messages to be leveraged systematically. A brand platform should lead to a consistent, coherent and recognizable 'trade mark' and communication.

The brand definition exercise will involve the two branding levels: the corporate level relating to the COST Framework and the 'product' level relating to COST Actions.

Brand Identity

The basis for a strong brand is a coherent brand presentation in terms of visual identity and messaging. Brand guidelines and templates for each application will be defined and presented in a brand book.

By definition, the COST brand has many users, including the thousands of COST Action participants. COST wishes to control the brand presentation, clear guidelines will be provided via the website and respective documents developed. The transition to the COST Association with a new scientific organisation and procedures has created momentum. There is a unique opportunity for renewal, also, and specifically in terms of brand presentation and brand experience.

An internal brand audit will be conducted, listing all the relevant print, audio-visual, digital applications used by the COST organisation.

Major Communication Activities

There is a differentiation to be made between Framework related (corporate level) communication activities and COST Actions related dissemination activities. The Framework related communication activities are about building brand awareness and credibility (reputation), and informing about the Open call. COST Action related communication activities are about disseminating COST Actions' results and outcomes. They are, however, crucial for building the credibility of COST and its brand. The objective is to increase synergies between the two communication levels, the corporate, Framework-related level, and the COST Action related level. The corporate level should better leverage COST Actions' dissemination, while COST Actions should better promote the Framework and act as ambassadors (according to the COST branding guidelines).
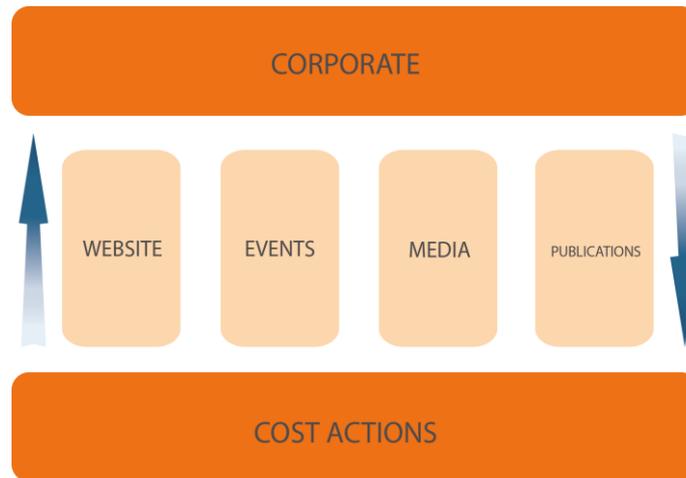
Digital Communications

COST website (cost.eu)

The COST website is critical for the organisation's reputation as well as for the governance and management of the Framework (policy information, legal aspects, presentation of procedures, portal to evaluation and management tools, contact points among other). For all target audiences, it is *the* key source of information and participation in COST Actions and activities.

It is both an information tool and a working tool, as it allows for administrative interaction (access to IT tools via the website, i.e. e-COST). The website will play an ever-increasing outreach role in the context of a broadening stakeholder platform in the Inclusiveness Target Countries and Near Neighbour Countries.

The website has been receiving positive feedback in various evaluations. It will keep improving throughout this strategy to enable more intuitive, user-friendly navigation, the content and language will be revised (less governmental, less jargon, more customer centric and directed to broader audiences). The opportunity to develop a web portal integrating the COST Action websites will be studied.

In the past years, online activities have increased with regular web updates, a regular e-Newsletter and the launch of social media accounts, both contributing to increase the traffic to COST website and improve outreach across Europe and among groups of younger researchers, engineers and scholars.

In the next years, the COST Association plans to use these digital channels even more to create visibility for the COST Framework, to disseminate its messages and to engage with specific social media literate groups.

The website should be attractive to a broad audience, not just to the research and innovation

community already involved in COST. The homepage should - at the first glance - set the context in science and technology, research and innovation, convey what COST stands for and what its activities are.

Social media

Over the last years, COST has been active on social media such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. All social media channels have a good audience in terms of quantity and profile. Social media activity is constantly improving, however based on a rather tactic and generic approach. Any investment in social media is time-consuming and should therefore be well thought through and planned in a strategic way. Behaviours and usages might vary strongly among certain countries and target groups. COST will analyse the audiences it can engage and the added value these media bring in comparison to others.

