

French officials say they are prepared to sign a Letter of Intent committing to the construction of the European Spallation Source. France joins the host nations, Sweden and Denmark, by solidifying its contributions to the project.

Lund, 10 October 2013 – French representatives have announced today at the ESS Steering Committee meeting in Lund, that they are prepared to sign a Letter of Intent. In meetings with Swedish and Danish officials, representatives from the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR) said they are prepared to commit to fund the project.

"This is a very significant step for ESS and the European science community", says Lars Leijonborg, Sweden's Chief Negotiator. "France's commitment is a clear signal of support. The contribution of French scientists and engineers will make to the project are essential for success."

The European Spallation Source ESS is a next-generation neutron source built in partnership with 17 European countries. It is expected to open up new opportunities for scientists using neutrons for material research. France has one of the largest neutron user communities in Europe with a tradition of research in this field.

The decision comes following an extensive review of France's participation in international research organizations. The review, which concluded in June, determined that ESS is an important strategic future scientific instrument. The pledge reflects the country's long tradition of supporting large-scale research infrastructures. It also solidifies the commitment France made to Sweden and Denmark when Lund was chosen as the site of the European facility.

"We are very pleased that ESS was highly evaluated by the French government's review process," says Peter Honeth, the Swedish State Secretary of Education and Research. "That is a very strong validation of the project's importance for the future of European research infrastructures."

The estimated cost of ESS is €1.843 billion for construction. The French contribution will be a combination of in-kind and cash. French laboratories and research institutes will develop and provide a significant portion of the hardware for the facility in France.

"The success of ESS is dependent on the intellectual investment of its partner countries," says Jim Yeck, Director General and CEO of ESS. "I am looking forward to collaborating with our French partners, who have a track record of excellence in world-class engineering and neutron science."

Discussions about details of the contributions are ongoing between French officials and the Host countries. Details still need to be worked out relative to the specific contributions, and operations of the facility. The final selection of the French in-kind contributions is subject to an independent evaluation committee, consisting of representatives from all partner countries.

"The negotiation process with France has been fruitful and constructive," says Bo Smith, the Danish Chief Negotiator. "We are very confident that an agreement on details will be reached soon."

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ESS IN SHORT:

The European Spallation Source – the next generation facility for materials research and life science.

The European Spallation Source (ESS) will be a multi-disciplinary research laboratory based on the world's most powerful neutron source. ESS can be likened to a large microscope, where neutrons are used instead of light to study materials – ranging from polymers and pharmaceuticals to membranes and molecules – to gain knowledge about their structure and function. ESS will be around 30 times brighter than existing facilities, opening up new possibilities for researchers in for example health, chemistry, fundamental physics, environment, climate, energy, transport sciences and cultural heritage. ESS is an intergovernmental research infrastructure project, and it will be built in Lund in southern Scandinavia. Currently 17 European countries are Partners in the ESS project, and will take part in the construction, financing and operation of the ESS. The Partner Countries are: Sweden, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom. The European Spallation Source ESS AB is a state-owned limited liability company, today owned by the host countries Sweden and Denmark. ESS AB is currently working on finalizing the ESS technical design, planning the future research at ESS, preparing for construction, and planning the future international ESS organisation. This is done in collaboration with a large number of Partner Laboratories, research institutes, and universities around the world. The ground-break is planned for 2014, the first neutrons will be produced in 2019 and the facility will be fully operational around 2025. ESS is expected to support a user community of at least 5000 European researchers and will have great strategic importance for the development of the European Research Area. Near by there will be complementary laboratories, such as the synchrotron MAX IV in Lund and XFEL and PETRAIII in Hamburg.