

EVENT REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

EUROPEAN OFFICE BRUSSELS
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Europe's Digital Innovation Policy – Horizon 2020 Midterm Review and Outlook to FP9

03 May 2017 | 12h00 – 14h00 | Siemens AG HQ Brussels

Public Research and Development (R&D) and Innovation funding play an essential role for Europe's future and global competitiveness. Over seven years (2014 to 2020), the European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme seeks to spend more than 80 billion euro on it. The Commission wishes to enable breakthroughs and discoveries in order to, finally, drive economic growth and create jobs.

In light of the current debate on how to maximise the impact of research and innovation programmes in Europe, our workshop has brought together H2020 beneficiaries with decision makers from the European Commission and the European Parliament on 3 May 2017 at the Siemens AG EU Representation Office. We have assessed the first half of H2020, we have proposed recommendations for the remaining 2018 to 2020 timeframe, and we have also given a first outlook to the Commission's follower programme (FP9). Generally speaking, we were asking how EU policy makers can ensure that Europe remains a global leader in R&D and Innovation in an ever more digital context.

First, Christian Ehler, Member of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, argued that Europe had to find its role in global competition. The EU was losing 40.000 engineers every year due to demographic reasons and was facing a serious innovation gap. This is why, according to Ehler, the EU had to define a European model for the digitisation era via which it distinguishes itself from other parts in the world. Also, instead of just allocating an immense budget, the EU had to prioritise its aims and to decide for "flagship projects".

Next, Eddy Roelants, Vice-President for R&D at Siemens EU Representation Office, gave an overview about what digitisation means to businesses and citizens and which different forms it is assuming. Mr Roelants put a special emphasis on artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and big data. He was followed by Kurt Vandenberghe, Director for Climate Action and Resource Efficiency at the European Commission's DG Research and Innovation. Mr Vandenberghe was, among other things, highlighting how difficult it is for the Commission and other public bodies to measure the concrete impact of investments.

Addressing the "productivity paradox", Mr Vandenberghe stated that in the EU, there was a huge amount of digital knowledge. This knowledge, however, was lacking implementation. In order to have a real and visible impact of investments, there was no other way as to prioritise. Our last speaker, Muriel Attané, fully agreed on this last point. Ms Attané is Secretary-General of the European Association of Research and Technology Organisations (EARTO). According to her, the EU has to strengthen its collaborative applied research. More than that, collaborative participation with industries should be promoted.

The statements by our keynote-speakers were followed by a discussion with the workshop participants. First, there was a general agreement that the EU should allocate more money to fewer issues. Second, the EU and especially the Commission have to better communicate the successes of its Horizon 2020 programme in order to obtain public understating and support. And third, facing political impatience and various concerns in the Member States, the EU needs concrete results of its initiatives.