SENET 2nd Policy Dialogue Meeting Report

9th of March 2021

Table of content

Policy Dialogue Meeting report

1.   Executive Summary

SENET - the Sino-European Health Networking Hub - is a European Commission funded Horizon 2020 project[1] with two main objectives:

- Increase EU-China collaborative efforts addressing common health research and innovation challenges;
- Create a sustainable health networking and knowledge hub, which facilitates favourable conditions for a dialogue between Chinese and EU research and innovation (R&I) entities.

China and the EU are currently developing their framework programmes (Horizon Europe and the 14th Year Plan in China) to support Research and Innovation.

In line with SENET's overarching objectives to enhance Sino-European collaborations in HEALTH research and innovation actions, a policy expert meeting has been organised on March 9th, 2021, as a stakeholder consultation workshop (virtual format). It addressed specifically intermediaries that act as facilitators between R&I actors and policy stakeholders such as cluster organisations, health National Contact Points (NCPs) or networks, but policy makers on different level (regional, national) have also been invited. The aim of the meeting was to better understand the opportunities for and barriers to Sino-European collaboration in the field of health, to gather feedback from stakeholders on their interests, needs and challenges encountered in collaborative activity – and what measures could facilitate collaboration.

To set the scene Philippe Vialatte, head of Science and Technology at the EU delegation in China, introduced the state of the play of EU-China health relations, followed by a presentation of the SENET project and a summary of findings from desk research and previous consultation meetings, whilst the second part of the meeting was designed as moderated roundtable discussion.

The meeting has been part of a bottom-up process SENET has put in place to gather input from European and Chinese stakeholders and the insights gathered will, combined with information stemming from desk research and further consultation activities, feed into three major deliverables the SENET team aims to develop in the upcoming months: a roadmap for Sino-European health collaboration, policy recommendations, and an action plan.

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[1] SENET involves five partners from Europe: Steinbeis 2i GmbH (S2i, the coordinator), Global Approach Consulting (GAC), Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG), European Vaccine Initiative (EVI) and Sociedade Portuguesa de Inovação (SPI), and four partners from China, that is China National Health Development Research Center, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, Beijing Science and Technology LinkedIn and China National Center For Biotechnology Development). To learn more about our project and activities, please visit our website: https://www.senet-hub.eu/

2.   The SENET project

SENET - the Sino-European Health Networking Hub - is a European Commission funded Horizon 2020 project launched early 2019 and running until the end of 2021.

The project has two main objectives:
- Increase collaborative efforts addressing common health research and innovation challenges;
- Create a sustainable health networking and knowledge hub, which facilitates favourable conditions for a dialogue between Chinese and EU research and innovation entities.

To achieve its overarching objectives, SENET offers three major activities:

- **Identify health challenges of common interest between the EU and China**:

During its first phase, SENET analysed the health research priorities of the European Commission framework programme for research and innovation **Horizon 2020** and of Healthy China 2030/the 13th Five Year Health Plan of China to identify the common research and funding priorities. Three major thematic topics of joint interest have been identified through this analysis: Chronic diseases, infectious diseases and rare diseases.

- **Support collaborative health research initiatives between the EU and China**:

SENET aims at bringing together Chinese and European research teams to answer to Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe calls[2] or to work together in another configuration.

- **Develop a sustainable health networking hub between the EU and China**:

SENET supports a bottom-up approach from the R&I stakeholders to the policy makers to support Health R&I collaboration, with the aim of developing recommendations and an action plan addressed to the policy makers. The Policy Dialogues support this activity.

3.   Introduction to the policy expert meeting

As part of the sustainable health networking hub, **SENET organises a series of Researchers and Innovation Experts Meetings and Policy Dialogues**. The first Researchers and Innovation Expert Meeting has been organised in June 2020 (the report can be found **here**) and the first Policy Makers and Implementers Experts Meeting took place in December 2021.

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[2] https://www.senet-hub.eu/call-power-partnering/

This **second Policy Dialogue was targeted to policy makers from different levels (regional players, EU Member States, European/China), as well as organisations that act as intermediaries** between the R&I actors and policy decision makers. Besides gathering the point of view from policymakers directly, the meeting aimed at further understanding how the intermediaries support the development of international collaboration, what are the main research and innovations priorities between China and the EU and what is expected from higher policy makers to support health research and innovation collaboration.

