

LAUNCHING EUROMEDITI TO FOSTER APPLIED TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN the European-Mediterranean Region

The Malta Council for Science and Technology is at present spearheading a project to set up a European-Mediterranean platform for fostering applied technology and innovation. This institute shall engage European and Mediterranean Businesses, Academic and Research Entities, and also National Governments for the development, customisation and deployment of innovation technologies in sectors that have a special relevance to the Euro-Mediterranean Region.

This initiative code-named EuroMedITI was publicly launched at Le Meridien Phoenicia on March 2nd 2006 and aims to empower Malta as an outstanding technology and innovation platform for business-driven services. Most of these services would relate to Training, Applied Research and Development, Incubation, and Dissemination in the Mediterranean Region, appealing directly to industries searching for a location and a hub to access emerging Mediterranean markets.

A Business-Driven Approach

EuroMedITI is now gearing up to be 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 all partners, promoting knowledge transfer and mobilising human resources. EuroMedITI will also provide a strong support infrastructure by supplying market intelligence, facilitating network formation, and providing access to finance. The institute's business plan will be completed by June 2006 for presentation to the Government of Malta.

Focusing on Technology

The initial focus will be on three technology sectors of particular relevance to the Mediterranean, namely: Renewable Energies; Water and Environmental Technologies; and Information and Communication Technology. Other sectors or specific projects that are relevant and feasible may also be adopted and developed at a later stage. The functions of EuroMedITI will include training, applied research and development, and will also incorporate an incubation mechanism to promote the commercialisation of new technologies.

At present 20 pilot projects in designated sectors have been identified in collaboration with Fraunhofer Institutes, Henri Tudor Public Research Centre and local Maltese partners which include, amongst others, Enemalta Corporation, Water Services Corporation, WasteServ Malta Ltd, the University of Malta and MITTS Ltd.

Exploiting European Assistance

EuroMedITI addresses specifically 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 Partnerships, 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”*. Notwithstanding EU investment into the region of over €2 billion a year in grants and loans, progress towards a number of the goals set out in the Barcelona Declaration since 1995 has been slow, as the disparity between science, technology and the innovation capabilities of the Mediterranean region and mainland Europe persists.

Rising to the Challenges

Cultural diversity, economic imbalances and political realities across the Mediterranean are proving to be a serious obstacle towards creating a properly functioning regional common market and hampering the uptake of European technology in developing Mediterranean states. 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 acquire pertinent knowledge about Mediterranean markets through collaborative partner networks complemented by the technology transfer, customisation and development enabling prototyping and testing that will facilitate dissemination and uptake. This should reduce the North and South technology gap divide, cultivating a culture of innovation through technology transfer and competence building and promoting cooperation between partners. Such initiatives will lead to a sustainable increase in business and research activities in the region improving the overall level of science and technology in the Mediterranean, and contribute to the strengthening of the European economy by consolidating its Southern-European market.

Financing Solutions

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

EuroMedITI Founding Partners

The current founding 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 European research institutes:

Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft (Germany)

The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, commonly known as the Fraunhofer Institute, undertakes applied research of direct utility to private and public enterprise mostly 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, 90% of which is generated through contract research. Two thirds of this revenue is derived from contracts with industry and from publicly financed research projects whilst the rest 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 the future decades. The Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is also active on an international level through affiliated research centers and representative offices in Europe, the USA and Asia, which 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 offering a wide range of services and activities: The Centre co-ordinates eleven innovation platforms, where every innovation platform revolves around a national strategic goal, a range of partners and of multidisciplinary research and transfer activities. The Henri Tudor Centre has 252 employees and an annual budget of 21,645,800 Euros (2005).

Gearing for the Future

EuroMedITI is now planning to embrace further partners for support and collaboration on other projects and is gearing up to deliver a business plan outlining its operation, together with a number of pilot projects 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

