

SCNAT – Platform Mathematics, Astronomy and Physics (MAP)

Terms of Reference for Round Table „Swiss Representation in International Organisations and Research Infrastructures“ (ROTIORI)

1. Background and Rationale

Switzerland is a member of several international research organisations (IRO) which are running experiments and/or exploit state-of-the-art research infrastructures worldwide. The Swiss research community is very actively participating in existing IROs and is keen to participate in other new IROs in the future.

The importance of the IROs for Switzerland is undisputed. They provide one of the best and most stable routes to pursue international collaborations and cooperations in research. In general, those participations are not directly influenced by the political relations between Switzerland and the EU and other countries. Not counting the participation of Switzerland in the European Space Agency, Switzerland annually invests approximately 100 MCHF in different IROs, representing about 2.5% of the financial support of research directly allocated by the Swiss government.

Thanks to the participation of Switzerland in IROs, researchers active in Swiss institutions can participate in experiments and/or have access to research infrastructures which are not available with the same technical standards and corresponding opportunities in Switzerland. IROs help to secure the international networking of Swiss-based researchers by supporting their connections and scientific collaborations worldwide.

In view of the substantial financial support for IROs provided by Switzerland, it is only natural that the scientific community, the political body, and even the general public in Switzerland are kept aware of the developments in the respective research areas. There is also an obvious interest in involving the Swiss scientific community in the selection, the planning and in the steering of the participation of Switzerland in IROs. Provision in this regard is already well built up for some IROs (for instance CERN), whereas it is only marginal or inexistent for other IROs.

Since its reorganization in early 2007, the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences (SCNAT) is a major actor for connecting science, politics and citizens. In connection with IROs, its platform MAP has been hosting the so-called “Roundtable zur Vertretung der Schweiz in internationalen Gremien” since 2011, a forum for information exchange between active scientists and SERI, the agent representing the political decision makers, as well as other stakeholders such as the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF). Based on this experience, SCNAT is considered as the most appropriate body available to coach and accompany the participation of Switzerland in IROs on behalf of the scientific community, and to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the process in an appropriate way.

2. Objectives and Expectations

The ROTIORI is expected to

- bring forward the bottom-up opinion of active researchers representing different scientific disciplines that depend on connections to IROs for their internationally competitive research activities.
- secure an informal exchange of information between the responsible administration organization (SERI) and the relevant scientific communities as well as other relevant stakeholders (e.g. SNF, ETH Domain, Swiss Universities)
- enhance the mutual understanding of the needs and requests of different scientific communities in connection with IROs
- contribute to an educated priority setting in case of limiting financial restrictions
- encourage and initiate activities of coordination within individual science groups, including the establishment of Swiss user communities for each IRO.
- Each user community should organize itself to best serve its members and adopt its own rules of procedure. An elected president or spokesperson is expected to represent the community in the RoTIORI. The community should propose a delegate to the SERI for providing scientific expertise within the Swiss delegation to the Boards of respective IROs and act as a member of the delegation. SCNAT is expected to foster these coordination efforts and to be active in the completion of the user's community landscape.
- develop the current situation of ROTIORI towards reaching the status of an umbrella forum for all interested user communities.
- provide information to SCNAT's communication channels for the dissemination of important aspects of IRO matters of public interest. At least once during a 4-year budget period, SCNAT should organize a public event to communicate important results and highlights in relation with the use of IROs by Swiss researchers.

3. Organization

The ROTIORI meets twice a year during spring and fall quarter, respectively. The respective dates are fixed at the end of the preceding meeting.

The „Geschäftsstelle“ of the platform MAP of SCNAT is responsible for

- keeping track of the membership of ROTIORI
- collecting the agenda items
- sending out the invitations including the agendas
- writing the minutes of each meeting within 2 months maximum.

The meetings are chaired by a chairperson nominated by the Board of MAP and confirmed by the Board of SCNAT.