

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN the European-Mediterranean Region: The LAUNCH of Euro-MedITI

The Malta Council for Science and Technology is spearheading an initiative to set up an European-Mediterranean platform for technology and innovation. The initiative, called the EuroMedITI was publicly launched at Le Meridien Phoenicia on March 2nd 2006.

The principal objectives of the institute include engaging European and Mediterranean Businesses, Academic and Research Entities, and National Governments for the development, customisation and deployment of innovating technologies in sectors that have a special relevance to Euro-Mediterranean Region.

EuroMedITI aims to empower Malta as an outstanding technology and innovation platform for business-driven services in Training, Applied Research and Development, Incubation, and Dissemination in the Mediterranean Region. This will appeal directly to industries searching for a location to execute applied research and development under favourable conditions, and a hub to access the emerging Mediterranean market.

Approach

EuroMedITI is a business-driven initiative aimed at facilitating the development, adaptation, prototyping, testing, and dissemination of innovating technologies to address specific demands and requirements of the Mediterranean region. It will act as a platform for Euro-Mediterranean business, R&D and academic networks, fostering collaboration between partners, enabling transfer of knowledge and mobilising human resources, including business persons, researchers, academics, and students. EuroMedITI will provide a strong support infrastructure by supplying market intelligence, facilitating network formation, and providing access to finance. This will enable ideas to be generated and developed rapidly and smoothly, allowing quick deployment to the market, and assuring profitability.

EuroMedITI's business plan will be ready by June 2006 for presentation to the government of Malta – the sponsor, through the MCST, of this initiative.

Areas of Focus

The initial focus will be on three technology sectors of relevance to the Mediterranean, namely: Renewable Energies; Water and Environmental Technologies; and Information and Communication Technology. Other sectors or specific projects that are applicable and feasible may also be adopted and developed. The functions of EuroMedITI will include training, applied research and development, and it will incorporate an incubation mechanism to promote commercialisation of new technologies. To perform these functions, the initiative will employ new intelligent services and remote working by means of information and communication technologies and new media.

Around 20 projects in areas of Renewable Energies, Water and Environmental Technologies and Information and Communication Technology have already been identified through brainstorming sessions with Fraunhofer Institutes, Henri Tudor Public Research Centre and local partners which include, amongst others, Enemalta Corporation, Water Services Corporation, and MITTS Ltd.

European opportunities

EuroMedITI addresses directly the main objectives of the Lisbon Strategy for a European Research Area (COM(2004) 353 final), primarily those of *“launching European technological initiatives, amongst private enterprises, research institutes, the financial world and regulatory authorities”* and *“developing research infrastructures of European interest”*, with the objective to promote innovation and economic growth in the Mediterranean region.

The EuroMedITI initiative also addresses the objectives of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, highlighted in the Barcelona Declaration, *“to strengthen scientific research capacity and development, contribute to the training of scientific and technical staff, and promote participation in joint research projects based on the creation of scientific networks”*. Progress towards a number of the goals set out in the Barcelona Declaration has been slow, notwithstanding an EU investment into the region of over €2 billion a year in grants and loans since its launch in 1995. In particular, the disparity between science, technology and innovation capabilities of the Mediterranean region and mainland Europe persists.

Challenges

The diversity of customs, cultures, economic status and political realities across the Mediterranean is proving to be a serious obstacle towards creating a properly functioning common market in the region and hampering the uptake of European technology in the developing states of the Mediterranean. Products manufactured with the average EU consumer in mind and services tailored to satisfy European clientele are not necessarily applicable or even appealing to non-European neighbour countries in the Mediterranean. A lack of basic understanding of such market realities in the Maghreb and the Mashreq poses a large challenge to European multinationals, and even more so to small and medium sized companies that lack the necessary resources to access the region.

EuroMedITI will work to accrue pertinent knowledge about Mediterranean markets through collaborative partner networks spanning the Euro-Mediterranean space. Access to Mediterranean market intelligence will be complemented by the transfer, customisation and development of relevant European technologies, enabling the prototyping and testing of the pertinent products and services. The involvement of Mediterranean partners will facilitate their dissemination and uptake in the region.

The initiative will serve to reduce the current technology gap between North and South by cultivating a culture of technology and innovation through technology transfer and competence building, promoting cooperation between partners from science, technology and business from all potential markets. This will lead to a sustainable increase in business and research activities in the region and, in the long term, not only improve the overall level of science and technology in the Mediterranean, but also contribute to a strengthening of the European economy by consolidating its Southern-European market.

Financing

Initially, EuroMedITI will require financial support through seed-grants allocated specifically for this purpose by the Maltese Government and the EU. This funding will be increasingly complemented by private financing from industry, private investment, financial institutions and funds obtained through the standard EU programmes and initiatives. The European Investment Bank, particularly through the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP), is also expected to play an important role in supporting the initiative. After the initial start-up period, EuroMedITI will develop into an autonomous organisation, drawing its financing primarily from industry with the support of existing EU and national research programs.

Consortium Partners

The current partners to the initiative are the Malta Council for Science and Technology (Malta), Malta Enterprise Corporation (Malta), Createtech (Malta), Emphasys GmbH (Germany) as well as two leading research institutes:

Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft (Germany)

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft undertakes applied research of direct utility to private and public enterprise and of wide benefit to society. Its services are solicited by customers and contractual partners in industry, the service sector and public administration. The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft maintains around 80 research units, including 58 Fraunhofer Institutes, at over 40 different locations throughout Germany. A staff of some 12,500, predominantly qualified scientists and engineers, works with an annual research budget of over one billion euros. Of this sum, more than € 900 million is generated through contract research. Two thirds of the Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft's contract research revenue is derived from contracts with industry and from publicly financed research projects whilst the remaining one third is contributed by the German federal and Länder governments, partly as a means of enabling the institutes to pursue more fundamental research in areas that are likely to become relevant to industry and society in five or ten years' time.

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is also active on an international level: Affiliated research centers and representative offices in Europe, the USA and Asia provide contact with the regions of greatest importance to present and future scientific progress and economic development.

CRP Henri Tudor (Luxembourg)

Created in 1987, the Public Research Centre Henri Tudor's main aim is to promote innovation in both the private and public sectors by offering a large panel of services and activities: R&D projects, technology transfer, technological assistance and consulting, high level training and qualification, doctoral research, animation of innovation networks, high-tech business incubation. The Public Research Centre Henri Tudor can rely for these activities on a large industrial and institutional partnership.

The Public Research Centre Henri Tudor co-ordinates eleven innovation platforms: "Quality and certification of IT services", "Innovation systems security", "Interoperability standards and e-business", "e-learning, knowledge management and networked organisations", "Statistical and prospective studies in the knowledge economy", "Cleaner production", "Sustainable construction", "Health care technologies", "Information technologies in construction", "Renewable energies" and "Free and Open Source software". Every

innovation platform gathers around a national strategic goal a range of partners and of multidisciplinary research and transfer activities. Public Research Centre Henri Tudor has 252 employees and a budget of 21,645,800 Euros (2005).

The initiative is open for other research, business and financial partners. Current partners include Wasteserv, Water Services Corporation, Enemalta, MITTS Ltd, the University of Malta. More are expected to join in the coming weeks.

Further information on EuroMedITI may be obtained from Jacqueline Gauci at 2599 2504, or e-mail at jacqueline.gauci@gov.mt