15 experts from different EU Member States and China confirmed their participation to the meeting. These experts represented different backgrounds, mainly regional/national governments, health networks, health clusters and NCPs. The profiles of the registered participants were taken into account for shaping the guiding questions of the moderated round table discussion of the meeting.

The meeting was organised into two main parts:
Firstly, Philippe Vialatte, head of Science and Technology at the EU delegation in China presented as invited speaker the state of play of EU-China collaboration in Science, Technology and Innovation to introduce the discussion.
This introduction was followed by a short presentation of the SENET project and a summary of findings from desk research, notably related to common priority topics for health research & innovation in the EU and in China.
The second and major part of the meeting was organised as moderated roundtable discussion. During this guided exchange, the major aspects addressed related to the participants' interest in research fields for EU-China collaboration, their experiences on the matter, opportunities observed and challenges met.
On the basis of the introductory presentations, the discussion and experts' suggestions, a set of draft policy recommendations were presented in a wrap up session, which will be further fine-tuned by the SENET team in the upcoming time.

The agenda of the meeting can be found in Annex 1.

4.   Major takeaways of the meeting

4.1. EU Delegation perspective of the EU-China cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation

Philippe Vialatte, Head of Science and Technology from the EU Delegation in China, presented the state of play of the EU-China cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation, thus putting Sino-European collaborative projects in a context and sharing information about ongoing policy discussions that are aimed at fostering collaboration among research and innovation actors. The following chapter presents main aspects of his speech.

Mr Vialatte presented the Horizon 2020 European Commisison (EC) framework programme (2014-2020) that has funded more than 32,000 projects, with 162,000 participants from almost every country around the world. From 2016, the European framework programme has been characterised with the three "O": "Open Science", "Open Innovation", and "Open to the world".
He indicated that China took a great advantage of this openness: it has been the n°2 participant after the US in terms of the number of participants, with 600 participants in 270 projects (among them, 21 participants to Health calls).

According to Mr Vialatte, to facilitate the active participation of Chinese' stakeholders, the "flagships initiative" was agreed together with the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST), the Ministry of Industry and the National Science Foundation of China (NSFC) to focus the Sino European cooperation on five major topics:
- Food, Agriculture and Biotechnologies,
- Environment and Sustainable Urbanisation,
- Surface Transport,
- Safer and Greener aviation,
- Biotechnologies for Environment and Human Health.

In practical terms this meant that several topics in the H2020 work programme were earmarked for EU-China collaborations.

Mr Vialatte specified that a second element facilitated the participation of Chinese entities in H2020 was the co-funding mechanism set-up by the MoST (for the first three flagships), the Ministry of Industry (for aviation) and the NSFC (for the biotechnologies).

The Horizon Europe framework programme (2021-2027) is still under discussion, but its structure has already been agreed, with one specific programme on defence, plus three pillars: "Excellence science", "Global challenges" (6 global challenges identified from health to

digital to food), and "Innovation", the latter one much more developed than it had been under the previous framework programme.

In addition, five "missions" have been opened. These missions are **horizontal topics** that will aim at delivering very concrete results for society at the end of Horizon Europe, linked to the (1) adaptation to climate change, (2) **cancer**, (3) climate-neutral and smart cities, (4) healthy oceans, seas, costal and inland waters, and (5) soil health and food.

Mr Vialatte highlighted that as far as **international cooperation** is concerned, **all countries around the world can become associated countries, as far as they agree to the related conditions set**. Six countries have verbally expressed interest: Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Canada. However, to become an associated country, countries will have to demonstrate quality in terms of research and innovation and that they respect democratic rules. **China**, which has not shown interest to join Horizon Europe as an associated country, would therefore **not be eligible**, even if China and the European Union strongly reaffirmed their will and need to collaborate on a balanced basis. This notably means having equal and open access to each other's framework programmes.

Mr Vialatte put forward that international collaboration with China under Horizon Europe will therefore be based on a bilateral **joint roadmap** currently under preparation by the European Commission and the MoST, with no defined timeline. This joint roadmap will be constituted of two pillars:
- **Future thematic priority areas** for collaboration;
- **Framework conditions**.

