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We must keep manufacturing in Europe, says Neelie Kroes

David Manners

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"We must keep manufacturing in Europe," Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the EC, told the European Nanoelectronics Forum in Munich this morning.

Asked by EW if it's realistic for the shrunken European semiconductor industry to invest in fabs, Kroes replied: "The mood is there. The management of the big companies have mentioned to me that if they can get manufacturing back to Europe they will do it. It needs an investment climate in which it can be done."

"The European semiconductor industry is not just a large industrial segment – a 30bn euro industry – but it is highly innovative," said Kroes, "it supports innovation almost everywhere you look."

"Innovation in the semiconductor industry grew close to 9% a year for the last 50 years," added Kroes, and accounts for close to 30% of total innovation."

Kroes pointed out that ASML is an example of how Europe can win "if we get it right."

"We'll need specialized chips, powerful, easy to programme and power efficient," said Kroes, "let's make them here in Europe."

"In May we set out the challenge to make sure we have the whole electronics ecosystem here in Europe," said Kroes referring to her concept of an 'Airbus of chips'.

Kroes sees this as a co-operative initiative – not one company. "For me it is a model where we're uniting the efforts," Kroes told EW, "we need to combine." This will need new ways for industry to work together."

"Could we work differently" asked Kroes, "Could we build strategic alliances? Could we build an electronic powerhouse here in Europe? I'm sure we can. I need others to commit."

Asked by EW if ARM had a part to play in the European strategy called Horizon 2020, Kroes replied: "We all have to put our building blocks together. When we do that we get much more out of it than when it's organized on a national basis. I am quite interested in keeping the UK on board."

Research is too fragmented in Europe, said Kroes, the way ahead is a Joint Technology Initiative capable of supporting very large projects. "Investing in research means investing in productivity," said Kroes.

"We need to align our investment behind a common industrial strategy," said Kroes, adding that a budget of 80bn euros has been proposed for 2014-20 to support the strategy.

"I'm fighting like hell within the Council to get the revenues for research and innovation," Kroes told EW, "if we can't do it, then it's all over."