

The European Organisation for Nuclear Research

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The European Organisation for Nuclear Research

Alongside European economic, political and monetary cooperation, scientists in Europe in the post-war period called for a revival of university exchanges between countries and for the setting up of research programmes which were often too sophisticated and too costly for national laboratories acting on their own. A further aim was to achieve levels of technological and nuclear advancement comparable to those of the United States and the Soviet Union, which exploded their first atomic bombs in July 1945 and August 1949, respectively.

The idea of a European institute for nuclear science geared towards civilian applications was put forward at the European conference on culture organised by the European Movement and held in Lausanne from 8 to 12 December 1949. The project was then taken up in Geneva by the European Cultural Centre and subsequently in Paris by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In November 1951, also in Geneva, an intergovernmental council was created to study nuclear cooperation and the construction of a large European particle accelerator. In Geneva, on 15 February 1952, Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Yugoslavia signed the Agreement constituting a Council of Representatives of European States for planning an international laboratory and organising other forms of cooperation in nuclear research. International scientific conferences were held in Copenhagen in June 1952 and in Amsterdam in October 1952 to set the objectives and the location — Meyrin in the canton of Geneva — of a European Organisation for Nuclear Research, known henceforth by the French acronym CERN.

The Convention for the establishment of CERN was signed in Paris on 1 July 1953 by the states that had signed the provisional agreement, together with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Greece. It entered into force on 29 September 1954, the day on which the Convention was ratified by France and the Federal Republic of Germany. Austria joined in 1959, and Spain was a member between 1961 and 1969, withdrawing, as did Yugoslavia in 1962, for financial reasons. Unlike nuclear power plants, CERN worked exclusively on fundamental research into nuclear matter and particle physics. As soon as it was created, it concentrated its efforts on the building of a synchro-cyclotron and a proton synchrotron based on accelerator technology. For that purpose, physicists from all the member countries were brought together for a specific period. The European Organisation for Nuclear Research does not conduct any military research programmes.

On 15 June 1954, the representatives of eight European countries (Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) met in Paris to establish the European Atomic Energy Society (EAES). The Society sought to encourage the spread of the scientific and industrial applications of atomic energy, in particular by promoting scientific cooperation through exchanges involving engineers and researchers working on programmes relating to the strictly peaceful use of nuclear energy. The EAES quickly became a European forum for meetings and debates.