

Report:

International Ministerial conference on principles and values for international cooperation in research & innovation

Brussels, Belgium, 16 February 2024

On 16 February, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union hosted an international Ministerial conference on principles and values for international cooperation in research and innovation (R&I). The event was co-organised with the European Commission.

The meeting was an important milestone in the Multilateral Dialogue on principles and values for international cooperation in R&I, launched in July 2022. It was attended in person by Ministers or their representatives from 57 countries as well as representatives of the International Science Council, the OECD, and UNESCO. In addition, 16 stakeholder organisations representing the European academic and scientific communities had been invited to follow the event in an online format.

The conference was co-chaired by the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers, represented by Vice-President and Minister of the Walloon Region Willy Borsus and Belgian State Secretary Thomas Dermine, and by the European Commission, represented by European Commissioner Iliana Ivanova.

The meeting was formally opened by Vice-President and Minister of the Walloon Region Willy Borsus, who placed the event in the context of the overall priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers. Priorities are (i) defending the rule of law, democracy, and unity, (ii) strengthening the EU's competitiveness, (iii) pursuing a green and just transition, (iv) reinforcing the EU's social and health agenda, (v) protecting people and borders, (and vi) promoting a global Europe, all of which strongly rely on the input from research in the natural, technical, social and human sciences for the formulation and implementation. Openness, dialogue, and cooperation are at the heart of the European Union's conception of its interests.

European Commissioner Iliana Ivanova, in her opening speech, recalled the main objective of the Multilateral Dialogue, which is to work towards a common understanding of how the key principles and values for international R&I cooperation are elaborated and implemented in practice, with the aim of guiding research performers, research funders and policymakers for future collaborative actions. She noted the importance of reciprocity for a genuine global level playing field in R&I, which necessitates agreeing collectively on the rules of the game. For this, shared principles and values are indispensable, as a basis of mutual trust both between researchers and between policy-makers. Specifically with regard to artificial intelligence, Commissioner Ivanova noted that only two weeks ago, EU Member States had given their formal approval of the European Union AI Act, the world's first comprehensive AI law. This groundbreaking legislation ensures that AI in research and innovation will adhere to ethical standards, in academic studies or commercial applications. She highlighted the importance of open collaboration in research and innovation while respecting diverse cultural contexts, striking the right balance between being as open as possible and as closed as necessary, fostering engagement with international partners to promote mutual understanding, and to guide researchers in navigating global political and societal landscapes.

In his keynote address, OECD Deputy Secretary General Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen noted the challenges for international cooperation in science, technology and innovation (STI) posed by the geopolitical context (Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's war on Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East, heightened international competition in technology development & innovation, growing concerns around research security, etc). He emphasised the importance of increased international cooperation and joint investments in R&I to address global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

Knudsen highlighted the need for a balance between seizing opportunities from scientific advancements and minimising risks, emphasising the role of international governance frameworks in retaining public trust. He stressed the importance of a multistakeholder approach (government, business, research communities) and dialogue between countries to co-design appropriate values-based frameworks for international STI co-operation. He pointed out the complementarities of the OECD Recommendation on Responsible Innovation, its Recommendation on AI, the OECD's Transformative Agenda for Science, Technology & Innovation Policies, the OECD Framework for the anticipatory governance of emerging technology, and the OECD Global Forum on Technology with the initiatives, declarations, and legal instruments developed by EU, UNESCO, the G7 and G20, with which the OECD works closely. In conclusion he looked forward to advancing these discussions further at the upcoming OECD S&T ministerial meeting in April in Paris (on transformative STI policies for a sustainable and inclusive future).

In the subsequent plenary debate, 42 speakers (Ministers or their Deputies, Ambassadors) addressed the audience, laying out their countries' priorities and policies related to international R&I cooperation and reflecting on responsible responses to the rapid development of new and emerging technologies and to the increasingly challenging global environment. There was broad consensus on the importance of shared principles and values in international R&I cooperation as a basis for mutual trust and on a good understanding of the different cultural contexts (*viz.* national traditions and indigenous knowledge) within which these principles and values are applied. Numerous delegates mentioned the importance of guiding principles and fundamental values to navigate the transformative impact of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence or synthetic biology so as to ensure their trustworthiness and inclusivity. In view of the growing complexities and uncertainties of such newly emerging technologies, a collaborative approach was more crucial than ever before to ensure their safe, responsible and fair deployment.

