

PRESS RELEASE: TANGIBLE BENEFITS OF EU RESEARCH FUNDING

Strategic workshop on supporting exploitation and dissemination of research and development (R&D) results from small- and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that took place in Brussels, 29.01.2010.

Three innovative EU funded projects held recently a joint workshop to discuss this issue. Attracting over 50 participants including European Commission officials, stakeholders and SMEs in the field of eco-innovation and construction, the workshop primarily marked the end of a two year EU funded project called ECOINNO2SME.

This seven-partner-project has sought to identify and support SMEs in the environment and eco-innovation sectors that have been involved in EU funded R&D projects, but have not been fully able to commercialise and exploit the results of the R&D that has been undertaken. Two other projects which has similar aims and objectives but focusing on different sectors, were also presented at the workshop – USEandDIFFUSE, focusing on health and ICT and PRESTO which focuses on strategic research priorities for SME associations active in the construction sector.

An estimated €30 billion in EU funds and financing alternatives are available to SMEs in Europe. A significant share of this funding is found in various research and development programmes that seek to increase Europe's competitiveness through innovation and development. However not all SMEs have been able to commercialise the results of EU funded research projects that they have participated in.

The audience profited from a wide range of success stories and best practice recommendations, all from the SME perspective. A general consensus amongst the participants was that the ability to bridge the gap between research results and market introduction was a major concern both for SMEs and the European Commission. One key message was that when it comes to exploitation of the results, the SMEs should be the main drivers as they provide the market view for the project consortium. Another key message of the SMEs was that there still exists a strong necessity for further exploitation support to facilitate commercialisation. Areas identified include high costs for securing intellectual property rights (IPR), additional funding support for demonstrators and/or proto-types as well as for reducing the bureaucratic burden.

As a mediator between SMEs and the markets, the Enterprise Europe Network provides free of charge consultancy for innovation strategies and transnational cooperation. Through the eco-innovation initiative from the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) some of these challenges and concerns raised are already being addressed such as direct funding with no intermediaries, eligibility of individual companies as beneficiaries so long as the EU added value can be shown and funding of demonstrators in new applications. Moreover the EC wants to fund pilot actions for demonstrators under its Research for the Benefits of SMEs scheme (Capacity pillar of Seventh Research Framework Programme, FP7) in the call for 2011.

In addition the EC is paying particular attention to the funding of SMEs under the current FP7 to ensure the increased participation of SMEs. Within the ten cooperation programme themes (COOP, Cooperation pillar of

FP7) of FP7 a target of at least 15 % of the EU-contribution going to SMEs has been set. The latest monitoring report of the EC, with figures from grant agreements signed before 1.10.2009 shows that within the COOP programme as a whole, 13.4 % or € 850 million of the budget has been granted to SMEs.

The outcomes and recommendations can be found under the project website of ECOINNO2SME:
<http://www.ecoinno2sme.eu/index.php5?file=31&event=110>

Contact:

Hartmut Welck, Charlotte Schlicke – ECOINNO2SME – ecoinno2sme@steinbeis-europa.de

Anna Stachowicz - USEandDIFFUSE - stachowicz@transfer.edu.pl

Eduardo Herrmann – PRESTO - herrmann@steinbeis-europa.de