A social media strategy must be based on a sound analysis of the habits and usages of our key target groups. From today's perspective, social media represent an opportunity to engage with younger individuals of the science and technology communities. A qualitative survey will be conducted with the help of an online tool to find out how researchers, engineers and scholars, and especially the early career investigators and young researchers use Internet platforms and social media, and how they connect digitally. The most prominent bloggers, opinion leaders and the relevant communities/groups and platforms will be analysed to understand if and how COST could build on them effectively. The COST website will also integrate links to social media for researchers such as Research Gate. The objective is to increase COST digital presence by 2016.

Database

The COST communications database includes today about 10.000 individual contacts such as EU and national policy makers, representatives of the research and innovation communities, industry stakeholders, EU and specialised press at Member State level. These contacts are used for the dissemination of the e-Newsletter and for invitations to COST conferences and events. The database will be used professionally and further developed according to the COST Mission, strategic objectives and policies. This means that the database will be updated on a regular basis, and segmented to allow for analysis. A segmented database will, for example, help to evaluate the COST outreach in Inclusiveness Target Countries and Near Neighbour Countries.

Conferences and other Events

The events aim at effectively contributing to the COST Communication strategy. Their common objective is to communicate COST results, outcomes and impacts and, by doing so, profiling and positioning COST as a relevant player in the European Research Area. Through the focus and quality of their content, these events will contribute to building the new COST Association's credibility. They can be organised by COST alone (COST-branded events) or in partnership with other organisations or partners (co-branded events).

Methods and procedures will be elaborated, setting the frame for conferences and events and the identification of topics, organisation and attendance.

COST-branded events

Different, specific types of events will be organised to share COST Action results with research communities, and potential end-users (policy makers, enterprises or others). They will allow to demonstrate the importance of the COST Framework and to influence the research agenda, aiming in particular at highlighting COST's role as:

- a precursor in new and emergent fields of science and technology;
- a facilitator of innovation (knowledge sharing and transfer to economic actors);
- its societal dimension (answering current and to societal questions;
- its political dimension (contribution to the policy agenda).

The COST branded events will be of three major types:

Science & Technology related conferences

The objective of these larger events is to focus on scientific and/or technological developments and findings, in particular where cross-disciplinary (open interpretation of trans-, multi- and inter-disciplinary) approaches have allowed breakthrough findings:
- stimulating the strategic development of key scientific and/or technological topics/fields,
- fostering the emergence of new fields of science and technology or new research communities,
- addressing COST strategic priorities, specific policies or regions in Europe.

Exploratory workshops

The objective of these smaller, interactive, output oriented events is to explore new and emerging fields or ideas with potential impact on new developments:
- generating impact for emerging fields ('weak signals'), stressing results and outcomes,
- highlighting under-developed areas, promoting rare disciplines, stressing new techniques or methodologies,
- stimulating the strategic development of future oriented scientific topics/areas.

Action Showcases

The objective of these Action dedicated events is to focus on disseminating Action results and outcomes with tangible impact;
- showcasing relevance for the specialised researchers, engineers or scholars,
- differentiating COST Actions towards other instruments (added value of networking),
- demonstrating leverage of national research investments.

In addition, and in order to increase awareness in Inclusiveness Target Countries and to promote the COST Framework, a dedicated roadshow will be organised. It will focus on major cities of those countries, where COST Information sessions with dissemination activities will aim at spreading COST opportunities at widest to the national and local interested communities, with the help of the CNCs.

In the context of the above-mentioned conferences and events, media relations will be established

and press conferences/briefing sessions will be organised, where appropriate.

Events in Partnership

Partnerships offer opportunities to organise co-branded events and to join existing initiatives. These events help to gain visibility in the frame of transparently established partnerships.

COST will strengthen its participation to conferences organised by other organisations with the objective of promoting COST (credibility, image, and awareness) and/or presenting inspiring examples of COST Action activities and results. This implies COST Action participation. Strategic partnerships creating specific opportunities will be continued or started where specific interest groups can be targeted though existing dedicated platforms.

