Mineral resources are crucial for the competitiveness and innovation of the European economy. The minerals industry, comprising producers and users of industrial minerals and metals, aggregates and ornamental or dimensional stone, oil, gas and derivates, as well as coal and by-products, provides vital inputs to Europe’s economy and social well-being. Because of their great diversity, minerals and their derived products are necessary for almost every aspect of life.
Major end-users of mineral raw materials are the construction, chemicals, automotive, aerospace, machinery and equipment sectors, providing a total added-value of EUR 1 324 billion and employment to about 30 million people. These important sectors of the EU economy are critically dependent on these raw materials, and high prices or bottlenecks in their supply can jeopardise the sectors’ competitive position. Therefore, securing access to raw materials is an important factor for the EU’s competitiveness and, hence, crucial to achieve the objectives of the EU’s growth and jobs strategy.

The European Technology Platform on Sustainable Mineral Resources (ETP SMR) unites hundreds of stakeholders from industry, the research community, public authorities, the financial community, regulators, consumers and civil society around the major technological challenges to the sector, in order to jointly develop a common vision. The platform will contribute to strengthening one of the fundamental pillars of the European economy and society: the European minerals industries. These include oil, gas, coal, metal ores, industrial minerals, ornamental stones, aggregates, smelters as well as technology suppliers and engineering companies.

The ETP SMR has the following objectives:

- securing the future supply of/access to European raw materials;
- supporting the revival of exploration of Europe’s mineral potential;
- developing innovative and sustainable production technologies;
- implementing best practices;
- reuse, recovery and recycling as well as new product applications;
- creating European added value through RTD-based technology leadership, education and training.

**Strategic research agenda**

The research objectives are to be implemented in five focus areas, corresponding to the working groups. They cover the value chain of raw materials, extending from exploration and extraction, mineral processing to mineral products ready for use in the downstream industry, addressing also reuse, recycling, and horizontal issues.

The priority project areas are as follows.

- The scope of exploration is to secure the long-term supply of minerals to Europe, by new exploration technologies and by building a knowledge base of Europe’s mineral resources.
- Different extraction and processing methods are needed depending on the type of mineral resource and the desired products and, therefore, require a different RTD focus. Common points are process and extraction efficiency, the significant reduction of energy consumption, and developments toward zero environmental impact.
- New methods for rapid and effective rehabilitation are required to reduce the environmental consequences of an extraction site after closure.
- The common goal concerning reuse and recycling is to ensure that by 2030 Europe has a recycling industry as a natural, integrated part of its mineral industry.
- The future demands new application areas for mineral products, the design of new mineral products, and the creation of new mineral product functionality, through an enhanced understanding of customer needs.
- A well-functioning interaction between industry and society is crucial for a sustainable industry. It is necessary to enhance the positive attitude of society towards minerals consumption and the activities of the mineral industry and its technological development.
Regarding communication activities, SMR organised two stakeholder events in June and September 2007 in Brussels. A brokerage event with other platforms was organised in Poland in June 2008.

SMR published the first version of its implementation plan in December 2007 with a focus on framework conditions (policy, capacity-building, public acceptance) for innovation in the European minerals industries.

Next steps

Having updated its SRA, the ETP is currently revising its implementation plan with regards to completed work, ongoing priorities and new priorities that have emerged over time.

The platform will continue to play an important role in improving the collaboration between various Member States, supporting the evolving policies/strategies in sustainable mineral resource management, and securing the future supply of mineral resources through innovation and new technologies.

All the main research topics identified have a definite short, medium or long-term time horizons. This enables the definition of projects common to each of the mineral industry sectors involved in the ETP SMR and clearly addresses the basic needs of the whole minerals industry. Some initial projects have already been identified.

Update on platform activities

The structure of the platform has remained unchanged. The Stakeholder Forum consists of all interested parties of the sectors involved. The platform is steered by the High Level Group, from which a Steering Committee has been elected to oversee the daily management of the platform. The Secretariat is run by the Council (EMiReC, the European Mineral Resources RTD Council).

The work of the platform was financed by industry and other organisations through the EMiReC (European Mineral Resources RTD Council), and actively supported by stakeholders organised in focus areas.

The platform also interfaces with a Mirror Group, consisting of representatives of Member States. The platform actively encourages and supports national initiatives in the area of mineral resources. Particularly in Poland and Sweden, the Member States programmes are very supportive and the industry has signed special cooperation agreements.

The global character of the mineral sector offers natural opportunities for international cooperation, particularly with Russia and with countries of Africa and Latin America.

As regards cooperation with other platforms, SMR works on developing linkages with a number of other ETPs, particularly SusChem, Waterborne, eMobility, ESTP, ESTEP, Manufacture, ECTP, EuMaT, and the Industrial Safety ETP.