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Innovation Relay Centres bring the future nearer

Small and medium-sized enterprises often face problems in selling technologies or know-how abroad, or are unable to source their technology needs in their own countries. To ensure that the huge innovation potential of the EU's 25 million SMEs is fully exploited, a network of Innovation Relay Centres (IRC) was created in 1995 to stimulate transnational transfer of innovative technologies and to promote technology partnerships. At its annual meeting held in Brussels from 27- 29 June 2005, the IRC network gathered European and regional stakeholders to discuss new methods and objectives for future innovation support – and celebrated 10 years of successful operations bringing innovative companies together to make innovation a business reality.

Addressing the IRC Network, Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen responsible for enterprise and industry policy said: *“Innovation is the key to opening the door to a brighter economic future. If we want to overcome Europe’s current stagnation and raise its capacity for growth, we have to reduce the gap between the EU and the US in innovation performance. The IRC network is enabling SMEs to play a crucial part in reaching this goal.”*

Commissioner Verheugen also presented the award for the most successful technology transfer exploiting EU-funded research results to the partnership between Simtech Systems of Finland and XC Engineering of Italy. Mr. Verheugen noted that: *“The success of this technological cooperation is directly attributable to the IRC Network”.*

The Europe-wide network of Innovation Relay Centres (IRCs) acts as a broker, helping SMEs access the information, knowledge, technologies, finance, expertise and assistance they need from the resources available throughout the region, and discover possibilities for partnership and cooperation. The cross-border collaboration and exchange of know-how gives the most innovative companies significantly greater visibility, so their success can be emulated by others throughout the region.

The network consists of 71 IRCs, involving 230 organisations in 33 countries within and outside the EU. In the past ten years it has assisted in over 12,500 technology transfer negotiations and helped more than 55,000 client companies exploit their research results and meet their technology needs. Most IRCs are operated by consortia of regional organisations with established reputations in local research and industrial communities. These include innovation agencies, Chambers of Commerce, regional development agencies and university technology centres. All IRCs draw strength from their membership of a European network. The strong technical and personal links within the network equip each IRC to broker technology transfers quickly and efficiently.

In many regions, IRCs have established themselves as the service providers of choice for companies wishing to internationalise their research activities, their marketing operations or their supply chains.

This year's 3-day conference brought together technology transfer experts from the entire network of Innovation Relay Centres. Participants made the most of the opportunity to network, and gained inspiration from the best of Brussels-based research and development and innovative excellence that was on show at the conference.

More information

<http://irc.cordis.lu/>