The first milestone towards the establishment of a common strategy for the development of Europe’s electricity networks was set in April 2006 when the paper ‘Vision and Strategy for Europe’s Electricity Networks of the Future’ was published. In this Vision, future electricity markets and networks must provide all consumers with a highly reliable, flexible, accessible and cost-effective power supply, fully exploiting the use of both large centralized generators and smaller distributed power sources across Europe. End users will become significantly more interactive with both markets and grids; electricity will be generated by centralised and dispersed sources; and grid systems will become more inter-operable at a European level to enhance security and cost-effectiveness. This new concept of electricity networks is described as the ‘SmartGrids’ vision. It will enable a highly effective response to the rising challenges and opportunities, bringing benefits to all network users and wider stakeholders.

The European Technology Platform SmartGrids has focused its efforts on the development of this Strategic Research Agenda (SRA). It has contributions from four working groups that represent a wide range of European industrial and academic expertise. Member State governments have also provided valuable advice and comment through the Mirror group. The SRA is a reference document that consolidates the views of stakeholders on research priorities that address the key elements of the Vision document. The purpose of the SRA is to provide a resource for European and National programmes. It seeks to be non-prescriptive and strategic in nature; it is designed to encourage competitive activity; it is intended to be an inspiration for new thinking in important policy areas. The SRA proposes a framework for a future research programme which can be summarized by the following goals:

- To ensure that Europe’s electricity networks develop in such a way that enhances Europe’s competitive position while supporting environmental objectives and the commitment to sustainability.
- To capture the benefits of collaboration and co-operation in addressing challenges that are common across all Member States.
- To provide a clear framework, goals and objectives on which the research community can focus, encouraging innovative solutions where this will add value.
- To generate the momentum and support necessary to convert good ideas to adopted products and solutions.

A key principle in the development of this SRA is that grid users should be at the focus of developments. To achieve this, the work has taken an integrated approach to technical, commercial and regulatory aspects, seeking delivery of added-value solutions and services to all stakeholders and end customers. It recognizes the complex factors inherent in achieving successful technology transfer from research to deployment, and also the new dimensions created by a liberalized market and its regulatory frameworks.

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