

## EIT to spend €1bn on 'interesting experiment' in commercialising R&D

Europe will spend €1bn on bringing European technology to market over the next three to four years, according to Martin Schuurmans, chairman of the governing board of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

He told EIRMA's annual conference in Budapest that the EIT has been set up to focus on excellence and results.

"We are going to spend around €1bn over the next three or four years on this interesting experiment," said Schuurmans. "This is not another program that will, yet again, subsidise European industry."

The EIT will back a series of knowledge and innovation communities (KICs) that will focus on developing and bringing European technologies to market more quickly.

Each KIC will get between €50 million and €100 million a year for 7 to 15 years. The EIT will provide 25% of the funds, with a further 25 to 50% coming from existing programs. The partners will provide the remaining 50 to 25%.

"We have to shoot for excellence in these knowledge and innovation communities to be competitive at world scale," he said.

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Each KIC will become a network that is focused on a few or just one place where the work is done. Major topics in each KIC will have a CEO-style leader, a business plan targeting particular results, an intellectual property rights policy, and a strong EIT brand to restore pride in Europe and European technology.

"We need to dare to be excellent," said Schuurmans. "Consensus and 'everybody equal' must come to an end. We have to choose and we choose to go for excellence."

Schuurmans is acting quickly to establish the EIT, its working methods and the first few KICs. Simplicity is key.

“We are taking a bottom-up approach,” he said. “Everyone says ‘here’s another Brussels initiative that will give us 120 pages of rules, which we will write down diligently and then they give us the money’.

“In fact we’re looking for simplicity. Our initial call for proposals was nine pages, with four pages of criteria. We’re looking for proposals of up to 40 pages, and if there are more than 40 pages in the document you submit, our website will reject it automatically.”

The KICs have been designed to last for at least seven years and up to 15, to reassure potential partners of the initiative’s stability: “We’re trying to create commitment rather than control.”

The EIT is already developing KICs on climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable energy and the future information and communications society.

Schuurmans wants to involve enterprises, education, research technology organisations, investors, research funders, as well as local, regional and national governments in the KICs. He sees their output as being “webs of excellence that create new business both for existing industry and in new endeavours”.

What’s in EIT for industry? Schuurmans argues that industrial partners can bring their activities under the umbrella of a KIC and so help move them forward much more quickly.

“This forces you to focus on exploiting that opportunity,” he said. “You need to explore new opportunities to fast-forward your business, because now is the time. But I am not saying the EIT is the only solution. It’s one opportunity you could go for.”

Schuurmans is motivated by a sense that Europe is lagging the US and Asia in its ability to exploit the technology that it develops.

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“We in Europe focus on problems much more than elsewhere,” he said. “There is a crisis and the opportunity [it presents] is that it can help us break down resistance to change.”

He called for better education in entrepreneurship among the science and engineering community.

“The way we educate our people is to be employees. Seldom is there a desire to be an employer or an entrepreneur. We leave that to the business schools. We have to build entrepreneurship into the science and engineering curriculum. Without entrepreneurship, the EIT programme will not fly.”

Schuurmans also called for greater entrepreneurship among businesses.

“This is the time not to preserve only what you have. You have to fast-forward, and free up capacity to do that.”

He added that industry needed to find new sources of innovation in academia and incubators, and explore new business models and approaches, as Apple has done with the iPod and iTunes. And he called on R&D managers to lead this change.

“R&D leaders should foster leadership, simplicity and excellence,” he said.

## **Links**

### **Annual conference**

<http://www.eirma.org/f3/showthread.php?t=7626>

### **Martin Schuurmans**

<http://eit.europa.eu/about-eit/governing-board/board.html#c268>

### **EIT**

<http://eit.europa.eu/home.html>