EARTO Position Paper on the Future EU Governance for Technology Infrastructures

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KEY MESSAGES

✓ RTOs are the primary operators, investors, and innovators within the European TIs' ecosystem and must be fully represented in the governance of the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures (the 'TI Forum').

✓ EARTO supports the establishment of a dedicated EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures as foreseen in the European Strategy on RTIs (September 2025) and calls for its governance to be purpose-fit, inclusive and operational from early 2027 onwards to oversee the development of the pilots launched.

✓ EARTO analyses three governance scenarios — an ESFRI-inspired Forum, a model inspired by EU partnerships based on an MoU (currently called co-programmed), and a light advisory network — and recommends a phased, pragmatic approach: launch with a credible advisory structure and build towards a full Forum with an investment mandate.

✓ Cross-cutting governance principles must include a multi-stakeholder representation (RTOs, industry, Member States, European Commission), a TI-specific mandate clearly distinct from ESFRI, sectoral thematic working groups, and a permanent secretariat.

1. Introduction

As defined by the European Commission Expert Group on TIs, Technology Infrastructures (TIs) are physical or virtual facilities, equipment, capabilities and associated services that enable companies and public actors to test, validate, demonstrate, prototype and scale up new technologies under close-to-market or application-oriented conditions. Examples include pilot lines, testbeds, demonstration environments, regulatory sandboxes, living labs, digital testing facilities, and small-scale manufacturing infrastructures.

Research and Technology Infrastructures (RTIs), encompassing both Research Infrastructures (RIs) and Technology Infrastructures (TIs), are strategic assets at the heart of Europe's innovation and competitiveness agenda. The European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) has provided a long-standing and well-regarded governance framework for RIs. There is no equivalent pan-European body for TIs. While there is some support from European research and innovation actors to develop pilot facilities to demonstrate and scale-up innovative products or services at European level, efforts are not interconnected and lack a strategic direction to involve key industrial sectors. Comprehensive and effective support for TIs should coordinate relevant future and existing initiatives under a governance framework of technology infrastructures (TIs) at European level. This framework must enable Member States, the private sector and hosting organisations to focus investments effectively and maintain a long-term strategy aligned with industry needs, particularly for testing and development capabilities essential for innovation.

The European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures (RTIs), anchored in the EU Competitiveness Compass and the European Innovation Act, explicitly calls for the establishment of an EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures to coordinate national and European strategies, promote shared access, develop investment roadmaps and fill the structural gap that has long impeded the full exploitation of European TI potential.

EARTO, the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs), representing over 350 RTOs from more than 32 countries and more than 228,000 highly-skilled researchers and engineers, very much welcomes this initiative. RTOs are not merely users of TIs: they are the primary operators, investors, and innovators within European TIs' ecosystems. Their expertise spans from the development of large-scale test and validation environments to piloting green and digital transitions with industry.

This position paper presents EARTO's analysis of three possible governance scenarios for the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures, drawing on the EU funded-project RITIFI deliverable D3.1 'Governance model options for TIs at European level' (November 2024), the RTI Summit 2025 Position Paper (March 2026), the European Commission consultation on the Charter of Access for Industrial Users to RTIs (November 2025), EARTO's own response to the EC Consultation on a European Strategy for RTIs (May 2025), and relevant European Commission's policy documents. EARTO sets out the key principles (see section 3) that must underpin the governance of the Forum, regardless of the scenario chosen and recommends a phased approach that can deliver impact rapidly while building towards a more comprehensive structure.

2. Policy Context and the Case for Action

2.1. The EU Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures

The European Commission's Strategy on RTIs, published in September 2025, marks a pivotal moment for Europe's RD&I ecosystem. It is built on two pillars: one for Research Infrastructures, anchored to the ESFRI process, and a new, separate pillar for Technology Infrastructures. EARTO strongly supports this dual-pillar approach: whilst collaboration between RIs and TIs is to be encouraged and has been explored by the EU-funded RITIFI project, the governance, financing models and industrial linkages of TIs differ fundamentally from those of RIs and require tailored mechanisms.

