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Increasing SME involvement in EC R&D programmes

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A new initiative, The SME Engagement Programme, aimed at getting SMEs more involved in EU funding, was launched at the European Nanoelectronics Forum 2014 in Cannes today.

Leading the initiative is Peter Connock, Chairman of Memsstar the Scottish MEMS manufacturing equipment specialist. ASML is the first large company to try out the new initiative. Intel is also taking an interest.

“We have been trying all through ENIAC to find ways to get SMEs involved, and we’ve failed dismally,” Connock told a Round Table Discussion in Cannes, “there’s a general feeling that there should be more opportunities for SMEs to get involved.”

“We feel the best way is to get SMEs connected to a large company,” added Connock, “and get into large projects which would otherwise be difficult for them. It would also be a less bureaucratic way for them to join projects and bureaucracy is sometimes difficult for SMEs.”

SMEs are defined under the initiative as companies with 250 employees or less with revenues of €50 million or less.

The way the initiative works is that interested SMEs can apply for a one page form which will transmit from an SME to a large company the way in which the SME can contribute to the large company’s technology development.

The responses will be transmitted to AENEAS which will arrange for research collaborations between SMEs and large companies in projects where the large companies see value in what the SMEs can contribute.

“SMEs are important because they are innovative and create employment but they need a short-term return on investments,” said Connock, “we want people to act as intermediaries between SMEs and large companies. We have a preliminary group of intermediaries which I’d like to expand.”

“Is it naive? Yes. Is it idealistic? Possibly. Is it worth a go? Yes,” says Connock, “we want to be a dating agency – speed dating.”