

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

ENFSI - THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF FORENSIC SCIENCE INSTITUTES

By



WIM NEUTEBOOM, SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, NETHERLANDS FORENSIC INSTITUTE,
THE NETHERLANDS, SECRETARY OF ENFSI

Keywords: ENFSI, forensic science, cooperation, Memorandum of Understanding

Introduction

CEPOL and the European Network of Forensic Science Institute (hereinafter referred to as ENFSI) agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding in November 2009. The underlying philosophy was that it is in the interest of ENFSI and CEPOL to enhance their capacity to co-operate in the areas of information exchange and training. In this article, an overview of the history, aims and structure of ENFSI is presented.

It is obvious that forensic laboratories will benefit if first responders and crime scene officers have a high degree of forensic awareness. These workers start the investigation at the crime scene and this step - in terms of searching, collecting, and storage of physical evidence - is crucial for the success of later investigations at the forensic laboratory. Education and training on the application of forensic science in the law enforcement agencies and police forces is a good investment and ENFSI is ready to support CEPOL in that activity. Therefore, it is hoped that after reading of this article, ENFSI will come up in the mind of CEPOL-members if we are talking about 'forensics'.

Overview

ENFSI is an important network in the forensic community. It offers its members an excellent platform for exchange of scientific as well as managerial information. In an era of globalisation, ENFSI organises quality assurance programs for laboratories, encourages exchange of scientific information and developments via conferences and workshops, facilitates EU –funded joint research projects and provides broader access to databases. Under the auspices of ENFSI, there are many opportunities for individuals to meet colleagues in other countries and to build personal networks.

In the past years the European Union has demonstrated an increased interest in forensic science and has recognised ENFSI as a relevant player. This is demonstrated by the fact that ENFSI was given the privileged status of an EU-monopolist in 2009. But there is much more. Other EU decisions relevant to ENFSI include the Council Decision 2008/615/JHA (June 2008) on the stepping up of cross-border cooperation, particularly in combat-

ing terrorism and cross-border crime. That gives particular attention to develop best practice for crime scene investigations which includes specific handling of DNA and fingerprints to match them against profiles included in data bases interconnected by the Prüm Decision or the new Schengen Information System. Recently (December 2011) the Council Conclusions on the Vision for European Forensic Science 2020 including the creation of a European Forensic Science Area and the development of forensic science infrastructure in Europe was adopted in the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting. In the latter document a prominent role is described for ENFSI. These developments in Brussels show that ENFSI and forensic science are well established as part of the establishment. Finally, the relation CEPOL – ENFSI. It should be obvious from the above that ENFSI has the key to a lot of knowledge, experience and skills within the forensic science community. This knowledge is becoming more and more relevant or even crucial for law enforcement agencies. Realising that the ENFSI member-laboratories are located in 36 European countries and that the total number of experts on different forensic fields in these laboratories are over 6000, it is obvious that the circumstances to transfer expertise from the forensic laboratories to the law enforcement agencies are optimal. However, transferring expertise requires a sound philosophy and a good structure. The Memorandum of Understanding between CEPOL and ENFSI, signed in November 2009, will hopefully offer a basis for intensified collaboration.

The information below is an expansion on the background, history and operation of ENFSI.

History

In 1992 the directors of Western European governmental forensic laboratories agreed that they should hold regular meetings to discuss topics of mutual interest. At the first meeting in 1993 in Rijswijk (The Netherlands) 11 interested laboratories were present to consider the establishing of a Network. It was agreed that membership of ENFSI would be open to forensic laboratories from the whole of Europe without limitations of the number of laboratories from each country. The formal Founding Meeting took place on October 20, 1995 and is considered to be the official birthday of ENFSI. Here the founders of ENFSI signed the Memorandum of Understanding, governing the operation of the Network, the first regular Board was elected and the logo was introduced.

At the Annual Meeting 1999 in Moscow, the membership accepted the first ENFSI constitution. In that same year the ENFSI website www.enfsi.eu was launched.

After a special workshop discussing the future of ENFSI, the membership approved a new constitution in 2002. The main changes were the introduction of a member's fee, the transition of a network of individual directors into an institutional network and the establishing of a permanent Secretariat, financed from the member's fees. An important milestone was achieved in 2009: the EU recognised ENFSI as a so-called monopolist i.e. it is considered to be the sole voice of the forensic science community in Europe.



Aims

The aim of ENFSI is laid down in its constitution: *“to ensure that the quality of development and delivery of forensic science throughout Europe is at the forefront of the world”*. This is a high level ambition and requires substantial efforts to be achieved.

