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## Conclusions of the EU Competitiveness Council on the implementation of the Eurostars and AAL programmes and the report on the Joint Research Area (ERA)

***Based on the expert group's report, the EU Competitiveness Council adopted the conclusions of the Eurostars Programme interim review, which is referred to in development strategy as the Europe 2020 program that should ensure the participation of medium and small enterprises in the development of the EU economy in terms of innovation and research. The amount of financing for the program has increased as the Council noted that all Member States are now cooperating in the Eurostars Programme, including six partner countries. The EU Competitiveness Council also adopted conclusions on the report of the joint program of the Ambient Assisted Living (AAL). The EU Council welcomes the progress that has been made in developing innovative products and services for the elderly based on information and communication technology. The Council notes that it has made significant progress since 2007 in establishing a common European Research Area (ERA), particularly through joint programming initiatives (JPI) and the Joint Technology Initiatives (JTI). The European Commission intends to present a framework for ERA as soon as possible in 2012.***

### **Eurostars**

The EU Competitiveness Council urged Member States to increase their contributions to reduce the difference between the required amount for registered projects and the amount that is available. The European Commission has been tasked to examine whether and how it would be possible to increase the amount from the EU budget. The expert group that prepared the report believes that the target population of European small and medium enterprises that are engaged in research and development in accordance with the main objective of the Eurostars Programme has been reached. According to its findings, the program addresses the real needs of small and medium enterprises engaged in research and development through a combination of features as it has attracted a large number of applications with highly relevant projects in excess of the originally allocated budget.

The group is confident that through an approach of open innovation, which is quickly becoming a common practice, and recognition of the importance of research and development in medium and small enterprises, demand grew for these companies in international cooperation in research and development. It therefore recommends that the Eurostars Programme should continue beyond 2013 and that the European Commission should use flexibility clauses to make a proposal to increase the budget in the next edition of Eurostars, so as to be able to respond to growing demand.

The European Commission has recently confirmed the importance of SMEs, especially those with high growth potential, which are able to easily transform the results into new products and services, in a communication on the flagship initiative - the Innovation Union. A clear commitment has been

established for the development of EU research and innovation programs to ensure easy access and greater involvement of small and medium enterprises. To achieve this objective, the Commission referred to the need for further use of partnerships with Member State agencies, in particular on the basis of the experiences from the EUREKA Eurostars initiative.

EU instruments for funding research and innovation should be simplified; including instruments for small and medium-sized enterprises. The current European support scheme is very dispersed, so the European Commission should explore options for an overall approach. The European Council invited the Commission to evaluate the feasibility of a research agenda for innovation in small companies, with the objective of meeting the needs of fast growing innovative companies based on market-oriented approach.

The group did not comment on individual countries, but stressed that the criteria for eligibility to the Eurostars Programme need to be used in all participating countries. The group also recommended that all national funding bodies sign bilateral agreements with the EUREKA Secretariat.

### **Ambient Assisted Living Program (AAL)**

The AAL program focuses on applied research, in which products and services for the elderly, based on information and communication technology, can be brought to the market in two to three years. The EU Council welcomes the progress that has been achieved under the program of Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) in the development of innovative products and services. For this program to continue to offer even better results, links between research subjects and operators need to be strengthened. The EU Council calls for participating Member States to consult with stakeholders and take into account the interests of their research communities when preparing their financial commitments. It also welcomes the number of small and medium enterprises that reached a penetration of 40% with consumers.

### **European Research Area (ERA)**

The EU Competitiveness Council adopted conclusions on the European Research Area (ERA). In his view, this framework should allow for the continuation of the implementation of the Ljubljana Process in full use of European intellectual capital. It should promote tackling social challenges and ensuring the competitiveness of European industry through the quality of the scientific and technological base. The link between research and education needs to be strengthened, because the ERA has to be the foundation for the realization of the Innovation Union initiative on the basis of the development of Europe 2020. In preparing the framework for the ERA, the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) should also cooperate.

#### **Useful information:**

- Conclusions of the EU Competitiveness Council on the Eurostars Programme:  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/122355.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/122355.pdf)
- European Commission report on the Eurostars Programme:  
<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st08/st08986.en11.pdf>
- Conclusions of the EU Competitiveness Council on the AAL Programme:  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/122353.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/122353.pdf)
- European Commission report on the AAL Programme:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/einclusion/docs/aal/com\\_sl.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/docs/aal/com_sl.pdf)
- Conclusions on ERA:  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/122351.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/122351.pdf)
- Committee report on the ERA (ERAC):  
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/st01206%20en11%20%283%29.pdf>

Prepared by:  
Bostjan Sinkovec & Darja Kocbek