

COST MINISTERIAL DECLARATION 2016

Europe must continue to promote excellent, bottom-up and collaborative Research and Innovation

Background, recent achievements and state of play

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology), established in 1971, was the first European intergovernmental framework for research collaboration. Since then, COST has proven to be an efficient tool to network and coordinate nationally-funded research activities by bringing together researchers and other stakeholders to exchange knowledge on very diverse topics, thus contributing to scientific cooperation and capacity building.

Since the last COST Ministerial Conference held on 15 June 2010 in Palma de Mallorca, a great deal has changed in the organisation of COST:

1. In the perspective of Horizon 2020, the COST Association was established in 2013 as an international non for profit organisation. The COST Association is now the recipient of the Commission's grant for COST activities.
2. New procedures have been established for the submission, evaluation, selection and approval of proposals in order to, among others, enhance transdisciplinarity in COST Actions. In this regard, a new Scientific Committee has been set up to facilitate and monitor these procedures.
3. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Joint Research Centre has been signed to reinforce the cooperation between the Commission and COST Member States.
4. More recently, COST has welcomed Montenegro. Thus, COST is now comprised of 36 Full Member States and one Cooperating Member State.

Challenges and objectives

In considering COST as an indispensable basis for future innovation, ongoing challenges in research and innovation need to be taken into account: efficient use of public resources, addressing emerging societal challenges, engagement of all stakeholders and the civil society in science, and the use of digital technologies.

Based on these challenges, COST has developed its vision and strategic goals that aims at strengthening the current characteristics of the COST activities as well as developing new ideas which will further expand the outcomes and impact of COST Actions. These are:

- Inclusiveness at all levels (gender, age, geography) as COST provides opportunities for less established researchers, for the benefit of all.
- Pathfinder character as COST is a unique European bottom-up collaborative instrument for Research and Innovation. COST will contribute to the identification of new emerging topics that can eventually be addressed through the national research and European framework programmes. COST should explore the possibilities to enhance synergies with the European Research Council.
- Contributing to the priorities of the European Research Area (ERA) in particular scientific cooperation and capacity building, as well as international cooperation. Furthermore, as COST is an intergovernmental framework with a long experience of managing research networks, COST could develop its role in Member-State driven initiatives, such as joint programming process.



- Promoting open innovation in COST Actions across Europe, COST contributes to increase the uptakes of research results by industry (including SMEs), and turn them into economic value in line with the Open Innovation agenda.

Commitments

The Representatives of the Governments of the COST Member States thus:

1. Reaffirm their commitment and national support to COST, and continue to enable and encourage national COST authorities to commit themselves in order to fully exploit COST potential and call on the European Commission to facilitate this process;
2. Stress the importance of COST as part of the European Research Area, and welcome in this respect the strategy process undertaken with the aim of embedding COST more firmly in the ERA;
3. Stress the importance of strengthening synergies between COST, the EU framework programmes for Research and Innovation and other ERA programmes, and look forward, in relation with the European Commission, to the future developments of the next framework programme and discussions on possibilities to strengthen the position of COST;
4. Consider that the future EU funding should allow COST to meet future expectations;
5. Acknowledge the role of COST in promoting inclusiveness at all levels, which includes promoting Early Career Investigators, gender balance and participation of low-performing countries; in the context of the Widening programme, stress the importance of promoting country-specific action plans to implement necessary changes, when and where relevant, to further promote the participation of Widening countries in COST Actions and assess progress;
6. Reinforce the attraction of SMEs participation in COST Actions as a contribution to boosting EU industrial capacities;
7. Acknowledge the role of COST in science-policy interface and welcome, in that perspective, the development of strategic initiatives and the cooperation with the Joint Research Centre;
8. Welcome a closer cooperation between COST and the European Research Council in order to promote bottom-up collaborative research, as well as inclusion within excellence;
9. Consider that COST has a long experience of managing research networks; welcome the reflexion on how COST can play a role in the future of other research initiatives driven by Member States such as Joint Programming;
10. Welcome the new possibility offered by COST for third countries to become Partner Member States, showing that such countries also have political support for the COST framework;
11. Invite the CSO to report to the next COST Ministerial Conference on the achievements realised.