Progress in experimental particle physics today depends heavily upon the availability of very high interaction energies. This is most easily achieved, in particular for electrons, by allowing beams of accelerated particles to collide. This principle has already been used on a number of occasions for electrons and in the case of the CERN Intersecting Storage Rings - the biggest facility of this kind - for protons. Most of the major new machines under construction or at the proposal stage also envisage storage rings in which head-on collisions between various particles can take place.

In June 1975 the ESF decided to prepare itself to give advice concerning the two rather similar European proposals for electron positron colliding beam accelerators which had been put forward (EPIC in the UK and PETRA in the Fed. Rep. of Germany). A small group of experts was selected and a mandate for this group was prepared which included the task of choosing, on scientific and technical grounds, the better of the two proposals. The group was also to consider a similar US proposal (PEP) with a view to considering the question of whether one single Euro-American facility might suffice (assuming agreement could be achieved with the US).

This ESF initiative, although among the first taken by the Foundation, proved to be too late. By the turn of the year there was already a German decision to proceed with the PETRA project in Hamburg. However, it was also apparent that the new facility would be open to exploitation by the whole European community to an extent which no other national machine had been so far. The Executive Council therefore decided to abandon the proposed study and to dissolve the group of experts.

The discussions and experiences referred to above led the Foundation to consider its relations with the European Committee for Future Accelerators (ECFA) which is an informal organization for the long-term planning of European high-energy physics facilities. It also aims to ensure the effective exploitation of large existing or planned accelerators: in this respect it is advisory to CERN, and it has also been instrumental in making PETRA open to the European scientific community as a whole. Following discussions between ECFA and the ESF, an agreement has been reached according to which advice from ECFA can be given to the ESF on request, concerning elementary particle physics.

ECFA thus remains an independent scientific body, but at the same time the ESF will have access to its advice and does not need to create an additional organ for dealing with matters in the field.