

ENPG activities integrated into the eInfraNet project

ENPG, the European Networking Policy Group has been serving for 15 years as a discussion forum and advisory body comprising delegated representatives of national governments, agencies, or other organisations and authorities being responsible for the policy and funding of research networking (more recently e-Infrastructure) development and operation for research in the represented European countries.

The basic endeavour of the ENPG has been to contribute to the co-ordination of national and European level policy making and strategy decisions as well as funding principles and practices in the complex development and exploitation processes of e-Infrastructures in research, innovation, and education, with special emphasis on Research Networks and related services.

Members of the ENPG have developed in 2008-2009 a revised Strategy for duly handling e-Infrastructure matters in the following years characterised by fast development, diversification, and proliferation of e-Infrastructure facilities and services. The new Strategy document aimed at determining the mission of the ENPG, outlining a vision of what is to be achieved within a medium time-frame of some 3-5 years, and defining a set of activities playing key role in how to make the vision true.

In parallel, ENPG members have done their best to contribute in 2009 to the preparation and submission of an EU FP7 project proposal in order to establish a more stable, more effective, and more sustainable framework for realising, among others, the goals set out by the Strategy. The objectives of the proposal have been based on the plan of establishing an ERA-NET network for developing and strengthening the cooperation and coordination between national programme owners and managers dealing with e-infrastructures and relevant European initiatives, ensuring their smooth and efficient integration in the European Research Area.

The evaluation of the submitted proposal resulted in acceptance and the eInfraNet project – an EU FP7 co-funded multi-country activity – has been launched on 1 January 2010 for a three years period. This has been a good opportunity to merge the ENPG strategic goals with the eInfraNet objectives and to integrate the intended ENPG activities into the eInfraNet project.

There was full agreement on behalf of both the ENPG members (28.01.2010) and the eInfraNet partners (15-16.04.2010) about the following reasons of the merger:

- Handling of policy and funding matters with respect to e-Infrastructures on European level and coordinating the related national policies is at least as important in the future as it has been in the past.
- The ENPG has successfully completed a period of preparing basic documents for the principles and practices of future activities in the above policy coordination for e-Infrastructures.
- With the launch of the eInfraNet project a perfect framework for handling of the above policy and funding matters has been established.
- The eInfraNet Steering Committee (which later will, in accordance with the eInfraNet plans, turn to be an e-Infrastructure Policy Group) which can smoothly integrate the ENPG functions, principles, and practices set by the mentioned basic documents.

- The representative of the eInfraNet project coordinator, also Vice-Chair of the ENPG, taking over also the duties of the leaving Chairman, is in the best position to manage the above smooth transition.
- The eInfraNet project looks forward to an increasing number of national project participants – by this way, and also independently of project participation, the membership of the mentioned e-Infrastructure Policy Group can be gradually increased in order to approach full European coverage.
- The eInfraNet project provides due financial background for operating the e-Infrastructure Policy Group and therefore the accumulated ENPG reserves are best exploited by sponsoring the 2011 TNC (TERENA Networking Conference) so that, in return, TNC 2011 will put special emphasis on policy issues.

The above points briefly summarise the principles and practice of a reasonable, timely, and straightforward step towards continuing the traditional ENPG activities in a new framework which is in harmony with the changing circumstances. Indeed, completing the ENPG-eInfraNet merger, and making the ENPG resources available to eInfraNet, allows and best helps continuing the e-Infrastructure related activities on behalf of the national policy making and funding authorities within the frameworks of the eInfraNet project, especially within its prospective Steering Committee which later will turn to be the re-formed e-Infrastructure Policy Group, as the eInfraNet DoW itself is talking about it.

More details on the eInfraNet project can be found at the URL <http://e-infranet.eu> while more info about the ENPG strategy merged into the eInfraNet project and a brief historical background are summarised by the attached brief summary.

Acknowledgement and thanks are due to all those ENPG members who enthusiastically provided their expertise and voluntary contribution to ENPG and, indirectly by this way, to the European e-Infrastructure and especially research networking communities during the last 15 years. Similarly, the honouring agreement on behalf of the eInfraNet partners and the EC about the merger is highly appreciated.

Vision, mission, and strategy issues related to e-Infrastructure policy and funding as outlined by the ENPG in 2008-2009

Background

ENPG has been established in 1996 by the highly appreciated initiative of Hans-Peter Axmann (Austria) and has played eminent role in making, under his founding chairmanship, the policy of developing the earlier European research network backbones (TEN-34, TEN-155) a success. ENPG, chaired later by Malcolm Read (United Kingdom), has also successfully contributed, again on policy level, to creating the global leader multi-gigabit GEANT network generations. More recent achievement within ENPG in 2008-2009 has been the extension of the ENPG Strategy from research networking to e-Infrastructures at large, in order to effectively contribute to the harmonisation of national policies as well as funding principles and practices with respect to e-Infrastructures.

Today e-Infrastructures constitute the most widely exploited class of Research Infrastructures and play, as a major pillar of the ERA (the European Research Area), an indispensable role in building and operating an up-to-date working environment for scientific research and technological development, for related higher education activities, as well as for competitive technical innovation.