The aim shall be achieved through membership meetings, expert meetings, open forensic science meetings as well as the work of the Board, Standing Committees and Expert Working Groups. Further, it will:

- Encourage all ENFSI laboratories to comply with best practice and international standards for quality and competence assurance
- Expand the membership throughout Europe while maintaining the development and credibility of ENFSI
- Strengthen and consolidate ENFSI
- Establish and maintain working relationships with other relevant organisations all over the world

Structure

ENFSI is governed by a five member Board, elected for a three-year term by the membership from the directors of its member-institutes. The Secretariat, located at the Netherlands Forensic Institute in The Hague, supports the Board members in their duties. Three Standing Committees on Quality & Competences, Research & Development and Education & Training respectively act as the strategic advisors to the ENFSI-entities as well as to the ENFSI member-institutes on their specific expertises in a broad sense. The 16 Expert Working Groups (see Table 1) are the backbone of ENFSI in terms of the scientific knowledge and interests.

The relations between the ENFSI-entities are summarised in the organisation chart

ENFSI Organisation Chart

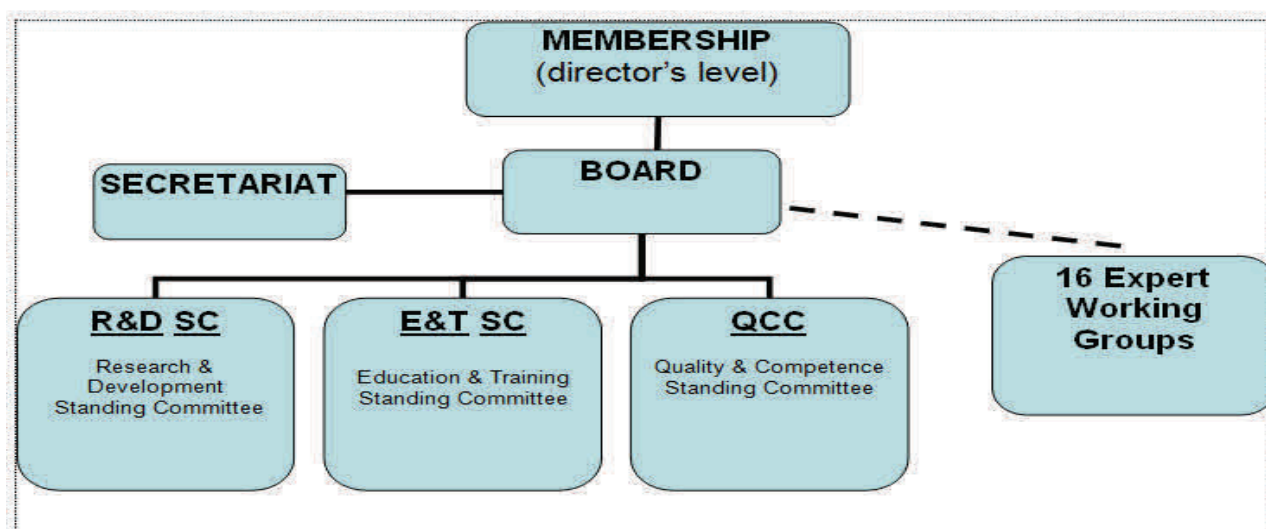


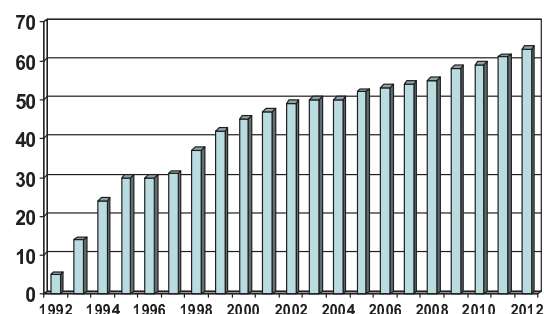
Table 1 – ENFSI Expert Working Groups

1. Digital Imaging
2. DNA
3. Documents
4. Drugs
5. Explosives
6. Textile & Hair
7. Fingerprints
8. Firearms & Gunshot Residues
9. Fire & Explosion Investigation
10. Forensic Information Technology
11. Forensic Speech & Audio Analysis
12. Handwriting
13. Marks
14. Paint & Glass
15. Road Accident Analysis
16. Scene of Crime

Membership

ENFSI is a dynamic expanding organisation that welcomes new members that can meet the ENFSI eligibility criteria. The number of members has rapidly increased over the years from 11 forensic laboratories in 1993 to 63 laboratories from 36 countries today. The number of languages spoken within the ENFSI community is 24 which is sometimes a barrier in the communication. The chosen working language is English.