The EU Strategy recognises that TIs, as physical or virtual user environments enabling companies (including SMEs) and RTOs to test, validate, prototype and scale up technologies, are essential for European industrial transformation. They are the critical link between scientific knowledge generated in research institutions and the deployment of innovations in the market, particularly for SMEs and scale-ups that lack in-house infrastructure. The EU Strategy calls for: a pan-European investment roadmap, improved and harmonised access conditions, a Charter of Access for industrial users, and an overarching governance body: the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures.

2.2. The Governance Gap

Despite the wealth of TIs' facilities across Europe — operated primarily by RTOs and universities active in technology fields — the policy and investment landscape remains highly fragmented. The EC study 'Policy landscape supporting Technology Infrastructures in Europe', the RITIFI governance report, and the RTI Summit 2025 Position Paper all converge on the same diagnosis: TIs are governed under different national ministries (economic affairs, innovation, research) and regional authorities, funded through incompatible instruments, and largely absent from EU-level strategic coordination, with few sectorial exceptions.

Today, Research Infrastructures benefit from strong governance: for strategy setting via ESFRI's structured road mapping and afterwards use different implementing instruments such as the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) legal framework. To the contrary, Technology Infrastructures have limited or looser EU-level mechanisms to prioritise investments, coordinate national strategies, or create shared European access. The result is duplication in some areas, critical gaps in others, and underused capacity overall — a structural weakness that undermines Europe's industrial competitiveness vis-à-vis the US and China. Besides avoiding duplication and closing investment gaps, TIs' governance should also help reduce fragmentation through common standards, interoperability and coordinated access models across Europe.

Any further governance model developed for TIs should recognise that one unique selling point of technology infrastructures is their two-way collaboration model (pull and push) with industry: 1) Industry can use them for the development of their innovation pipelines; and 2) Industry provides infrastructures with off-the-shelf technologies to develop new capabilities.

The model of the European Digital Infrastructure Consortia (EDICs), which follows the ERIC model while adding participation of industry, may offer some relevant lessons. Especially, it may be interesting to look further at how it supported coordinating contributing technology infrastructures across Member States through the Digital Decade Policy Programme Committee. In any case, it should be noted that even this governance should not be the default option to implement TIs, even if it manages well the profit-generating activities: VAT exemptions and State aid still require further clarification.

The RTI Summit 2025, held in Copenhagen under the Danish EU Presidency and bringing together for the first time the RIs and TIs ecosystems, strongly called for the EU to establish a dedicated EU-level coordination and governance mechanism for TIs, implementing the TIs Expert Group's two-layer model (horizontal and thematic), starting with a light advisory structure including Member States, the European Commission, industry and TIs' hosts.

2.3. EARTO's Role and Long-standing Engagement

EARTO members manage a wide range of complex, large-scale TIs across Europe, including multi-use research and prototype facilities, test and validation environments and small-scale manufacturing infrastructures. RTOs are uniquely positioned at the intersection of public research and industrial value chains. They operate TIs, yet their operational sustainability depends critically on access to industrial users.

RTOs are not only important stakeholders but the primary operators of many Technology Infrastructures across Europe. Supporting companies in the development, testing, validation and industrial deployment of new technologies constitutes the core mission of RTOs. Their infrastructures are already being used daily by industry and therefore represent a mature and effective mechanism for delivering European competitiveness objectives. The future TIs' governance framework should explicitly recognise and build upon this existing operational capacity.

EARTO has long advocated for a coherent EU strategy on TIs. Since 2019, EARTO has published a series of position papers, jointly with the JRC, on the implementation of an EU Strategy for Technology Infrastructures, the role of RTOs as operators of TIs, the need for dedicated EU funding instruments, and the barriers created by State Aid rules. With the adoption of the EU Strategy on RTIs, the governance question moves from the conceptual to the operational phase, and EARTO wishes to actively contribute to shaping the right framework.

With the upcoming trialogues on the new European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) and the future EU RD&I programme, FP10, it is now high time to start developing the EU governance for TIs that should be in place under the next MFFs. Piloting the new EU governance for TIs should be done by 2027 to be ready to launch work under FP10 and the new ECF from mid-2028 onwards.