In the process of developing this joint roadmap, **the first step is to agree on the framework conditions** (that are key to a balanced cooperation) before discussing the thematic priority areas with the MoST. In fact, the framework conditions concentrate the major areas of disagreement between China and the EU, while they share pretty similar thematic priorities. Until China and the EU have agreed on this joint roadmap, **the former flagship initiatives will continue. Subsequently new flagships like health and climate change may also be added**.

Mr Vialatte reported that so far, the EU and the MoST have agreed that **the joint road map will be constituted of 13 framework conditions** that go from Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) to pre-normative research and standardisation, open science, ethics and integrity, reciprocal access to research programmes, mobility of researchers, access to public markets, etc.
They have also agreed to consider, for each of these framework conditions: their definitions, the state of play, the objectives, the milestones and indicators.

The setup of this joint roadmap marks, according to Mr Vialatte, **a change of direction in the EU policy for collaboration with China**, that happened in the last two years. The EU wishes now to rebalance this cooperation, be transparent, open and work as equal partners with China.

Besides, the EC wants to work with China on areas of high interest for Europe. The EC is designing a process to try and better inform European's stakeholders specialised in the areas in which China and the EC could work in the future.

Mr Vialatte indicated that the idea is to look at different sectors and **identify the strengths and weaknesses of the R&I in China,** what are the best researchers in these areas and **come up with a well-informed list of topics** to stimulate future collaboration. **The industrial sector will also be largely consulted** before crossing the priorities.

So far, **climate change, biodiversity and health** will be very high on the agenda of both sides.

4.2 Experts' point of view

Following the presentation on the perspective of the EC regarding Science, Technology and Innovation collaboration with China, the roundtable discussions with experts was the moment to gather insights "from the ground": the aim was to give experts the floor to present their point of view on the drivers and challenges of international collaboration and possible recommendations to address to EU level policy makers.

During the discussion, it became clear that intermediaries and policy makers are driven both by top-down strategies (higher policies that influence them) and by bottom-up activities of their stakeholders.

The exchange made clear that for the intermediaries, one of the main roots to engage into international collaboration is to **actively engage in some of the key networks** that exist for a specific thematic, in Europe and internationally. In actively engaging in these networks, policy makers and intermediaries are in fact able to **find partners that share a common strategy and a complementary skill set** in terms of research and innovation that fit their agendas and that make the collaboration meaningful.

These networks in fact often organise expert groups' round tables for **exchanging good practices and ideas** in a collaborative and not in a competitive way and are crucial to progress and avoid duplication in projects. This can also be achieved in joining international projects consortia.

Joining common activities together with Chinese organisations is viewed as a great opportunity to discover a very different system that would force any expert to think out of the box:

In fact, experts highlighted the fact that China and the EU are experiencing similar demographic changes at the same time (with the population getting older and facing a higher degree of multiple chronic diseases and deteriorating structures in health and care).

To exchange about it and confront health care systems that are completely different would be an excellent way to introduce innovation in both health care systems as it would allow to think more broadly and discover new ways of being innovative and disruptive.

Expert participants reported on this general interest for more collaboration with China, and put forward concrete cooperation ideas and topics that could be strengthened on more technical research topics that overlap both European and Chinese priorities. These notably include Digital Health Care and Ageing.

In addition, it was mentioned that the size and growing economy of China are also a major benefit for European businesses: for innovations that are close to the market, China

represents the access to a potential nest of clients. To enter this market, smaller stakeholders interested in making the bridge with China are using the networks, their intermediaries, but also notably research and innovation collaboration agreements that exist at university level.

Also, experts indicated that due to the limited size of some European countries, the collaboration with China would be very beneficial to access larger research data sets in exchange of the expertise of European research centres to analyse this data.

Finally, it was highlighted that as China is now one of the most active community for health research and innovation, an equal access to the knowledge created there would be of very high value for all European experts.

Despite these important benefits of collaboration, participants reported that important barriers and challenges remain for policy makers or implementers willing to collaborate with their Chinese counterparts. They mentioned in particular the following aspects:

- Cultural challenges and language barriers: interpersonal relationships are really important to overcome cultural differences and the language barriers. This can be facilitated with a dedicated preparation (learning about the Chinese culture) that happens before the collaboration takes place and with having the appropriate person in charge of the collaboration (someone used to both cultures).

