



## EUREKA – The Industrial Research Driver

# Developments and Ambitions of the Slovenian EUREKA Chairmanship

*Aleš Mihelič*



Dr Aleš Mihelič, Director General  
Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology,  
EUREKA Chairman 07/08

Over the last few years, public and private research entities have been steadily realising that, to sharpen Europe's competitive edge in a global market, they need to come together to address the fragmentation of research in Europe. For 22 years, EUREKA, the intergovernmental initiative for industrial research and development (R&D), has been successful in bringing together national funding for collaborative European projects and has used its network to support industrial research. The objective has been to fill the gaps in close-to-market, industry-led research and build critical mass on the international scale on the level of individual projects and also in the form of clustering projects, built around specific subjects.

Since its creation, over 3,000 industrial R&D projects have been carried out within EUREKA, with the overall amount of public-private investments exceeding EUR 25 billion. More than 13,400 partners from the industrial and academic sectors have been involved. As the bottom-up initiative, EUREKA is also well suited for industry, and this is also shown by the more than 70% share of industrial partners in EUREKA projects. The EUREKA network is proud that nearly 45% of project part-

ners are from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In July 2007, on behalf of Slovenia, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, took on the year-long chairmanship of EUREKA. The EUREKA programme was created in 1985 on the initiative of the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the French President François Mitterrand as a peaceful response to US President Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" project. At that time, Europe decided to build its competitiveness on a peaceful platform i.e. industrial applications and development. The European Heads of State and Government in March 2000 in Lisbon reconfirmed this by adopting the well-known Lisbon Strategy. It aims to boost growth and employment and to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic area in the world by 2010. In addition, the 2002 Barcelona European Council specified objectives in the area of research and development, focussing on private investment (two thirds of the overall objective of 3%).

By pooling national public sources and a great amount of industrial R&D money, EUREKA is one of the important contributors to the realisation of the Lisbon goals. In addition, the results of EUREKA projects are constantly paving the way to European competitiveness. To mention only a few examples: smart cards, digital television, an online airline and travel global reservation system, car navigation, infrared car applications and detection, cancer diagnosis with new generation antibodies, soil pollution monitoring, tools for detecting digital crime, tests for child allergies, etc.

Currently, EUREKA includes 37 countries and the European Commission as the 38th member.

A member of EUREKA since 1994, Slovenia has been involved in 69 completed EUREKA projects with a total budget of EUR 26.8 million. 50 SMEs are among 122 Slovenian participants involved in EUREKA. Slovenian companies, research institutes and universities are working on projects in a variety of areas from medicine, biotechnology and the environment to information technology and transport. Recent success stories include an easy-to-apply test to assess immune system robustness in poultry, a new material and coating to reduce clogging in vascular implants and extend life expectancy, eco-friendly composite materials, Omega 3 and Omega 6-rich pork meat, plant-based waste water treatment devices and methods, etc.

Photo: [www.jakavinsek.com](http://www.jakavinsek.com)

Speech by the Prime Minister at the EUREKA ministerial conference on 6 June 2008 in Ljubljana.

From right to left: Prime Minister Janez Janša, Dr. Aleš Mihelič, Dr. Janez Potočnik, Minister Mojca Kucler Dolinar, Director of the EUREKA Secretariat Luuk Borg

The main goal of the Slovenian EUREKA chairmanship is to carve a niche for EUREKA in the European Research Area (ERA). EUREKA with all its projects, clusters and umbrellas, already represents an important player in the field of European research. With its wide network and its effective bottom-up approach, it has the potential to increase competitiveness in Europe. One of our main objectives is to define EUREKA's position within the ERA as one of the most important pillars. Moreover, we want to combine the advantages of the EUREKA Chairmanship and the Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council along with co-operation with the EUREKA network and the European Commission, to make a significant contribution to European research policies. From its creation, EUREKA has always been effective in SMEs and this group is particularly important for the future.

Beside the preparation of the new EUREKA strategy and action plans, another important objective is to simplify and synchronise EUREKA internal procedures and to promote a proactive approach to project end-users. This

also includes improved communication with target groups (companies, national authorities, the European Commission, and other important players such as technology platforms, ERA-NETs, the media, etc.).

We would like to enlarge EUREKA's geographical boundaries to the Western Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR of Macedonia, and Montenegro – extending our network's potential for collaboration on innovative projects.

Eurostars, EUREKA's new project based on article 169 of the EU Treaty, a joint programme mechanism of 27 countries, co-funded by the European Commission, is also likely to become a reality during the Slovenian chairmanship. With Eurostars, EUREKA, and its experienced network of National Project Co-ordinators, is on the verge of assuming a significant and ambitious role in the ERA. Everything will focus on playing this active role, not only on a programme or project level but also on a political level. There is much to expect from EUREKA's Ministerial Conference, taking place in Ljubljana on 6 June 2008.

The ministerial debate will focus on novel ways of supporting industrial research, opening innovation space to third country participation, defining improved R&D results communications and finally on the adoption of a new strategy on the future development of the EUREKA initiative. It is expected that, in addition to ministers responsible for R&D and the economy, Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša and Slovenian Commissioner Dr Janez Potočnik will also attend the conference.

We are confident that the Slovenian EUREKA chairmanship and EU Council presidency will leave a lasting imprint on the development of the oldest intergovernmental initiative for promoting industrial research and will provide a successful example of joint programmes in member states for the benefit of SMEs – Eurostars. Finally, projects generated will also greatly contribute to the future strengthening of a joint European R&D area, and the vision and realisation of a development-oriented Europe.