3. Key Principles for the Governance of the Future EU TI Forum

Regardless of the specific governance scenario chosen, EARTO considers that the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures must be built on the following foundational principles:

3.1. TI-Specific Mandate, Distinct from ESFRI

Governance and ownership differences between RIs and TIs should be fully acknowledged. The comparison with the ESFRI model and Research Infrastructures (RIs) is useful and informative. However, it is important to recognise that the ownership and management structures of RIs and TIs often differ significantly. While Research Infrastructures are frequently owned and managed by public organisations, a substantial share of Technology Infrastructures is operated by private non-profit entities (e.g. Spanish RTOs). This distinction has important implications for governance models, funding mechanisms, investment decisions, operational flexibility and compliance requirements. The future TI governance framework should therefore draw inspiration from RI governance where appropriate, while avoiding the direct replication of governance structures designed for a fundamentally different institutional context.

The Forum must have a mandate clearly tailored to the specificities of Technology Infrastructures in their different forms, ranging from accessible assets to research service providers: their industrial orientation, shorter technology cycles, market-access function, geographical jurisdiction and multi-ministerial governance at a national or regional level. The Forum should not be a mere sub-body of ESFRI, but a distinct governance entity with its own processes and stakeholder community. At the same time, mechanisms for coordination, synergy and collaboration with ESFRI must be established, given the continuum between RIs and TIs and the growing number of facilities that serve both communities. Participation in an infrastructure in ESFRI and the TI Forum should not be mutually exclusive.

3.2. Inclusive Multi-Stakeholder Representation

The Forum must bring together the four key constituencies: TI operators (primarily RTOs), industrial users (large industry and SMEs), Member States' national authorities (covering research, innovation, industry and economic affairs ministries) and the European Commission (notably DG CLIMA, DG CNECT, DG ENER, DG ENV, DG DEFIS, DG GROW, DG RTD, and DG SANTE): all DGs that will link FP10 and ECF Policy Windows. Each constituency brings an indispensable perspective: investment roadmaps, access models and prioritisation decisions will only be credible if they combine policy direction, industrial demand and the operational intelligence of those who run and use the infrastructures. RTOs contribute operational expertise and strategic foresight; industry defines the demand and validates priorities; regional and national authorities align funding frameworks, and the European Commission ensures policy coherence and EU-level investment leverage for national, regional, as well as (in meaningful cases) private investment.

It will also be important to have proportionate participation mechanisms to ensure that smaller RTOs can participate effectively. For example, remote participation, rotating representation and representation through RTO networks could help avoid governance being dominated by a limited number of larger actors.

EARTO strongly warns against governance models that are limited to Member States (incl. EEA countries) and the European Commission only. TIs' governance without a direct voice for operators and users would replicate the disconnect that currently undermines European TIs' policy, where facilities are underused because the Forum is not connected to those who operate them and those who need them. A fit-for-purpose governance model should also include a feedback process with ESFRI, in order to avoid duplicating efforts.

In addition, many Technology Infrastructures in Europe have emerged through long-term regional innovation investments and are deeply connected to local industrial ecosystems. Aligning the European TI strategy with regional innovation priorities would strengthen implementation capacity, improve industrial uptake and reinforce multilevel governance across Europe. Accordingly, integration with regional innovation ecosystems and Regional Smart Specialisation strategies (RIS3) should also be on the TI Forum's agenda.

3.3. Sectoral Thematic Structure

A single horizontal governance body cannot adequately address the diversity of TI ecosystems across sectors. The TI Forum must be structured around sectoral thematic working groups or thematic platforms covering key industrial and technology domains: advanced manufacturing and characterisation across dimensions and Industry 4.0; green hydrogen and clean energy; digital and AI testing; agrifood technologies; recycling, circularity and sustainability; health and biomedical technologies; aerospace and mobility; quantum; AI, energy technologies, as well as further critical technology areas aligned with the EU Competitiveness Compass. These thematic groups should develop sector-specific investment roadmaps and feed concrete priorities to the high-level governance body. Such thematic groups could, for example, be attached/be sub-groups under the future EU RD&I partnerships, as has been done so far to develop the RTIs agenda for aeronautics or for the development of the pilot lines in semiconductors.

The Forum should include a bottom-up mechanism through which TIs' operators and industry can identify emerging technologies and infrastructure needs that do not yet fit within the (at that moment) pre-existing thematic Areas. This would help keep the governance model responsive to rapidly evolving technology needs.

