COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION  
Brussels, 1 June 2011  

11030/11  

RECH 144  
COMPET 226  
MI 291  

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS  
From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To Delegations  
No. Prev. doc. 10436/11 RECH 124 COMPET 199 MI 272  
Subject: Interim evaluation of the Eurostars Joint Programme  
- Council conclusions

Delegations will find attached the Council conclusions on the Interim evaluation of the Eurostars Joint Programme, as adopted by the Council ("Competitiveness") at its meeting on 31 May 2011.
Council conclusions on the interim evaluation of the Eurostars Joint Programme

The Council:

1. RECALLS the Decision\(^1\) of the European Parliament and the Council on the participation of the European Union in the Eurostars Joint Programme based on Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which required that the Commission should carry out an interim evaluation of the Eurostars two years after the start of the Programme.

2. RECALLS the Innovation Union Flagship Initiative\(^2\), including an explicit reference to Eurostars, in which the contribution of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to the European economy and its competitiveness and growth was highlighted in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy\(^3\), its conclusions of 26 November 2010\(^4\) and the conclusions of the European Council of 4 February 2011, recognising the role of SMEs in boosting innovation in the European Union.

3. WELCOMES the interim evaluation of the Eurostars by the Group of Independent Experts ("Group") and the Commission's report\(^5\) in response to the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

4. WELCOMES the fact that all EU Member States together with 6 Associated Countries and the European Union now fully participate in Eurostars which has resulted in an increase in overall funding.

\(^1\) OJ L 201, 30.7.2008, p.58.  
\(^2\) Doc. 14035/10.  
\(^3\) Conclusions of the European Council of 17 June 2010 (EUCO 13/1/10).  
\(^4\) Doc. 17165/10.  
\(^5\) Doc. 8986/11.
5. WELCOMES the view of the Group that Eurostars is well aligned with the objectives of Europe 2020, complements well the opportunities offered to SMEs in FP7 for international cooperation and has proven to be attractive to the target group by reaching successfully European R&D performing SMEs; ACKNOWLEDGES that Eurostars - within the short period of its existence - has attracted a high number of applications and that the number of qualified projects has exceeded original budget allocations and there exists a sustainable and likely growing demand for support of international R&D cooperation by SMEs; NOTES, however, the Group's observation that Eurostars' impact on the generation of new partnerships is as yet limited. Even though the establishment of new international cooperations of R&D performing SMEs is not an explicit aim of Eurostars, RECOMMENDS that an analysis be carried out by the EUREKA Secretariat on ways to extend Eurostars' reach also to R&D performing SMEs without previous international experience.

6. ACKNOWLEDGES the efforts made by those Eurostars Member States that have put additional funding on top of their initial earmarked budget in order to finance more Eurostars projects above the threshold; however AGREES with the view of the Group that participating countries and the European Union should further strive to provide sufficient funds to minimise the gap between projects that meet the Eurostars threshold criteria and the projects that are actually funded and CALLS ON the Commission with a view to improving support to SMEs to examine the possibility of increasing the EU contribution via redeployments from within the existing EU research programme and preferably without affecting the budget for the Specific SME measures programme.
7. AGREES with the Group's view that the Virtual Common Pot appears to be a reasonably good solution and that Eurostars should continue to be organised around this principle; RECOGNISES that all participating countries and the Commission should have the common objective to fund more projects that meet the Eurostars thresholds; and SUGGESTS that Eurostars stakeholders study all relevant options with a view to financing highly ranked/above threshold projects that otherwise risk not getting funded because of a deficit in national level funding.

8. NOTES the Group's concerns regarding the integration at the implementation level and its view that further streamlining and harmonisation of implementation processes and funding rules at the national level would contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of Eurostars; SUPPORTS the continuous operation of a permanent and voluntary Best Practice Working Group of interested Member States to identify and disseminate good administrative practices as an appropriate way to address the harmonisation challenge.

9. WELCOMES the Group's observation that at the central level the operational implementation of Eurostars has achieved significant progress during the first two years; ACKNOWLEDGES that the EUREKA Secretariat has proven a very cost-effective implementation body in charge of the execution of the Eurostars and the programme has benefited from the use of the EUREKA network for the delivery and governance of the programme; NOTES the Group's recommendation to increase the number of experts as well as to continuously improve the quality of evaluations, including the selection and assigning of experts (balanced technical expertise and good general and local market knowledge across participating countries) and systems for providing feedback to applicants; SUGGESTS to consider possibilities as to how the Independent Evaluation Panel (IEP) can be given more time for analysis of the proposals and to provide suitable feedback to the applicants, whilst it AGREES that a short time-to-contract is crucial for SMEs and, as a visible aspect of administrative performance, should remain one of the priorities for all the stakeholders in Eurostars.
10. AGREES with the Group that more active sharing of experiences with other Article 185 programmes (EDCTP, AAL, EMRP, Bonus) and other EU level initiatives would be beneficial and INVITES the Commission to facilitate such exchanges and synergies.

11. SHARES the Group's conclusion that at this early stage, when only a few projects have been concluded, it is premature to assess the socioeconomic impact of the programme or the outcomes of individual projects; that appropriate impact indicators and data should be established by EUREKA through its Secretariat and the Eurostars Member States in order to measure the impact of Eurostars projects, and that the collection of such data should not impose too high a reporting burden on SMEs.

12. WELCOMES the recommendation of the Group to continue Eurostars beyond 2013; and WILL CONSIDER its continuation in the overall context of the future Common Strategic Framework for Research and Innovation funding.