

EUROSTARS

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New era for EUREKA

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Dear Commissioner Potocnik, colleagues, friends

It is my very great pleasure, as Chairman of EUREKA, to be here with you today.

Where the very foundation for a new frame of European support for industrial innovation will be laid.

The importance of industrial research in Europe is becoming more important every year. And not only for our politicians. Also for European industry and the service sector.

Countries like the USA, Japan, China, India and Korea are making tremendous progress in their competitiveness.

This is no longer just the result of a low-cost workforce. It is now the result of innovation.

In Lisbon in 2001, out of concern for the future wellbeing of Europe, EU prime ministers declared that Europe should become the most competitive economy in the world by 2010.

So far, the progress of member states is far from satisfactory.

Having said this, not all is bad. Publicly-funded research is well developed. Also governments are generally dedicating sufficient financial resources to basic research.

But the well-known EU paradox exists: We still cannot fully exploit these investments.

Member States and the Commission has been actively trying to act for several years. But the situation is improving as fast as we would like.

Good European Commission initiatives exist. They include the CRAFT initiative, supporting SMEs and several ERA-NET.

These have brought a new dimension to the life of public servants, enabling a rich exchange of experiences and good practice all over Europe.

EUREKA is a trusted, long established network supporting industrial innovation. EUREKA was Europe's peaceful response to President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative, better known as Star Wars.

Since its birth in 1985, Country participation in EUREKA has grown from 18 to 37 countries. The European Commission has also been a member since the beginning.

Up until today, EUREKA has supported more than 2,300 industrial research projects.

Up until today, EUREKA projects have attracted investment of more than 23 billion euro of public and private money.

And up until today, more than 12,000 partners have been involved in EUREKA projects, in of which more than 42% of participants are SMEs.

These facts demonstrate that EUREKA is a unique and valuable player today as it was 22 years ago.

With the Green Paper on the new perspectives for the European Research Area, Commissioner Potočnik, you reopened a big debate.

A debate on the role and definition of research and researchers in Europe.

As you know, EUREKA has presented its views on the ERA, and has emphasised the critical role of industry in research.

This was also a great opportunity for us all to reflect on EUREKA. Past, present and future. By coincidence, the Green Paper consultation coincided with our decision to define a new strategy for EUREKA.

My Italian colleagues during last year's Chairmanship and the current Slovenian Chair take this task very seriously.

The first priority is to reposition and reaffirm EUREKA as the number one player in industrial research. The Eurostars Programme is a first step in this direction.

Eurostars, powered by EUREKA and the European Community, will support research and development performing SMEs in executing market-oriented research in transnational projects.

22 Member States and five other EUREKA countries have committed themselves to contribute to this joint programme with an amount of 300 million euro over its six-year duration.

The Community will co-finance Eurostars with an amount of up to 100 million euro.

With Eurostars, the participating Member States go beyond the mere coordination of research programmes. They are participating actively in a voluntary integration process covering scientific, management and financial aspects.

In November 2004, the Competitiveness Council stressed the importance of SMEs for European growth and competitiveness.

The need for Member States and the Commission to enhance the effectiveness and complementarities of national and European support programmes for SMEs.

In particular, the Council encouraged the Commission to explore the possible development of a bottom-up scheme for research-performing SMEs.

The EUREKA member states are convinced that EUREKA could — and should — play an even stronger role in the future. How? By bringing currently fragmented financial and support mechanisms under one roof.

Why? To provide a single entry point to funding and support for businesses involved in industrial research.

This EUREKA ambition is also well in line with the 'Resolution on science and technology' of the

European Parliament. It calls for a more efficient and coordinated use of different funding and support tools to support R&D and innovation in Europe.

We, here, are all aware of EUREKA's assets. and success.

But being so close to industry for over 20 years means we hear about the drawbacks of EUREKA also.

Today is a celebration of what we have achieved together with our Commission colleagues, so I must not be too critical.

Nevertheless, I must mention:

Lack of synchronisation.

And lack of transparency of different national funding procedures. This has also sometimes resulted in insufficient public resources dedicated to EUREKA.

But we have learned from our critics. We have turned the negative into the positive by creating Eurostars.

Huge progress has been made.

With Eurostars, we have shown that simplification of procedures and synchronisation of national funding is possible.

The Slovenian EUREKA Chair set itself some ambitious goals.

One is to put a lot of energy into the further simplification and synchronisation of all EUREKA procedures.

I would like to thank all of my EUREKA network colleagues for their continuing support for the Chair in this endeavour.

It will not be an easy task. Progress is necessary.

But the fact that we are here today to launch this exciting joint programme called Eurostars is enough proof for me that progress is feasible.

Another of the Chair's priorities is related to communicating the results of EUREKA. I am convinced that better communication will contribute to a strengthened role for EUREKA.

To be effective and efficient we need to clearly identify our target groups and tailor our communications accordingly.

We have done this already with Eurostars and it is working.

The fact that you are all here today to witness the launch of this exciting joint programme called Eurostars shows our communication is working.

Here and now, the foundations for a new era for SME research and innovation is being laid.

I would like to thank you all for your valuable contribution in creating such a wonderful thing. I wish EUREKA and its Eurostars Programme a prosperous future.

I am firmly convinced that they will continue to benefit European SMEs and industry as a whole.

I am firmly convinced that as a result the European Research Area concept will be further strengthened and expanded to best accommodate industry needs.