



ECRN Joint Position

Joint Declaration of the ECRN Presidium **“Strengthening Innovation and** **Competitiveness ”**

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Strengthening the innovation-power in the Chemical Industry

1. The basis for wealth and employment in Europe is a modern, powerful and competitive industry. One of the innovation-engines and backbone of economic success is the chemical industry in various European member states.
2. After the restructuring of the chemical industry, everywhere in Europe this industrial sector benefits of the globalisation and ensures highly trained employees. With the new European chemical directive the chemical industry accepts equal standards and positions itself as a unit.
3. The sustainability of the chemical industry requires a high innovation-pace compared to worldwide competitors. More than ever before, the whole sector, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, need easier access to product- and process-innovation. On this topic, enterprises and states are in collective responsibility.
4. Against this background, the ECRN supports the objectives and instruments of the Lisbon-strategy of the EU-Commission and aims at a sensible increase of investments on research and development of industry and state.
5. At the same time the ECRN tackles another contributing factor to generate innovation for their chemical regions. As often seen, especially small and medium sized enterprises develop new products though the exchange with customers and competitors. The ECRN will support this innovation-strategy by supporting the setup of communication- and coordination-platforms together with the industry. This includes the setup of networks between science and industry.
6. The ECRN will evaluate its efforts constantly and – as a member of the European "High Level Group to enhance the competitiveness of the chemical industry – feed their results into this board.



Regional dimension of future EU Energy policy

In March 2006, the Commission published a consultation Green Paper on Energy entitled 'A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy'. Responses are to be submitted by September 2006.

Energy price fluctuations and security of supply were major problems during the past winter for energy-intensive chemical companies based in ECRN Regions. The problems encountered with unpredictable supply and massive price increases are disproportionate in Regions whose economy is based on energy-intensive manufacturing. Future debate on Energy Policy should include consideration of Regions and industries that will be most effected by energy availability and pricing and should provide assistance for disadvantaged member states.

Reliance on imported energy is growing and the European Commission is proposing that there should be regular reviews of Energy Policy to address some of the problems already experienced last winter. Six main priority areas were identified in the Commission's Green Paper: 1. Competitiveness and the internal energy market, 2. Solidarity, 3. Diversification of the energy mix, 4. Sustainable development, 5. Innovation and Technology, 6. External Policy.

ECRN members want to contribute to the debate on a truly sustainable Energy Policy for the future as the issue is of vital importance to chemical regions. The ECRN wants to ensure that the needs of our Regions and the industry based there remain central to future discussions on Energy Policy. We intend preparing a response to the Commission consultation and requesting involvement in future discussion on Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy.



Supporting interregional co-operation

In the framework of the discussion about the future programming of the EU regional policy, the ECRN supports the continuation of EU assistance for interregional cooperation (e.g. Interreg IV or territorial cooperation). The work of the network has demonstrated the added value of interregional exchange of experience and the active participation of regions in the European political debate. The ECRN sees the Interreg III C programme as successful instrument to establish international collaboration for the strengthening of competitiveness and the development of sustainable partnerships. Especially the flexibility in terms of thematic focus and geographic composition of the partnership is a clear advantage, which should also be available in the future.

The ECRN also supports the strengthening of European Research Policy, e.g. the 7th Framework Programme for Research and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme. The ECRN asks all interested stakeholders in the chemical regions to actively participate in these European cooperation projects to further develop regional innovation capacities and strengthen competitiveness. In this context, the ECRN offers its network as a platform to develop project ideas, establish project consortia and facilitate the application process. Based on the five thematic studies that have been implemented in the last months, the ECRN has the objective to develop spin off projects in the areas of cooperation of science and industry, skills development, chemical park management, land improvement and environment under integration of regional stakeholders. A specific training seminar will be organised on the 29/30 June in Maastricht to present and discuss the study results with regional experts. All interested partners are invited to participate in the development of joint projects to further intensify cooperation between chemical regions in the future.