3.4. A Permanent Secretariat with Operational Capacity

The TI Forum must be supported by a dedicated, permanent secretariat. Experience from ESFRI, the Joint Undertakings and the co-programmed European Partnerships shows that governance bodies without operational secretariats are struggling to deliver long-term continuity for their respective activities, such as developing roadmaps, managing stakeholder processes or engaging with the Commission's policy cycle. The secretariat should be capable of:

- establishing common criteria for definitions, facilitating technical discussions;
- supporting the work of the TI Forum
- providing analytical support, also by maintaining a live European TI mapping and monitoring tool;
- establishing priorities for investments by coordinating priority setting, preparing roadmaps and strategic agendas;
- collaborating with an array of industries to create sector-specific roadmaps to absorb the needs of industries for future tech development and scaling via already existing industrial and existing EU RD&I partnerships;
- facilitating access for industrial companies/SME/startups;
- orchestrating the coordination with ESFRI, as well as Member States by liaising with national mirror groups.

The TI secretariat could be funded through a Coordination and Support Action (CSA) in the early phase and supported by in-kind contributions from committed industry and TI operators. Additionally, the secretariat must seek the development and deployment of added-value services, mostly to the TIs, beyond the funding and strategic recommendations. The delivery of these services must reflect the governance scenario and its possible long-term transition.

3.5. Links to Funding and Investment Instruments

Public investment in TIs should be considered a strategic competitiveness policy: strong links between the future TI governance framework and European and national investment instruments will be needed. Technology Infrastructures generate positive externalities that benefit entire industrial ecosystems. Public investments supporting the creation, maintenance, upgrading and expansion of TIs should be regarded as strategic investments in European competitiveness, industrial resilience and technological sovereignty. A stable and coordinated multi-level funding framework involving regional, national and European authorities will be essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of Europe's TI landscape.

In this context, the TI Forum should aim to connect user needs with European technology infrastructure capabilities, promote coordinated access to existing TIs, and identify gaps and investment priorities to strengthen Europe's TI ecosystem. Its governance architecture must therefore create explicit linkages to the EU Framework Programme (notably the proposed RTIs programme under FP10), the new European Competitiveness Fund and its 4 Policy Windows, as well as national co-investment instruments, including via the upcoming National and Regional Partnership Plans (RNPPs, under MFF Heading I). The TI Forum should be able to advise on funding priorities based on industry needs, validate investment roadmaps for EU funding instruments, and inform EU policies.

Investment planning could also recognise that long-term operational capabilities (staff, quality management, digital infrastructure and continuous upgrades) are essential components of sustainable TIs. Without these linkages, the TI Forum risks becoming a talking shop with no influence on actual infrastructure investment decisions. TIs' funding needs and models will be different depending on the life cycle moment in which the needed TI sits, as well as depending on its activities. Funding needs could range from initial CAPEX, OPEX, updates, maintenance costs for supporting funding to boost SMEs' access, etc. It must be also recognised the need to ensure accessibility of the future TIs' investment instruments for smaller TI operators. Funding conditions, minimum investment sizes or co-financing requirements should not unintentionally favour only large-scale infrastructures.

The governance architecture of the TI Forum must be designed to support infrastructure in full compliance with EU State Aid rules from the outset. This requires a clear operational and accounting separation between economic and non-economic TIs' activities and transparent full-cost accounting frameworks for TI services accessed under EU-supported programmes.

Furthermore, a common impact assessment framework should be promoted by the TI Forum. The future TIs' governance framework should support the development of a common European methodology to assess the impact of Technology Infrastructures. Beyond measuring infrastructure capacity or investment volumes, indicators should capture industrial uptake, SME participation, technology transfer outcomes, new products and services enabled, contribution to strategic value chains and socio-economic impacts. A common impact framework would strengthen evidence-based policymaking and help demonstrate the return on public investment in TIs.

3.6. Open and Fair Access Principles

The commercially sensitive nature of many TI activities should be acknowledged: industry may request transparent and non-discriminatory access to infrastructures without supporting openness of the resulting data, intellectual property or know-how. TIs have to offer open and fair access where appropriate, combined with adequate protection of commercially sensitive and strategically important knowledge. From an EU perspective, this distinction is also important in the context of competitiveness and technological sovereignty.

