

Evaluating economic benefits of joint technology initiatives

By François Paquay

Overall, business leaders are positive when assessing their participation in public-private partnerships in research and technology

The joint technology initiatives (JTIs), these large-scale public-private partnerships launched in 2007, took a leap forward on 9 July. The endeavour will continue for the next seven years, with the EU and industrial partners investing additional €19.5 billion over the period 2014-2020. Europolitics asked business leaders involved in these projects about the impact on their competitiveness.

In 2007, the birth of the first JTIs was "slow and painful" both for the Commission and the industry, recalls Ric Parker, director of research and technology at Rolls-Royce, a partner in the Clean Sky 2 JTI. But seven years later, all agree that it has been a success. The first results are slowly starting to emerge: the first projects, launched in 2008, effectively kicked off

in 2010. Several projects ended in 2013, but some will continue until 2018. Now, as this first phase reaches its end, the first 'results' begin to emerge from the lab. The end of the second phase, in 2020, should see the beginning of mass production of innovative products generated by the JTIs.

Improving European citizens' lives is the objective of the JTIs, but not exclusively. "As a company, we want to make the world a better place, but we also have a commercial proposal to make," explains Peder Holk Nielsen, CEO of Novozymes, a partner in the Bio-based Industries PPP.

"The JTIs bring companies long-term financial stability and visibility," reckons Henri Winand, CEO of Intelligent Energy, which takes part in Fuel Cells and Hydrogen 2. "They guarantee that some of your research, development and deployment is being catered for and remove some of the risks linked to research activities. When you start working on an idea, you do not know if you will be able to commercialise it. In a JTI, what is fantastic is that about half of the cost of developing this

idea is borne by the public sector. And it does not prevent you from patenting at all."

Indeed, intellectual property rights are one of the important facets of JTIs. A consortium agreement, signed by all participants, enumerates the patents all parties already have and defines how others will access them. It also regulates how future IPR will be allocated. The general rule is that the company that generates the intellectual property keeps it. If it results from an activity within the consortium, other partners will get their share, in line with the agreement.

This functioning is globally welcomed by businesses. "On the one hand, IP must be protected. Making it publicly available would remove Europe's competitive advantage. On the other hand, this system puts enough information in the public domain so smaller companies can see what is being done and can consider applying to get a slice of the cake," explains Parker. ■

JOINT TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES UNDER HORIZON 2020

