

[Q&A]

Luuk Borg

# A coordinated approach to funding research

As head of the EUREKA Secretariat, the body that acts as central support for the European research initiative **Luuk Borg** is ideally placed to monitor the benefits a coordinated approach between the EU and national governments has on business – and what more needs to be done

**eStrategies:** Since its formation in 1985, EUREKA has championed a bottom-up approach to technological innovation. How has that approach worked and how successful has it been in raising the competitiveness of European industry?

**Luuk Borg:** For 22 years, EUREKA has been successful in bringing together national funding for collaborative European R&D projects close to the market and has used its network to support industrial research. The objective has been to fill the gaps in industry-led research and build critical mass in the form of clustering projects around specific subjects. However, national funding has not always been stable for all partners in collaboration for the total duration of a project.

The concept of using EU funding and national funding in a more synchronised way has taken hold of hearts and minds, and is currently being translated into policy at European level. Pending the decision of the EU Council of Ministers, the Commission will be participating in two new research instruments in 2008: the EUREKA Eurostars Programme, and the EU Joint Technology Initiatives (JTIs). As a founding member of EUREKA, the Commission is now stepping up its cooperation with EUREKA, notably within the JTIs on information and communication technologies and with the new Eurostars programme, aimed at European SMEs

**eStrategies:** How has the scientific research agenda changed since 1985? What are the new demands and challenges and how has EUREKA responded to these changes?

**Borg:** Over the last few years, public and private research entities have been steadily realising that in order to sharpen Europe's competitive edge in a global market, they need to come together to address the fragmentation of research in Europe.

**eStrategies:** It is widely acknowledged that SMEs are the engine rooms of economic growth in Europe, while R&D is the fuel that keeps those engines running. Yet, many, if not most, SMEs find it difficult to find support and investment to fund these R&D projects. How can this anomaly be best addressed?

**Borg:** The SME sector accounts for two-thirds of Europe's employment and almost 60 per cent of economic output, making it the most dynamic in terms of innovation, and job creation. Yet although state schemes exist for funding research, access to finance, especially in the critical stages after successful R&D but before commercialisation, remains a serious bottleneck in the flow of new technologies to market.

They frequently find it difficult to obtain sufficient financial support for their often high-risk research and development (R&D). EUREKA has long championed SME participation in European projects, offering a flexible bottom-up approach to bring innovation to market in a short time. Now the Eurostars Programme makes it possible to speed up and synchronise national (and Community) funding for small but ambitious international R&D projects. The EUREKA Eurostars Programme is the first European funding programme to be specifically dedicated to research-performing SMEs. Eurostars will stimulate them to lead international collaborative research and innovation projects by easing access to support and funding.

**eStrategies:** With billions of euro being invested in European research and development, how can critics of the funding programmes still maintain that not enough is being done to promote innovation in Europe? Are we doing enough?

**Borg:** Eurostars fits well with the objectives of the European Research Area (ERA) to coordinate and optimise regional,

