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Industry wants more from EC than just awareness

Christoph Hammerschmidt
EE Times
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MUNICH, Germany — The European semiconductor industry hails the EC announcement to foster nanotechnology and electronics. But the EC measures are not fast enough and not going far enough, some criticize.

In a joint press release, industry associations SEMI and EECA-ESIA welcomed the measures announced by the EC and highlighted the industry's willingness to play an active role in the implementation of the EC plans.

European nanoelectronics research cluster Catrene said it shares the EC position that micro- and nanoelectronics are of "systemic relevance" for Europe and announced "full support of the necessary strategies".

Infineon CEO Peter Bauer also praised the EC's new cognition. Of all semiconductor manufacturers, it was Infineon that during the financial crisis had lobbied at German state and federal governments and possibly also at the EC Commission level to recognize the semiconductor industry's 'systemic relevance' and hence to subsidize at least R&D efforts. 'Systemic relevance' — that was the government's buzzword describing the importance of banks bailed out when the financial crisis was at its climax less than a year ago.

With regard to the EC statements, Bauer pointed out that he is expecting a strategic European approach to industrial

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innovation policy. At the same time he demanded concrete measures to make use of semiconductor technology in solving societal problems such as energy efficiency, combating global warming or ageing societies. In this context, he reiterated his call for a more equal playing field with the rest of the world.

A similar statement came from SEMI Europe president Heinz Kundert who focused more on the manufacturing aspect. "The EC needs to ensure that the right framework conditions are in place also for manufacturing," he said with regard to the sagging chip production activities in Europe.

While those statements were diplomatic in tone, the industry also made clear that from its perspective the matter is rather urgent. And when looked into details, not all measures dangled by the EC were seen as positive. "The EC has established a workgroup related to our problems with a time line of one year. This is too long, we need concrete measures now," explained Martin Spaet, Director of the EECA-ESIA industry association.

While the EC move goes into the right direction, there is criticism in details. For instance the state regime defines a ceiling for R&D spending. "This is not helpful for the semiconductor industry where about 20 percent of annual revenues are spent for R&D", Spaet observed. "This threshold actually would cut research and development investments."

With regard to manufacturing, Spaet said the industry is aiming at a "differentiated view" with regard to subsidies. "Semiconductor manufacturing [in Europe] makes sense by any means," he said in an interview with *EE Times*. "But it needs to be differentiated. Not every chip vendor needs its own fab, but we need Europe to enable foundry business."

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