



MEP-s of Estonia, Latvia and Finland discussing ways to support Research and Innovation for European Union economic growth and competitiveness

On 25th of September, the Estonian Liaison Office (ELO) for European Research Innovation, in association with the Permanent Representation of Estonia to the EU and Estonian Ministry of Education & Research organized a panel discussion: “European Parliament supporting research and innovation for economic growth and competitiveness”. The panel consisting of MEPs from ITRE and BUDG discussed ways for Europe and its Member States to create a competitive and innovative economy structure by supporting research and innovation activities, especially fostering university-industry cooperation.

The event was opened by Mr. **Clyde Kull**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the EU, who gave a warm welcome to our honorable guests and highlighted the main topics to be discussed, including the need for scientific results to be transferred into innovations through stable frameworks for university-industry technology transfer and strong political support from the EU.

The message from Mr. **Jevgeni Ossinovski**, Minister of Education & Research of Estonia, was clear on that point as well – both enterprises and R&D-institutions in Europe need to become more active by means of finding ways to collaborate and taking advantage of the existing infrastructures in the best possible way. In order to achieve the ambitious Europe 2020 strategy goal of rising R&D investments to 3% of GDP, more efforts are needed from the Member States and at the EU level. Examples of such efforts would be supporting synergies between national (incl. ESIF) and European funding, increasing the involvement of sectorial policy domains in R&D programmes. The Minister also said it's important to acknowledge that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions– the differences between national R&D-systems should be respected in this regard. Mr. Ossinovski invited the panelists and participants in the audience to debate on the role of member states, R&D institutions, industry and Union in creating a well-functioning innovation ecosystem.

After the speech from Mr. Ossinovski, a special video greeting from ITRE chairman, Mr. **Jerzy Buzek** MEP was presented, who promised to support the consolidation of the European Research Area and equal opportunities for scientists involving their mobility and working conditions via regulative measures. Mr. Buzek stated that he would like to see more industry-driven applied research being conducted in the Member States, and that Europe has made an important investment with the “Horizon 2020” framework program and a lot of its instruments support university-industry collaboration – now Member States need to follow suit.

European Union budget cuts were discussed in a speech by MEP **Krišjānis Kariņš**, who stated that all the fractions represented in ITRE committee are protective of Horizon 2020 budget against the cutbacks (current proposal from European Council is to cut back approx. 11% from Horizon 2020 compared to the 3-4% budget cuts in the overall Union budget). Kariņš explained, that due to high taxes, wages and energy prices, the European edge in competitiveness lies in the high added-value services and products, meaning that we should focus on



knowledge-based manufacturing and developing smart digital services. He also brought out the ties between investments in R&D and export capabilities – the solution here would again, be the supportive measures for innovation cycle. Kariņš expressed his hope that the new Commissioner-designate for Research and Innovation, Mr. Carlos Moedas would join forces with the ITRE committee to fight against the Horizon 2020 budget cuts.

The ensuing panel discussion was moderated by Prof. **Toivo Maimets** from University of Tartu, who leaded an enthralling discussion with MEP Ms. **Miapetra Kumpula-Natri**, MEP Ms. **Kaja Kallas**, MEP Mr. **Krišjānis Kariņš**, Prof. **Erkki Truve**, serving as a Vice Rector of Tallinn University of Technology, Prof. **Volli Kalm**, current rector of University of Tartu and **David O'Brock** – director of Molycorp Silmet.

The discussion touched upon many aspects in university-industry cooperation, and the Member States possibilities to support the innovation cycle. The following points were made:

- 1) All the panelists agreed on that possible budget cuts on the 2015 budget of Horizon 2020 should be highly avoided. Horizon 2020 budget cuts would give out negative signals for the applicants from industry and research sectors all over Europe, and contradict with the goals of Europe 2020 strategy and statements made in the Union's and Member States' strategy documents;
- 2) In Member States, it is crucial to use the new programming period of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to support university industry cooperation, to leverage more private investment into R&D. The Smart Specialisation principles offer the necessary framework, but MS and regions should be able to review their RIS3 focus areas after every 2-3 years to be open and flexible to supporting of rapidly evolving tech sectors, for example ICT and nanomaterials.
- 3) Similarly, the MS can have a more proactive and flexible role in designing instruments for supporting technology transfer and lab-to-market activities. Being a stakeholder in Venture Capital funds that invest into R&D-focused SME-s, managing programs for applied research in the RIS3 priority domains and supporting participation in international consortia, like the European Innovation Partnerships can have a positive effect on the MS innovation ecosystem.
- 4) More awareness on the different funding opportunities made available by Horizon 2020 and, also the risk financing instruments, needs to be communicated to the private sector. One concrete way for MS to support more university-industry cooperation would be to bring together previously successful (for example, in the 7th Framework program, listed in CORDIS) consortia with promising research groups and SMEs in the same field.

The panel was followed up by a networking discussion.

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