Several delegates remarked on the particular importance of the principles and values under discussion in the context of large-scale research infrastructures, the construction of which often goes beyond the resources of any one country and the use of which should, to the extent possible, serve the advancement of scientific knowledge worldwide and therefore be made accessible to researchers from around the globe. Others highlighted the importance of 'open data' and 'open science' (based on the FAIR principles of findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability) as an important standard to be globally accepted.

A number of speakers more broadly underlined the importance of respecting international law and in this context strongly condemned the military invasion of Ukraine by Russia, supported the suspension of R&I cooperation with Russia and Belarus, and called for accelerated support for the integration of Ukrainian researchers into the European and global scientific community. Several representatives highlighted the EU's PRIMA initiative (Partnership for Research & Innovation in the Mediterranean Area) as a prime example of science diplomacy in action and an important platform to build bridges through collaboration in research and innovation. All delegates confirmed their commitment to the Ministerial Statement proposed for endorsement.

Following the plenary debate, Belgian State Secretary Thomas Dermine presented the Ministerial Statement on principles and values for international cooperation in research & innovation ('Brussels Statement'), which had been drafted collectively by the countries and stakeholder organisations participating in the Multilateral Dialogue, the Belgian Presidency, and the European Commission. The conference participants in attendance* for this agenda point endorsed the Brussels Ministerial Statement. It has been made available on the website of the European Commission ([Multilateral dialogue on principles and values - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)) and on the website of the Belgian Presidency ([Multilateral dialogue on principles and values for international cooperation in](#)

[research & innovation \(europa.eu\)](https://research-and-innovation.europa.eu)). Participant countries of the Multilateral Dialogue which were not able to endorse the Ministerial Statement on the day of the conference were invited to provide their endorsement in writing after the conference.

In her concluding remarks, Commissioner Ivanova noted the importance of widely disseminating the 'Brussels Statement' and the principles and values under discussion, and of raising awareness of them among researchers and innovators worldwide. She noted that the collective work of international partners and non-governmental organisations will be indispensable in implementing and disseminating the principles and values, and that governments should think about how best to translate the principles and values into tangible rights and obligations in their legal and regulatory frameworks for research and innovation.

Closing the meeting, Belgian State Secretary Thomas Dermine noted that the next step under the Multilateral Dialogue would be to develop the roadmap for future actions called for in the 'Brussels Statement'. He pointed out that the high number of countries represented in the conference, the interventions made by the speakers, and the endorsement of the Brussels Ministerial Statement were testimony to the importance which is given to shared principles and values in international R&I cooperation around the globe and to the appreciation of the Multilateral Dialogue as a useful platform for moving towards a common understanding of how these principles and values are elaborated and implemented in practice.

** In attendance for the endorsement of the Brussels Ministerial Statement:*

- Algeria
- Argentina
- Australia
- Austria
- Belgium
- Brazil
- Bulgaria
- Canada
- Chile
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Egypt
- Estonia
- Faroe Islands
- Finland
- France
- Georgia¹
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Israel²

¹ Georgia endorsed the Ministerial Statement in writing on 08 April 2024.

² Israel endorsed the Ministerial Statement in writing on 16 July 2024.

- Italy
- Japan
- Jordan
- Kosovo³
- Latvia
- Lebanon
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Mexico
- Montenegro
- Morocco
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- North Macedonia
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Tunisia
- Türkiye⁴
- Ukraine
- United Kingdom
- USA
- European Commission
- OECD
- UNESCO

Attachments:

1. Conference agenda
2. Brussels Ministerial Statement
3. Attendance list
4. Conference speakers

³ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁴ The Republic of Türkiye endorsed the Ministerial statement without its Annex.