- Framework conditions: as outlined in the EU position, many framework conditions could be tackled to facilitate collaboration. The challenges around these framework conditions are not only faced when collaborating with China. However, when it comes to China, the dimensions are totally different.

- Preparation and flexibility of the regulation: the regulation has to be prepared to facilitate an efficient collaboration. The legislative framework has to be more flexible to facilitate collaboration and introduce the results from collaboration into practice at a higher pace then what the current legislative frameworks allow.

5.　　Conclusion and outlook

Despite the relatively small size of the participants' group, the direct consultation in the moderated exchange could deliver interesting insights into policy intermediaries' experiences, their strategies for collaborative exchange, as well as the drivers and challenges of Sino-European collaboration.

Together with the presentation from the invited speaker, Mr Vialatte, this roundtable made clear that at an institutional level, there is a strong will and the need for China and the EU to collaborate, but not at any costs. Strong framework conditions first need to be negotiated and clearly established to build trust and facilitate collaboration between research institutions and innovation stakeholders on both sides.

Once the framework conditions are fixed, we notice large areas of common interest both for Chinese and European researchers and innovators. To allow these interests to meet, it has been brought forward that networks, clusters and experts' groups are essentials to be prepared to go abroad and to find partners in the other country. In fact, China is such a large market that many stakeholders could not access it by their own.

Finally, flagship initiatives are important for all stakeholders willing to begin collaboration at a research level to facilitate access to funds on both sides.

As already stated in introduction, this meeting is the second Policy Dialogue organised by SENET. Three other meetings (two "Researchers and Innovation Experts Meetings and one Policy Dialogue) will be organised in 2021.

SENET is a collaborative project that aims to strongly engage with the Sino-European health R&I community. If you are keen to share your experience with us, we encourage you to:

- Complete the following **feedback form** and send it back to us.
- **register as an expert on our website** to be invited to the next SENET's meetings.
- Stay updated, as we will soon open **a consultation** on the first drafts of our roadmap, recommendations and action plan (the link and the documents will be shared via twitter and the SENET's news section on the website).

Feedback form

We appreciate your feedback on the meeting topics! Kindly fill this form and send it back to SENEThub@steinbeis-europa.de

What should be the priorities for Health Sino-European collaboration?

☐Health and Care Systems
☐Research Mobility (PhDs, Doctors etc.)
☐Digital Health
☐Ageing
☐Research on infectious diseases
☐One Health
☐Research on infectious diseases
☐Chronic diseases
☐ Other (Please specify):

What are the main barriers for Health Sino-European collaboration?

☐Legislation, Standardisation, Regulations, Certifications
☐Ethics issues
☐IPR & Data Management issues
☐Language barriers
☐Lack of knowledge/ uncertainty regarding cultural aspects
☐Non-alignment of strategies
☐Non-alignment of fuding programmes/calls
☐Difficulties of finding appropriate collaboration partners
☐Lack of information on funding opportunities
☐Other (Please specify):

What could be appropriate concrete support measures/incentives to overcome these barriers?

☐Framework programmes with coordinated calls
☐Co-funding mechanism
☐Specific programmes providing a common pathway to China for several R&I actors such as SMEs ("going together")
☐Alignment of joint RDI activity on both sides (same calendars, real interaction, joint results)
☐Better communication on opportunities by the networks
☐Other (Please specify):

6.   Annexes

Annex 1 - Agenda

Time	Title	Speaker
09.30-09.35h	Welcome and presentation of participants	**Hicham Abghay** – SENET's coordinator, Steinbeis S2i
09.35-10.00h	State of play of the EU-China cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation *(15 min presentation, 10 min Q&A)*	**Philippe Vialatte** - Minister Counsellor, Head of the Science and Technology Section, Delegation of the European Union to China
10.00-10.10h	Short presentation of the SENET Project and introduction to the roundtable discussion	**Julie Saccomano**, GAC
10.10-11.15h	Roundtable: How to incentivize and strengthen International Health Collaboration?	Moderator: **Sonja Reiland** CRG
11.15-11.30h	Conclusion – End of the meeting	**Eva Fadil**, GAC