In this context, the TI Forum is expected to promote the principles set out in the Charter of Access for Industrial Users to Research & Technology Infrastructures, including fair, transparent and non-discriminatory access for industry, particularly SMEs and start-ups. The governance architecture must ensure that access policies developed by the Forum are effectively cascaded to individual TI operators and reflected in their access frameworks. The TI Forum should also ensure alignment with the broader Open Science and Open Innovation agenda, while respecting the IP-sensitive nature of much TI use. Any requirements on access to TIs must reflect the different operating modes of those infrastructures, ranging from TIs that can only be accessed through contract research under operator control to TIs that can transfer user rights.

To improve access, we urge demand-side support instruments to address affordability barriers for SMEs and start-ups without undermining the obligations operator's cost-recovery obligations. These could include:

- Facilitate access instruments regardless of the MS where the TI is located,
- Harmonised clauses in contracts: access conditions, IP management, data access, dual-use, etc.
- Access vouchers,
- Enhanced SME co-financing rates under FP10 and ECF instruments,

- Exceptions to geographic (i.e. local or regional) origin of SMEs when applying to trans-national access and,
- Indirect funding mechanisms.

The TI Forum's role is not to lower cost-recovery standards, but to support the development of funding models that make full-cost access viable for underserved users.

4. Three Governance Scenarios for the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures

Drawing on the RITIFI D3.1 analysis, three distinct governance models have been identified for the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures. These are not mutually exclusive end-states but represent different levels of ambition, formality and institutional weight. EARTO analyses each scenario below before presenting its recommended approach. The scenarios presented can transition from one to the other, and each scenario has different phases.

4.1. Scenario A — Full-Fledged Technology Infrastructures Forum Inspired by ESFRI

This scenario reflects the highest level of ambition. It establishes a stand-alone, legally underpinned governance body — the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures — with its own high-level strategic board, working-level coordination board, thematic circles and a permanent secretariat. The model is inspired by the ESFRI Forum for Research Infrastructures and adapts it to the specific requirements of TIs, most notably by ensuring that industry and TI operators are full members of the governance bodies rather than merely consultative parties.

Governance Architecture

- **TI High-Level Strategic Board**: Nominated high-level industry representatives, DDG-level Member State officials (from ministries of economic affairs, industrial policy and/or innovation) and DDGs from relevant European Commission DGs (ENER, ENV, i.e. DGs that lead in ECF 4 Policy Windows & FP10 management). Meets annually to endorse the TI Roadmap, monitor progress and engage with emerging policy initiatives.
- **TI Coordination Board**: Representatives from industry, TI operators, European Partnerships and national ministries, regional or funding agencies beyond the research remit at the technical level, organised around TI thematic groups. Produces the TI Roadmap or investment snapshot. Meets more frequently (quarterly) and does the substantive technical and strategic work.
- **TI Thematic Groups**: Sector-specific configurations of active TI operators, industry and Member State national administrations. Each group feeds into the Coordination Board and develops sector roadmaps.
- **Permanent Secretariat**: Supported at first by a CSA, with long-term transition towards financial sustainability thanks to permanent funding from Member States, committed industry and the EU, with detached colleagues from committed industry and TI operators who liaise with the most relevant DGs of the European Commission.

Key Features

- Provides funding and investment directionality, not just coordination.
- Common decisions on funding priorities taken jointly by Member States — including representatives from finance, economy and competitiveness ministries — and industry to constantly push the boundaries of technology.
- EU-level involvement can be modulated per thematic group depending on the focus area, including representation of EU public-private partnerships or Joint Undertakings.
- Legal form: could be set up as a formal advisory group of the European Commission (art. 29 of the FP Regulation) or as a dedicated body under the FP10 RTIs programme.

EARTO Assessment

Scenario A is the most transformative option and would provide the TI ecosystem with the strategic weight and investment leverage it currently lacks. It would place TI governance on an equal footing to RI governance via ESFRI. However, it requires significant political buy-in from Member States and the European Commission and will take time to negotiate and operationalise. The risk is that if launched without adequate preparation, it becomes a bureaucratic body with high transaction costs but limited output. EARTO therefore sees this scenario as the ideal end-state, but not necessarily the most appropriate starting configuration.

