

Dutch Chair ends with new SME programme proposal

Roel Kramer, outgoing Chairman of the EUREKA High Level Group, reflects on the achievements of the Initiative during the Dutch Chair year 2004-2005 and sends a clear message to governments at member country and European levels of the need to improve funding and funding coordination for projects.



"When the Netherlands took over the EUREKA Chairmanship in July 2004, our programme was based on three cornerstones. The first was the completion of the programme of the Troika formed by Denmark, France and ourselves, with three issues: the streamlining of EUREKA's decision-making system, the improvement of project assessment mechanisms and the positioning of EUREKA within ERA. A second set of objectives, more specific to the Netherlands, included the deepening of EUREKA's relations with EU authorities, the improvement of funding mechanisms for our projects as well as the promotion of projects related to sustainable development. Last, but not least, the implementation of the recommendations of the Paris Ministerial Conference of June 2004 was among our key priorities for our Chair's year.

One year after, I would like to highlight a number of achievements.

"First, a giant step has been taken towards the better exploitation of the complementarities existing between EUREKA and the EU Framework Programme. This was particularly necessary in the field of SME participation in European research – a field where the European Commission has great ambitions and EUREKA a considerable experience. The Dutch Chair has therefore worked

with the European institutions to boost SME innovation by the use of Article 169 of the EU Treaty to encourage a joint national/EU programme aimed at R&D-performing SMEs, called EUROSTARS. Nineteen EUREKA countries have already committed to this approach and more will follow. I can tell that everyone is looking forward to implementing the EUROSTARS programme, given the extent of its potential impact on Europe's competitiveness.

"Second, the dialogue established at political and industry level in order to improve the performance of EUREKA has proved successful. I am thinking here of the establishment of the EUREKA Advisory Committee, whose seven members will have the important task of advising the High Level Group and the EUREKA Executive Group, for example in stimulating the most promising practices and technology areas. The Committee brings together senior advisors from industry and the research community and will undoubtedly be of great help to identify the cutting-edge technologies of tomorrow. Overall, the excellent input of industry, as demonstrated by the Resolution adopted at the EUREKA Industry Day organised in Schiphol in June 2005, is a quality resource that must be more largely exploited by EUREKA in the future.

"There is a consensus about the excellent role that EUREKA plays in contributing to the achievements of the Lisbon Council objectives"

"Another important reason for pride is the record participation of SMEs in EUREKA projects during this Chair year. Overall funding for EUREKA projects in 2004-2005 indeed showed an increase over previous years with some €1,500 million committed from public and private sources, the fourth best year in EUREKA's history. By the end of June 2005, 181 new innovative projects had been announced, with a budget of €318 million. Industrial participation was 70% and SME involvement approached 50%.

"It is striking to notice that more than half of the new innovative projects are in the areas of biotechnology,

information and communication technologies (ICT), and materials. Particular highlights include E! 3421 HIVVAC, a major project to develop an HIV vaccine with a budget of €13.4 million, and E! 3399 ART.MED on early detection of cardiovascular disease with a budget of €11.9 million.

"In addition, there are 57 newly running projects in the EUREKA Clusters, with a budget of €1,200 million of which €700 million is in the MEDEA+ micro-electronics Cluster and €270 million in the ITEA embedded software Cluster. The Dutch Chair also marked the start-up of several CELTIC telecommunications Cluster projects and the first projects in the EUROGIA energy Cluster. Three new Umbrellas were also endorsed: E! 3610 InnoFisk in aquaculture, E! 3603 ENIWEF in tribology and E! 3584 EConTec in e-content technologies.

"As we hand over the EUREKA Chair to the Czech Republic, my message goes to our successors and to the public authorities. To the latter, I would like to recall the general consensus about the excellent role that EUREKA is playing in improving innovation in Europe, and in contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon Council objectives. However, EUREKA can only play this role if and when there is adequate and effective funding available for its projects.

"As far as our successors are concerned, I think that the excellent output from the EUREKA Industry Day and the Interparliamentary Conference will form a great platform for the next 12 months. A number of milestones are going to mark this year: the implementation of the EUROSTARS programme, the EUREKA Forum, as well as the Ministerial Conference to be held in Prague next June. Having worked very closely with my Czech colleagues over the previous months, I am convinced that they are going to do an excellent job. I wish good luck to the Czech EUREKA Chair."