



SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES – THE ENGINE OF THE EUROPEAN INDUSTRY

The chemical industry is an important enabling industry that contributes to numerous other industries throughout the value chain and has significant innovation and value creation potential that has an impact not only on regional economies but the European economy and competitiveness as a whole. Many of the chemical innovators and enablers are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The ECRN sees the support of SMEs in particular as a backbone of the competitiveness in the regions and as an important factor for future growth.

- **SMEs are an integral part of EU economy.** They play a key role as providers of employment opportunities and serve an important function for the wellbeing and economies of local and regional communities. **SMEs and entrepreneurship should be addressed as an integrated part of economic and industrial policies** at all levels of policy making.
- **SMEs have a highly important role in competitiveness and innovation** and should be supported with dedicated efforts. Our capacity to build on SMEs' potential is decisive for the future prosperity of the EU and our regions. We should focus on fostering a competitive, dynamic and inclusive economy with more and better qualified jobs and a higher level of social cohesion.
- **The European "Think Small First" principle** that seeks to address SMEs' interests from the very early stages of policy making onwards is a good approach that should be further integrated in policy making at all levels as the **mainstreaming the Small Business Act (SBA)** and the upcoming SBA 2.0 continue at European as well as regional contexts.
- We must **ensure that our policy frameworks provide equal and fair playing field** to enterprises of all sizes and set appropriate conditions for successful and sustainable development of our regional and European economies.
- The **key role of regions** and the importance of **regional dialogues and stakeholder collaboration**, including dialogues on industrial development and SME policy, need to be recognized and leveraged.
- Regional **SME policies should be tailored to the relevant regional context.** The local environments in which SMEs operate are very different across Europe and we must ensure that **principles of multi-level governance and subsidiarity** are respected in order for regions to have the capacity to implement effective policy measures.
- **Regional strategies should build on regional realities** and leverage the regional strengths, address regional circumstances and take into account the economic, technological and demographic change processes and other local trends, constraints, or opportunities.

- The opportunities provided by e.g. **smart specialisation** strategies, **the European Structural and Investment Funds**, as well as **Horizon 2020** or **the European Fund for Strategic Investments** should be effectively leveraged as additional tools to support SMEs. The obstacles many SMEs face in terms of **access to finance** should be decisively addressed with concrete measures.
- **International trade and support for internationalization** are keys to competitiveness, especially for SMEs. **Cluster activities**, including at the regional and trans-regional level, can play an important role in this context and should be supported by the EU. Especially in the context of chemical sector, **value creation, innovation and SMEs** can also be supported by cooperation within **chemical parks**, clusters, or other types of value networks.
- **A smart mix of regional, national and European measures is needed** to contribute to the overall growth and development of SMEs. Collaboration and partnerships are vital. We need to work together.

SMEs are a vital element of the economic fabric at the European as well as at the regional level. To ensure a timely and coherent implementation of the tools and policies designed to create a more SME-friendly business environment, regional authorities play a key role, as they are closer to the local economic structure and have more information on the needs of local companies. As a regional network, ECRN is committed to enhancing cooperation and exchange of experiences across regions. We want to encourage cooperation and sharing of good practices across regions in Europe.

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The European Chemical Regions Network (ECRN) is an association of regional authorities from across Europe. Originally started as an INTERREG project in 2004, the ECRN has now a permanent Secretariat in Brussels and is registered as an association under German law. ECRN is recognized as a European stakeholder for regional issues concerning the chemical industry and policies. The network represents regions where chemical industry is an integral part of the local economy and seeks to bring regions together to tackle the challenges by exchanging information and exploring solutions to common problems. The aim of the ECRN is to improve the competitiveness of chemical regions, facilitate collaboration between regions, and to represent the common interests of the chemical regions in Europe.



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