4.2. Scenario B — EU Partnership Model based on MoU

This scenario is inspired by the governance architecture of co-programmed European Partnerships (such as ADR — AI, Data and Robotics, or Built4EU). It establishes a public-private partnership model based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between committed industry and TI operators, the European Union and

Member States. The primary objective is not to distribute EU funding directly, but to provide structured strategic advice to the European Commission and Member States on needed capital investments in TIs, developed through close collaboration between operators and industrial users.

Governance Architecture

- **General Assembly**: The highest decision-making body. Members are TI operators and committed industry. The European Commission participates as an observer. Member States are represented by representatives from economic affairs or industry departments. The General Assembly adopts the advice prepared by the secretariat, notably regarding the investment roadmap.
- **Secretariat**: Supported by a CSA, for the early phases organised as an AISBL (association internationale sans but lucratif lucrative) for its legal form (e.g. CEN-CENELEC including Member States and European Commission in its Boards). Consists of detached colleagues from committed industry and TI operators, or directly hired by the AISBL. Organises thematic task forces on specific investment questions.
- **Membership**: Committed industry acquires membership through a fee, gaining influence over investment priorities. TI operators gain membership by offering services to the European industry. No fee for non-profit TI operators.
- **Ecosystem & International Advisory Board**: External experts from EU public-private partnerships, appointed by the secretariat in collaboration with the most active members, to connect with the different infrastructure or thematic investment initiatives. This Advisory Board should include international external experts from leading non-European nations to bring a global benchmarking perspective.

Key Features

- Relies on industry and operator ownership, with the public sector in an observer/facilitation role.
- More flexible and less dependent on Member States' political processes.
- Strongly industry-driven; able to respond rapidly to emerging technology needs: The governance model should remain sufficiently flexible to accommodate sectors with different innovation pathways while maintaining a strong industrial orientation
- Can evolve into Scenario A as political commitment grows.

EARTO Assessment

Scenario B is an attractive model for generating a credible, industry-anchored strategic agenda for TIs. The co-programmed partnership architecture based on an MoU is already well-understood by Commission services and industrial stakeholders and has a track record of generating impactful roadmaps. However, EARTO notes a risk that without stronger public-sector co-governance, the resulting agenda may not be sufficiently aligned with national investment cycles or with the political priorities of Member States that have significantly different TI landscapes. Member States must be genuinely co-owners, not mere observers, if the TI Forum is to mobilise national investments. EARTO would support this model if it is structured to ensure meaningful Member State co-governance beyond observer status.

4.3. Scenario C — Light Advisory Network (JEF-IPCEI Model)

This scenario is the lightest governance option. Inspired by the Joint European Forum for Important Projects of Common European Interest (JEF-IPCEI), it establishes an agile advisory mechanism that provides directional input to policy initiatives without a formal legal structure. The model relies on two circles — a high-level political circle and a technical-level implementation circle — connected by a lean secretariat. No legal form is foreseen in this scenario.

Governance Architecture

- **High-Level Board**: High representatives from Member States from economic affairs or industry ministries and from Commission's DGs. Approves priorities developed by the technical circle and oversees its work.
- **Technical-Level Groups**: Representatives from TIs, industry, European Partnerships (from the FP) and national ministries, regional or funding agencies. Can have thematic sub-configurations by technology area. Develops investment needs analyses and feeds advice upwards.
- **Secretariat**: Hosted by an MS on a rotating basis or attached to one of the main TI operators or to the most involved EU Partnership and can rotate on a programmed basis. Supported by a CSA or expert group and by in-kind contributions of TI operators or committed industry. The European Commission (e.g. DG GROW or DG JRC) can be formally part of or hosts the secretariat.

Key Features

- Lightest governance model; fastest to launch.
- No formal legal structure; purely advisory.

- Provides input to relevant and emerging policy initiatives; useful as a plug-in mechanism for different Commission DGs.
- Intended as a transitional starting point that can evolve into Scenario B or A.