The membership includes governmental as well as non-governmental laboratories. Also the Forensic Faculties of the universities of Glasgow, Istanbul and Lausanne are members of ENFSI.

Table 2 – Growth of Membership

The member-laboratories are geographically spread right across Europe and include all the (candidate-)countries of the European Union. The map displays the locations of the ENFSI laboratories.



Forensic laboratories can join ENFSI if they fulfil a number of eligibility criteria. ENFSI members should cover a broad area of forensic expertise, being accredited (ISO17025) and employ at least 25 experts. Forensic laboratories that are not ENFSI members can, with some restrictions, participate in the activities of the Expert Working Groups.

Activities

Almost all ENFSI activities are science driven; science includes quality assurance issues. The exception is the Annual Business Meeting – traditionally held in May – where the directors of the ENFSI member-institutes meet. Typical topics here are the reporting (past year) and planning (next year) of ENFSI activities, approval of the annual budget, election of new Board members, amending of by-laws and selection of meeting venues.

The abovementioned Standing Committees (Quality & Competences, R&D and E&T) are managed by a Steering Committee. Apart from the regular activities, they organise each year a meeting with their liaison persons in each member-laboratory and in each Expert Working Groups. Topical issues are discussed, problems are identified and actions are agreed. The annual survey organised by the Standing Committees on Quality & Competences deserves a special mention. It is carried out amongst the membership and tracks the quality assurance status of the individual member-institutes. The survey is always a milestone and gives the ENFSI Board excellent data on the improving quality of member institutes. Each year the 16 Expert Working Groups organise a scientific meeting for their (associate) members; guests from outside the ENFSI community are regularly invited to participate. Other important activities of the Expert Working Groups are organising Proficiency Tests and Collaborative Exercises, publishing Best Practice Manuals, discussing field-specific quality assurance problems, setting up research projects and organising specialised workshops.

On top of these meetings, ENFSI organises additionally so-called ‘One day, One issue Seminars’ (OOS). These are open meetings dedicated to special topics for a limited number of participants. Examples of OOS-topics in the past are the uses and benefits of laboratory information management systems, the “*Report on the status of forensic science*” by the National Academy of Sciences (USA) and the EU Funding possibilities.

Finally, the Triennial EAFS Conferences should be mentioned: Every 3 years, since 1997 a scientific conference is organised under the patronage of ENFSI. Following a bidding process, the ENFSI membership chooses one of its institutes to host EAFS, the largest conference on forensic science in Europe. EAFS2012 had been held in August 2012 in The Hague (visit www.eafs2012.eu for more information). This conference is not confined to ENFSI members and welcomes representatives of law enforcement agencies, universities, laboratories, policy makers, etc. from all continents.

External Relations

ENFSI has contacts with a lot of relevant organisations in Europe as well as the rest of the world. Various domains can be distinguished.

- ENFSI is a founding member of the International Forensic Strategic Alliance (IFSA). This is the global network of (ENFSI-like) regional forensic networks in the continents. Besides ENFSI, it currently consists of the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD), the Senior Managers Australian and New Zealand Forensic Laboratories (SMANZFL), the Academia

Iberoamericana de Criminalística y Estudios Forenses (AICEF), the Asian Forensic Sciences Network (AFSN) and the Southern Africa Regional Forensic Science Network (SARFS). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has observer status.

- Quality assurance is one of the top priorities for ENFSI. For this reason ENFSI is a member of the International Laboratory Accreditation Organisation (ILAC). Furthermore, ENFSI has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Cooperation of Accreditation (EA) which has led to a close and active collaboration on forensic quality assurance topics. Also contacts are maintained with the Bureau International Poids et Mesures (BIPM)
- The main external focus of ENFSI is the European Union. Forensic institutes have two roots: 1) the natural sciences (chemistry, biology, physics, etc.) and 2) justice / law enforcement. This is reflected in the EU-contacts that ENFSI has in Brussels: on one hand DG Enterprise, DG Research & Innovation, DG Enlargement, etc. and on the other hand DG Home Affairs and DG Justice. Furthermore, ENFSI has regular contacts with Europol, Eurojust and of course CEPOL.

The current ENFSI Board



From left to right: Burhanettin Cihangiroglu (Turkey – Member), Torsten Ahlhorn (Germany – Member), Pawel Rybicki (Poland – Chairman), Üllar Lanno (Estonia – Chairman designate) and Lourdes Puigbar-raca (Spain – Member)