**SAON Involvement in LC-SPACE-02-EO-2018**

**Background**

The European Commission has issued a call under Horizon 2020 for a coordination and support action (CSA) under the topic “Copernicus evolution – Mission exploitation concepts” with the identifier of LC-SPACE-02-EO-2018.

One of the priorities under this call is: “A. Monitoring of the Polar Regions, notably the Arctic, specifically for sea ice and environmental conditions”. The work will entail bringing together “the key European stakeholders and competent entities which are:

* Engaged in activities that can answer questions raised in the user requirements gathering process;
* Have the ability to network with suitable research actors to fill the knowledge gaps;
* Have the required expertise to assess the needs for an end-to-end operational system, with due attention to potential international cooperation opportunities for tackling this global challenge.

“At the same time, there is a need for accompanying scientific and technical support to address:

* Ways to improve Copernicus' ability to describe the changing polar regions, including the snow/ice coverage, salinity, sea ice, permafrost, the biogeochemical state of the ocean, biodiversity in light of different scenarios of availability of additional complementary data from space;
* Identification of research gaps regarding integration/assimilation of space based data into sea state, ocean physics, biogeochemistry and ice models;
* Ability to provide not only sea-ice mapping but also sea-ice forecasts for maritime purposes, and as essential climate variable and/or essential ocean variable;
* Assessment of access to adequate and sustained in-situ observing systems and the necessary research gaps to fill in terms of assimilation/modelling capacity.

“Activities shall thus encompass the coordination of ongoing efforts, include mutual identification of research and infrastructural gaps, and facilitate a cooperation of further research and development to be undertaken to reach sufficiently mature capacities for an operational integration as a subsequent step.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

“The intention of the EO2 topic is not research itself, but to bring together key European stakeholders that can understand the scope of activities needed for establishing an operational European capacity for monitoring in domains A,B,C of the topic.

You should in a supportive manner identify which research is already done, which development gaps exist – i.e. establish, through your extensive network, what coordinated action and research response might be needed in R&D programmes across Europe to prepare an operational capacity.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Opportunity**

Recent discussions within SAON about its strategic direction have highlighted a number of issues:

* The objective to influence and guide Arctic observing networks
* The need for funding to ensure sustainability
* The reality that without involvement in a significant and high-profile project, the Arctic observing community may start to lose interest in SAON.

The proposed project could contribute to fulfilling each of these.

While SAON has historically not been focused on space-based observing systems, its mandate certainly does not preclude them. Space-based observing is the focus of Polar View’s expertise, and they would be pleased to support SAON for this project.

Previous experience in initiatives such as EU-PolarNet (AMAP) and the ESA Polaris programme (Polar View) will be particularly relevant here.

The budget is between Euro 2-3 M and the duration is about two years.

**Status**

The SAON Secretariat has initiated discussions with a number of organizations that should be part of a team. At the moment the situation is fluid and complicated with at least two other bid initiatives in the works and many of the important organizations participating in two or three of the existing teams. Obviously, the situation is not ideal and discussions are ongoing as to whether some consolidation is possible at this point. This could take the form of SAON leading a combined bid, or participating on a team under the leadership of another organization.

**Recommendation**

Given the effort required to formulate a bid of this magnitude, having SAON lead one of three bids is to be avoided. However, If SAON can be involved on a consolidated team, preferably as the lead, but potentially as a participant, it could help SAON achieve its strategic objectives.

1. See: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/lc-space-02-eo-2018.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/support/faqs/faq-8491.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)