EARTO Assessment

Scenario C offers the pragmatic advantage of speed: it could be operational within 12–18 months without requiring lengthy treaty-based negotiations or legal establishment procedures. The JEF-IPCEI model has demonstrated the value of agile advisory mechanisms in mobilising politically complex cross-border investment processes. However, EARTO notes that purely advisory bodies without a formal mandate, stable funding and investment-connected roadmapping capacity risk becoming inconsequential over time. A Scenario C body would be valuable as a launch configuration only if there is a clear and credible roadmap to transition towards Scenario B or A within a defined timeframe.

5. Comparative Overview of Governance Scenarios

The table below summarises the three scenarios across key governance dimensions and sets out EARTO's recommended path:

Criterion	Scenario A ESFRI-Inspired Forum	Scenario B MoU-based Partnership	Scenario C Advisory Network (JEF-IPCEI model)	EARTO Recommended Path
Legal Form	Formal advisory group / FP body	AISBL / MoU-based partnership	No legal form	Phased: start C, evolve to A
Industry Role	Full member, strategic board	Full member, General Assembly	Technical Group	Full member from day 1
RTO/Operator Role	Full member, Coordination Board	Full member (no fee)	Technical Group	Full member, co-owner
Member State Role	High-level board members	Observers + economic departments	High-level Board	Co-governors, not observers
EC Role	Board + secretariat	Observer + secretariat	Secretariat (JRC)	Active partner
Secretariat	Permanent, dedicated	CSA + AISBL	expert group + rotating host	Permanent from the outset
Investment Mandate	Yes — roadmap + funding advice	Yes — roadmap + capital advice	Advisory only	Mandatory from Phase 2
Launch Timeline	3–5 years	2–3 years	12–18 months	12–18 months (Phase 1)
Main Drawback	Slow to negotiate; bureaucratic	Weak MS buy-in, if MS not properly represented	Purely advisory; low impact risk	Manage transition carefully

6. EARTO's Recommended Approach: A Phased Path to a Full Forum

EARTO recommends a phased approach to establishing the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures, combining the agility of Scenario C with a clear and binding commitment to evolve towards the full governance architecture of Scenario A.

This approach is based on three key insights from the background analysis:

- **Speed of launch matters**: The publication of the EU Strategy on RTIs and the preparation of FP10 create a time-limited opportunity to turn strategic ambition into concrete European action. A governance body that takes five years to establish will come too late to support the Strategy's implementation and provide timely input into the development of FP10.
- **Credibility requires operator and industry ownership from day one**: even a light governance structure must give RTOs and industrial users a formal, decision-influencing role. An advisory circle that only includes Member States and the Commission will not be taken seriously by the TI operator community.
- **Evolution must be legally embedded from the start**: EARTO recommends that the Phase 1 body (Scenario C-inspired) include a sunset clause and transition protocol specifying a maximum 36-month transition to a Phase 2 body (Scenario B or A), with clear milestones.

Phase 1 (End 2026–2027): Launch of the TI Advisory Coordination Mechanism

- **Establish a lean TI Advisory Coordination Mechanism (or 'EU TI Forum – Preparatory Phase') by early 2027 at the latest**.
- **Governance**: High-level Board (Member States + EC) + Technical groups (TI operators including RTOs, industry, relevant EU Partnerships).
- **Secretariat**: CSA-funded, hosted by a leading RTO network or TI operator consortium with EC participation.
- **Mandate**: Develop the first pan-European TI investment snapshot; establish a live European TI mapping tool; develop sector-specific roadmaps for two or three priority areas aligned with the EU Competitiveness Compass (e.g. green hydrogen, AI testing, advanced manufacturing, fusion for energy), alternatively, inspired by the most successful running pilots under Horizon Europe 2021-27.
- **Output**: A validated European TI Investment Snapshot by the end of 2027, feeding into FP10 programme preparation.
- **Prepare a swift national implementation for the transition to a full TI Forum, ensuring that the Forum will be well-established throughout the EU once it is up and running.**

Phase 2 (2028–2030): Transition to the full EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures

- **Based on lessons learned in Phase 1, transition to a governance model by 2028, with full operationalisation by 2030**.
- **Establish the permanent secretariat** with adequate staffing.
- **Formalise thematic circles** for all key technology domains.
- **Identify cross-sector challenges** (e.g. interoperability, access models or shared services) that are common across different TI domains.
- **Establish the formal link to FP10 RTIs programme** and its investment decisions.
- **Ensure coordination with ESFRI** through a light dedicated RI-TI Interface mechanism, as a forum or key event may also be envisioned for the interaction of RIs and TIs governances at EU level, as well as for their networking and global positioning

7. EARTO's Key Recommendations to the European Commission and Member States

EARTO RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Launch the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures – Preparatory Phase immediately, targeting operational launch by early 2027 at the latest, as a Scenario C-type advisory mechanism with a binding transition to a full Forum by 2028.

