

ECS Brokerage Event 2020: the biggest and best yet!

Brussels was the place to be on 14-15 January 2020 for the 480 participants who gathered for the ECS Brokerage Event 2020, held in the city's elegant Hotel Le Plaza. This year's event was the biggest ever. The growing participation shows how much Europe's Electronics Components and Systems (ECS) community values this opportunity to meet potential partners, learn about Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) funding programmes and form collaborative consortia. As one SME participant put it: "I'd never get the chance to be face-to-face with the right contacts from large enterprises anywhere else!"

The figures reflect the event's success: 30 countries represented, more than 100 attendees from SMEs, 33 project idea presentations, 50 project idea posters, plus numerous SME expertise pitches and consortia sessions. From the moment registration opened on the Tuesday morning the conference rooms were buzzing with conversations. Posters – promoting project ideas, from fast prototyping in Industry 4.0 to precision bioelectronics in medicine – quickly attracted discussions and the opening plenary session was full to capacity.

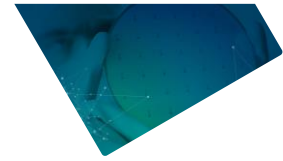
Three Industry Associations, one event

The scope of the ECS Brokerage Event 2020 also reflects the role of the three Industry Associations – AENEAS, ARTEMIS and EPoSS – in jointly supporting the entire ECS community. A point Caroline Bedran, Director General, AENEAS, stressed in her welcome speech: "This event is for you – to create consortia and prepare project proposals, and it's open to all. Together, our three associations represent the whole ECS value chain from chips to smart systems. As not for profit organisations, we are here to help you to make the most of your activities."

The three industry associations (3As) organise together two-yearly events, the ECS Brokerage and EFECs, the ECS industry's high-level conference, in a mission to strengthen the ECS industry in Europe through collaboration and networking. This in turn is part of an intensified cooperation based on a renewed Memorandum of Understanding signed in November 2019, explained Ms Bedran.

Besides strengthening the European ECS ecosystem, the 3As share a mission to represent the interests of the ECS industry community in the ECSEL tripartite Joint Undertaking under Horizon 2020. They are contributing to shape the European Partnership for KDT (Key Digital Technologies) under Horizon Europe, the successor to Horizon 2020 by co-designing funding programmes together with the European Commission and National Public Authorities (NPAs). They are also promoting EUREKA Clusters as a valuable funding instrument for the ECS industry and supporting their evolution to further improve their effectiveness.

These missions are particularly important now as Horizon 2020, ECSEL and the EUREKA PENTA/EURIPIDES² Clusters are launching their final Calls in 2020.



Shaping the future with our members

This changing context was widely addressed over the two-day conference, with speakers from the 3As and the European Commission addressing key questions: What will the new funding landscape look like? What is the role of 3As in shaping it? And what are the practical implications, especially for SMEs?

But this wasn't purely an information push. In a lively interactive session on the ECS-SRA (Strategic Research Agenda) run by SRA Chair Dr Elisabeth Steimetz of EPoSS, and Vice-chair, Dr Patrick Cogez of AENEAS, the participants – and indeed the entire 3A memberships – were encouraged to contribute thinking on priorities for the ECS industry with an focus on impact for Europe's social and economic well-being.

Launched jointly by the three Associations in 2018, the ECS-SRA has served as a basis for the Multi-Annual Strategic Plan (MASP), work plans and calls in ECSEL, as well as a reference document for the EUREKA PENTA/EURIPIDES2 Clusters. The latest update was published on the opening day of the conference. However, this year will be "interesting" said Mr Cogez, "since there are new funding instruments being set up and it is also time for a major ECS-SRA update."

Elisabeth Steimetz added that the ECS-SRA will continued to be structured around key applications and essential technologies as drivers and enablers for ECS, but there would be greater emphasis on transversal, cross-sectional topics including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Edge computing, advanced control, architecture and design methods together with quality, reliability, safety and cyber security.

"We will structure the agenda around two parts: one top-down to support high-level decision-making, focused on societal needs from sustainability to European competitiveness; the other, bottom-up, to provide a strategic basis for KDT, and ECS-related EUREKA and Horizon Europe calls for the years ahead," said Ms Steimetz.

Invited to give feedback on questions about the ECS-SRA via their phones and laptops, some 200+ participants enthusiastically contributed. 80% expressed an interest in getting involved in developing content for the next update and suggestions for improvement / expansion.

Hearing the SME voice

As these strategic priorities are defined and implemented, SMEs are vital players and Elisabeth Steimetz emphasised the 3As' support: "... we have an important say in funding instrument design. We make proposals and we make sure the SME voice is heard," she said.

Certainly, the SME voice is heard at the ECS Brokerage Event – this year with ever more diversity in application and technology areas, more women presenting, and a geographical spread from Canada to Turkey. Throughout the two days, the poster exhibition spaces were constantly busy. The SME presentation sessions drew attentive audiences, with SMEs promoting specific project ideas and seeking out potential partners. Several other SMEs chose to showcase their capabilities in 'expertise' pitches, where they outlined the experience and skills they can bring to collaborative projects.



Providing practical information

The ECS Brokerage event is also a rich source of information for participants on finding and responding to calls. Simona Rucareanu of the ECSEL JU Office and Peter Connock, Director of the PENTA programme, gave extensive practical advice on proposal creation and submission. Plus, the participants heard about many new calls of interest such as a EUREKA ‘thematic’ call on AI to be opened in April. Meanwhile, Francisco Ibanez of DG CONNECT encouraged attendees to look at last calls within Horizon 2020 including in photonics – a new field for the ECS community attracting much attention. Mr Ibanez mentioned applications such as sensing in environmental pollution and agri-food (another noticeable new topic at this year’s event) and indicated that photonics is expected to feature in the future KDT instrument.

Going further

Looking ahead, the 3As are committed to building on the success of the ECS Brokerage Event 2020. They recognise that while SMEs are crucial to Europe’s competitiveness, it’s not always easy for them to participate in collaborative projects and in many cases, they need large enterprise engagement and support. That’s what makes the ECS Brokerage event so valuable in disseminating knowledge of programmes and calls, and in facilitating connections between large enterprises, SMEs, research & technology organisations and universities to build consortia.