

10th Anniversary of ESFRI, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures

Building the best pan-European Research Infrastructures for the future is our mission

ESFRI is now in its tenth successful year. Created in 2002 by the Member States and the European Commission to develop the scientific integration of Europe and to strengthen its international outreach, ESFRI has become a lively and increasingly important Forum to advise Ministries and Funding Agencies on strategic issues of Research Infrastructures.

In 2004 ESFRI was mandated by the Competitiveness Council to develop a strategic roadmap for Europe in the field of Research Infrastructures. The ESFRI roadmap covers all areas of research: from Humanities and Social Sciences to Biological and Medical Sciences, Environment, Energy, Physical Sciences and Engineering, Materials and Analytical Sciences and also e-infrastructures.

Under the chairmanship of the first ESFRI chair, Hans Chang, work started on the first version of this roadmap of pan European Research Infrastructures was. The goal was to describe the scientific needs for Research Infrastructures for the next 10 – 20 years. With advice from more than 1000 international high-level experts from all fields of research, the roadmap identified 35 new research Infrastructures or major upgrades of existing facilities. ESFRI also took into account input from relevant inter-governmental research organisations as well as the industrial community. The ever first roadmap of pan-European Research Infrastructures was published in 2006 under the chairmanship of John Wood, who was the second ESFRI chair. John Wood also initiated the first update of the roadmap, which was published in 2008 under the chairmanship of Carlo Rizzuto, who was the third ESFRI chair. Carlo Rizzuto also initiated the preparation of ESFRI's "Vision 2020" which was launched in 2010. Together with the 2010 update to the roadmap, which now contains 48 projects, a Strategy Report has been produced which describes the "work programme" of ESFRI for the coming years. With its roadmaps ESFRI has also stimulated the preparation of national roadmaps in many of the Member States and the Associated Countries.

The main task of ESFRI under its current (fourth) chair, Beatrix Vierkorn-Rudolph, is to help the projects on the ESFRI roadmap move towards implementation. This focus is in line with the commitment in the Europe 2010 Flagship Initiative - Innovation Union and the Digital Agenda, which states that by 2015, Member States together with the Commission should have completed or launched the construction of 60% of the priority European Research Infrastructures currently identified by ESFRI.

Ten of the 48 projects on the ESFRI roadmap have already reached the implementation phase and 16 more are expected to reach this phase by the end of 2012. All the ESFRI projects are funded by various groups of EU Member States and Associated Countries. The European Commission provides funding for the so-called preparatory phase of the projects as well as for the implementation of common objectives within clusters of related projects.

The ESFRI Forum is convinced that, particularly in difficult economic circumstances, research and innovation are key drivers for Europe's welfare. Excellent Research Infrastructures enable cross-disciplinary, frontier research and innovation. ESFRI has also promoted increased regional cooperation to facilitate a more equal spread of the Research Infrastructures between the Member States, and also works in close cooperation with the Commission to enhance international cooperation towards global use and coordination of Research Infrastructures

Background:

Excellent Research Infrastructures are essential for the cross disciplinary, frontier research and innovation that are needed to address the Grand Challenges and to engage European industry and service providers in innovation. In order to foster and monitor truly excellent pan-European projects and best practices in research infrastructure management, ESFRI is working to develop criteria and indicators that will support an evaluation of the quality and impact of research infrastructures. This evaluation should be carried out by the Member States that are the owners of the research infrastructures.

ESFRI supports and promotes the goals of the Innovation Union by developing schemes to facilitate the transfer of know-how and competences from research infrastructures to industry and to create conditions for an effective access for industry to the research infrastructures.

The formation of ESFRI has also led to ten years of continuous effort in building trust and improving coordination and communication between stakeholders. The ECRI conferences held in Trieste, Nottingham, Hamburg, Barcelona and Copenhagen, the regional aspects of Research Infrastructures debated at the regional conferences held in Brdo, Prague, Brussels and Debrecen demonstrated that it is possible to involve all stakeholders – states, society, business and the research community, to act or to support a pan-European approach in building and operating Research Infrastructures.