Therefore harmonising and integrating the diverse national policy and funding strategies and practices related to e-Infrastructures within Europe and beyond are more important than ever.

In order to best coordinate the activities of the related national Ministries and other policy and funding authorities in their efforts to establish a collaborative European approach with respect to strategy, policy, and funding in the area of e-Infrastructures, eInfraNet has integrated from early 2010 the ENPG objectives into the project goals by complementing those parallel European activities (like the ones of ESFRI, e-IRG, TERENA, DANTE, and the NREN-PC) dealing mostly with the technical development and practical application of Research Infrastructures and especially e-Infrastructures, including research networks. The significance of these complementary missions of the involved European organisations, stems from the fact that e-Infrastructures provide invaluable tools for multimedia electronic communication, interactive information access, and distributed distant collaboration for globally competitive research, education, and innovation.

eInfraNet continues the major mission of paving the way, on policy and funding behalf, for the fast evolution and wide utilisation of up-to-date e-Infrastructures in research, education, and innovation. This means that policy-level European uptake of the aims and goals on e-Infrastructures and on research networking will remain the dominant mission of eInfraNet – a mission by which the project surely will be a major contributor to making the ERA a breakthrough in our joint European efforts to keep leading edge position in the area of worldwide scientific competition and cooperation, as well as in the field of innovation-based economic competitiveness.

eInfraNet builds on wide European cooperation – not only by the activities of the initial project participants but also by inviting other European partners to join the common efforts. Earlier

ENPG members are therefore urged to establish contact with the eInfraNet project where they are welcome to cooperate and possibly enter in a later phase.

The Vision

It is assumed that scientific research, as well as its brother and sister, innovation on one hand, and higher education on the other, play an ever increasing role in every aspect of living humans on our earth. Social welfare, economic competitiveness, environmental consciousness are all closely related to the quality, efficiency, and impact of research – features supposing an advanced, stable, reliable, dependable, easily accessible and well exploitable research infrastructure comprising practically all kinds of more or less discipline-independent resources available within a geographical region (national, European, or global).

It is also assumed that, while research activities are always involving a rather complex mix of processes dealing both with materials and information, the role of the information oriented processes is continuously increasing so that the significance of e-Infrastructures for these research activities is growing fast.

e-Infrastructure components do involve, first of all, the research network (providing the means for interconnecting the researchers, the research sites, and the research resources, by enabling high speed data traffic between them) so that communication means, information access, and collaboration tools/services are available for supporting higher level e-Infrastructure functions such as operating grids, building and accessing digital repositories and archives, enabling high performance computing, allowing virtual environments, virtual presence, and virtual communities to establish/emerge and exploit.

e-Infrastructures will remain in the focal point of national and European developments, based, at least partly, on public funding. National governments on one side, and the European Commission on the other, continue playing a crucial role in that special, preferential handling of e-Infrastructures. However, harmonisation of national policies and funding strategies, as well as matching between these national developments and the EC supported European developments, suppose a solid monitoring, co-ordination, and advisory background both on policy and funding aspects – a function best covered by a well organised, straightforward activity, keeping also consciously in mind what the ERA needs from e-Infrastructures in Europe.

The above Vision assumes sustainable, stable, high performance e-Infrastructures, where the sustainable, stable, high performance European Research Network serves as the “glue” between the elements of those e-Infrastructures approaching a homogeneous standard of performance, accessibility and coverage within the ERA and beyond. The EU FP7 eInfraNet project, by having integrated the ENPG aims and goals, intends to contribute to making this Vision come true.

The Mission

The Mission stemming from the above Vision is to help keeping, strengthening, and utilising the available and operational e-Infrastructure elements, and to aid rapid and successful completion of the experiments and developments devoted to introduce those e-Infrastructure functions being not yet available and/or operational at the moment.

The mission is to be realised by a strong co-operation between the project participants and by inviting other countries to join the related efforts. This co-operation is to be complemented by an as close as possible contact between the partners and the EC, in order to establish perfect

matching between all involved parties making policy decisions and determining funding strategies in the area of developing and exploiting the services provided by e-Infrastructures.

Strategy

The ENPG Strategy having been built into the eInfraNet objectives contributes to the fulfilment of the Mission by building on a virtual strategic plan comprising eInfraNet activity items. The major activity items (Work Programme elements of the eInfraNet project) are associated to strategic, rather than operational, investigation and handling of issues related to the Mission. Such issues involve first of all the role, development, operation, and funding of e-Infrastructures.

The basic goals involved by the ENPG Strategy and appearing now also in the eInfraNet activity items are as follows: (1) provide a forum for investigating, discussing and advising on e-Infrastructures related national and European policies and strategies especially with respect to funding principles and practice; (2) endorse maintaining due awareness of the national governments and the EC of the role of e-Infrastructures and the need of appropriate policies and funding with respect to those e-Infrastructures; and (3) contribute to stimulating, motivating, accelerating, as well as co-ordinating and harmonising the related national and European e-Infrastructure development and exploitation activities.