> *For illustration, COST Association's presence will feature an information stand, presentations during the conference programme and/or a dedicated COST session. Certain conferences offer the opportunity to reach/engage with specific target groups like EU policy makers (as it is the case of the European Innovation Summits organised by K4I in the European Parliament), broad thematic research communities (such as EuroNanoForum), young investigators (such as the young researchers conference at the World Sustainable Energy Days-WSED), and enterprises (such as the Science Business Annual Summit, Academic Enterprise Awards).*

The promotion of COST Actions, their results and outcomes at major scientific, innovation oriented and policy events is an important vector to create credibility and awareness; in particular as the COST Action Chairs and key participants are perfect ambassadors for the Framework.

COST will actively strive to identify speaking opportunities at high level conferences and other events focusing on the most relevant and remarkable among them. This will increase COST visibility, outreach and impact and create a positive image transfer.

COST will also chose to participate to other events based on their geographic location or opportunities to create awareness for the COST Framework, for example in regions less familiar with EU research funding programmes.

Finally, in alignment with its external target groups and stakeholder strategy, COST will strive for a co-organisation of events aiming for scientific, technological, political and societal outreach, strengthening the role of COST in a given societal or policy domain, stimulating the strategic development of future oriented challenges and innovation.

> *As illustration, co-organisation can take place with organisations, programmes and initiatives (such as EUREKA, the Joint Programming Initiatives, the European Research Council, and Future Emerging Technologies) or target bodies (such as STOA or umbrella organisations such as EUA, for example).*
> *Last but not least, special attention and efforts will be dedicated to events co-organised with the European Commission, the JRC and other EU agencies. For instance, joint workshops*

bringing together COST Action Chairs and/or participants with their homologues involved in other European instruments, inviting research experts and EU or national representatives to exchange knowledge, discuss the results and outcomes and to explore future opportunities. The objectives are to facilitate exchanges with other research projects and stakeholders, to pave new ways of cooperation and to lay the basis for potential future collaborations.

Through its events, COST will aim to clearly showcase the added value of its bottom-up, open and inclusive nature to creating value by equally promoting both, those fields and topics currently less or not in scope of the EU framework programmes and initiatives supported by COST only and those fields which contribute to EU priorities as set in the EU framework programmes and initiatives, in particular Horizon 2020.

Publications

COST differentiates between two types of publications: corporate and scientific. Corporate publications are produced and published by the COST Association. COST Actions publish in context of their activities, scientific publications, such as Final Action Publications and peer reviewed articles.

Corporate Publications

There are currently three corporate publications published by the COST Association: Corporate brochure, Annual report, About COST, all of which received very positive feedback from target groups. These publications will be complemented by specific folders and factsheets with the aim to develop dedicated publications containing success stories. A COST photo library will be developed to be used for all corporate publications.

Scientific Publications

Each COST Action is recommended to develop a dissemination plan and respective dissemination material to share their research results with the research community or, if relevant, with other target groups, such as EU and national policy makers. In general, COST Action dissemination is left to the initiative and reasonability of the COST Action Chairs and Management Committees.

Guidelines for COST Actions dissemination and exploitation of results and outcomes, including Open Access and IPR will be released to the attention of COST Actions.

Media

As a not-for-profit, non-campaigning organisation, COST has so far not placed a strong focus on media relations. To increase its visibility, credibility and to position COST as a major player in the European Research Area, it needs to use this opportunity and increase media relations efforts.

The goal is to develop privileged relationships with a certain number of journalists from key media outlets covering research, innovation policy and topics. Focus will fall on the European media focusing on the defined target groups (see above). In certain cases, national media could be considered, for example when reaching out to Inclusiveness Target Countries.

An analysis of the European media landscape relating to research and innovation will support the development of a media strategy, setting objectives, priorities and defining actors and activities. The COST Association has already relationships with certain Brussels-based EU media, such as EurActiv, European Voice, The Parliament, and EU Observer. A screening of the COST presence in scientific, peer reviewed journals (such as Nature, Science) will be realised to understand impact and eventually stimulate increased activity.

Budget permitting, it will be envisaged to conduct a cross-EU screening on TV and radio programmes covering innovation and research topics and/or to have a dedicated COST session in national or European television channels (Arte, EuroNews, BBC Europe, etc.).

Media relations efforts and partnerships should be evaluated on a yearly basis.