

European Initiative to provide Innovative Technologies to revolutionise many European High Technology Industries

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Lyon, France – 19 December 2012. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and many others have said that the key to economic growth is Innovation. It is also the key to sustainable new jobs – almost all new opportunities in the US private sector over the last 25 years have been created in companies less than five years old. Unfortunately, R&D that generates Innovation and new technologies is expensive and companies' R&D budgets have been hard hit in the cash strapped times of the current economic recession.

Recognising this, the EU set up an initiative to fast track Innovation specifically in the area of Smart Systems that can deliver significant competitive advantages across a wide range of application fields such as Life Sciences, IT & Telecoms, Agrofood, Environment and Energy. The initiative is focused on the commercial exploitation of advanced technologies, developed in the framework of European collaborative research projects, and co-ordinated by the COWIN team, who are implementing this initiative as part of the European 7th Framework Program. The Smart Systems solutions can be used almost any industrial area such as Process Control, Medical Devices, Food, Drug Discovery, Bio & Chemical Detection and Water Related.

Smart Systems was chosen because it focusses on core strengths that are widespread in Europe. "In order to compete in the global marketplace, European companies need to be able to offer solutions that are significantly better," explained Laszlo Csernak, COWIN's Project Officer. "They cannot compete on price with the emerging economies that have low labour costs so the best way to have a competitive edge is to build in intelligence to create smarter products. Usually this takes the form of advanced miniature electronics often with state of the art sensors to provide awareness of what is going on so that immediate responses can be instigated. As this is a pan-European program, we are able to bring together research groups and companies from all over Europe to contribute parts of a solution forming an interlocking jigsaw that would never happen any other way. New synergies and working relationships have been fostered between countries and companies that are flourishing with the exchange of ideas that stimulates further innovation. It is a very real example of the European Community working together and achieving incredible, tangible results that will really make a difference in terms of economic growth and jobs."

The first phase was to identify the attractive technologies developed in the course of European Collaborative projects supported by the EU with potential for economic value. Hundreds of possible ideas and projects were considered and whittled down to about 50 by COWIN. Over the past year, these have been funded and many have reached the proof of concept or prototype stage. "We are now at Phase II," said Geraldine Andrieux-Gustin, the COWIN Coordinator. "COWIN acts a Technology Matchmaker that brings together this EU-funded research and matches these new technologies to companies who can use it in their existing product roadmaps or new product lines. COWIN's portfolio now has over 50 Smart System solutions, which we call 'Gold Nuggets', that we are discussing with more than 200 companies around Europe who might be able to use them. Now that we are actively deploying this portfolio of innovations and bringing them to the market, we are seeking more SMEs who would like to benefit from this mine of new technologies. We are also actively supporting the creation and development of start-up companies that are formed specifically to use these innovative technologies."

Henri Rajbenbach, Scientific Project Officer Microsystems and Smart Systems, at the European Commission, added: "The EU is now actively engaging and supporting SMEs with the outcome of EU funded research. SMEs form a key sector that will help regenerate the EU economy through these technological breakthroughs either via existing companies or new ones specially formed. In the next Research and Innovation Framework programme, Horizon 2020, we have stripped away red tape to make it really easy to small companies to benefit – they don't need to be part of a multi-country team."

Although the COWIN team are constantly matchmaking between the creators of the Gold Nugget new technologies and possible companies that can use them, COWIN also organises regular Marketplace events that enable companies to meet with several technology providers in one day. At the most recent Marketplace held in Paris during the EPoSS forum in September, over 80 meetings were organised.

Dr Olivier Acher, Directeur de l'Innovation at Horiba of France, explained: "These collaborative EU research projects bring interesting results. In one day, I have had ten face-to-face meetings that COWIN has selected as being possibly of use. Half of these have been really interesting and the other half might

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be of use sometime in the future. The COWIN Marketplace has been a really time-efficient way for me to find out about new technologies.”

A sentiment that was echoed by Georg Menges, Director Governmental Relations and Projects at NXP Semiconductors Germany, who added: “The COWIN Marketplace is really well organised and they only arrange meetings for me that are relevant. As a result, in just one day a year, I can meet with the right people and the right technologies.”

Part of COWIN’s responsibility is to also help nurture the technology creators as Michael Pelissier, the co-founder of RPMK, France, who explained: “We are at the incubator phase with a new technology that enables data to be transferred at high speed at close range using very low power. COWIN is helping us find out if there is a need for such a technology and then what the business case would be. As a researcher, business planning is a new area and COWIN is helping us explore new market opportunities.”

Another company that COWIN is mentoring is ATLAS Neuroengineering of Belgium that makes innovative probes to measure the electrical signals in the brain. CEO and co-founder, Dr Arno Aarts, said: “Until now, I have been in research as a PhD so founding and running a company is a very new experience. There is plenty of help generally available for the initial phase of starting a company and to develop your entrepreneurial skills but then it stops, which is where COWIN stepped in. They have helped us tremendously with business guidance, such as sorting out patents, guiding through business plans, finding finance and putting us in touch with prospective customers of our technology. An added benefit is that we meet with other technology innovators that are under COWIN’s wings to network and share experiences.”

Geraldine Andrieux-Gustin concluded, “Finding new innovations that are relevant to a company can be a costly, time consuming and tedious business of trawling through blogs, websites, conferences and journals but COWIN finds the relevant technologies for a company saving them time and money. We take the time to understand what kinds of technologies a company is looking for in the Smart Systems sector and only bring relevant technologies to them when they are ready to develop and commercialise. I would encourage all SMEs to contact COWIN – they have nothing to lose and a lot to gain. All this research has been funded by the EU specifically to be commercially exploitable in order to help European companies be more competitive and successful though being innovative and it is now ready for use.”

Further information on COWIN can be found at <http://www.cowin4u.eu>
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