2. Establish a permanent, CSA-funded secretariat from the outset, with capacity to develop investment roadmaps, maintain a European TI mapping tool and support thematic working groups.

3. Define the Forum's mandate as investment-linked from Phase 2 onwards, with a formal role in advising on FP10 RTIs programme & European Competitiveness Fund's priorities and national co-investment frameworks, including via the NRPPs (i.e. to be introduced in their upcoming template).

4. Establish clear interfaces between the Forum and ESFRI to exploit synergies while preserving the TI-specific mandate and governance.

5. Integrate the Charter of Access for Industrial Users to RTIs into the TI Forum's mandate, making access policy development a core Forum activity whilst taking into account the different modes of access that TIs can provide

6. Ensure that the TI Forum's thematic groups are aligned with the EU Competitiveness Compass and the European Competitiveness Fund's priorities to ensure TI governance is embedded in the EU industrial strategy.

7. Involve EARTO and its members, and other key TIs' owners, actively in the design and governance of the Forum: as the primary operator community for European TIs for a long time, RTOs must be co-architects of the Forum, in order to make use of their experience in an optimal way.

8. Conclusion

The publication of the EU Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures opens a historic window to finally give Technology Infrastructures the governance, strategic coordination and investment framework they need and deserve. EARTO warmly welcomes this development and stands ready to play its full role — as operator, innovator, strategic advisor and active member of any governance body established under this Strategy.

The three governance scenarios analysed in this paper — an ESFRI-inspired full Forum, a European Partnership model based on MoU, and a light advisory network — each have strengths and limitations. EARTO recommends a pragmatic, phased approach that launches rapidly with a credible, multi-stakeholder advisory structure and transitions within 36 months to a fully-fledged governance body with an investment mandate.

What matters most is that the TI Forum is built from the start on the right principles: TI-specific mandate, genuine multi-stakeholder co-governance, sectoral thematic structure, a permanent secretariat and explicit linkages to investment instruments. The TI Forum must connect industrial needs and priorities, access and funding in an agile manner as TIs respond to changing demand needs. Without these foundations, any Forum risks being captured by a single constituency, becoming a bureaucratic reporting exercise, or losing the trust and engagement of the TI operator community that is essential to its success.

EARTO calls on the European Commission and Member States to move swiftly and decisively to establish the EU Forum on Technology Infrastructures, and to do so in genuine partnership with RTOs, industry and the broader TI ecosystem. Europe's industrial competitiveness — and its ability to lead in the critical technologies of tomorrow — depends on it. The time to act is now.

Key Background Documents

- Charter of Access for Industrial Users to Research & Technology Infrastructures (28 July 2026)
- EARTO Response to the EC Consultation on a European Strategy on RTIs (16 May 2025)
- EARTO Press Release: A Milestone for Europe's Industrial Competitiveness – The New EU Strategy on RTIs (18 September 2025)
- EC Expert Group on TIs: Towards a European Policy for Technology Infrastructures: Building Bridges to Competitiveness (February 2025)
- EC Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures (September 2025)
- RITIFI Deliverable D3.1: Governance model options for TIs at European level (November 2024) — Horizon-INFRA-2022-DEV-01-02, Grant Agreement 101095267
- RTI Summit 2025 Position Paper: Key recommendations for the implementation of the European strategy on RTIs (2026) — GTS / DTI / RITIFI
- Technopolis Group for DG RTD: Policy landscape supporting Technology Infrastructures in Europe – Final Report (September 2024)
- VTT - Island of Innovation: A Comparative Reflection on Industrial Policy, Access to Talent and Technology Sovereignty (2026)