



## GreenEcoNet Thematic Workshop Brief

### “Internationalisation of SMEs: Improving access to markets for green SMEs”

Brussels, CEPS, 27 May 2015

#### GreenEcoNet supporting the internationalization of green SMEs

##### *Summary of discussion held*

Following the introductory remarks made by Mr Vasileios Rizos (Researcher at the Centre for European Policy Studies - CEPS) and Mr Vincenzo Gente (Project Officer, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission); Chris Hopkins (Project Officer, Green Economy Coalition - GEC) provided a visual presentation of the GreenEcoNet platform (<http://www.greeneconet.eu/>) and discussed how it can contribute to the internationalisation of EU SMEs.

#### Thematic topic: Improving access to international markets for green SMEs

##### *Summary of discussion held*

Following the introductory comments made by Mr Wytze van der Gaast (Senior Expert, Joint Implementation Network - JIN), Ms Eva Revilla (Policy Officer, DG Grow, European Commission) enumerated a number of instruments through which the EU supports SMEs and their internationalisation under the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs (COSME) programme: the European Resource Efficiency Excellence Centre, the European Enterprise Network and the European Strategic Cluster Partnerships. With the Partnership Instrument the Commission has launched the Low Carbon Business Action in middle-income countries. She highlighted that while over 90% of European SMEs are mainly active in national markets, internationalisation of their business offers new economic opportunities. In light of that, greening of SME business can both be triggered by new international



energy and resource saving opportunities and new market opportunities for SMEs that supply clean technologies and products. According to Ms Revilla, an overall policy vision is needed to support SMEs in their green internationalisation ambitions.

Mr Guido Lena (Director for Sustainable Development, The European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises- UEAPME) highlighted that while market mechanisms are the same internationally, markets may differ from each other in terms of lack of a solid legal and institutional framework, barriers related to language and cultural differences or limited finance opportunities. For SMEs these differences often form obstacles for entering an international market. He argued that a policy-driven international framework is needed based on a clear vision and providing institutional and legal support to SMEs when active on international markets, thereby supported by, among others, governmental agencies. He also recommended that banks take more actions to support SMEs which plan to enter international markets.

In her intervention, Ms Carine Van Hove (Managing Director, Flanders Cleantech Association - FCA) presented the Flemish experience with the internationalisation of SMEs and the Flanders Cleantech Association which has been able to develop international partnerships with various global organisations. Ms Van Hove noted that there is still a lot of work need to be done to effectively support the internationalisation of SMEs. She elaborated on the role of online platforms such FCA and GreenEcoNet. The functionalities of such platforms are acknowledged, especially in combination with expert advice, but Ms Van Hove also pointed out that platforms require maintenance for longer term support. Platform collaboration may support that.

In his presentation, Mr Arthur van Leeuwen (Coordinator, Netherlands Enterprise Agency) underlined the multiple benefits of internationalisation, including: increased revenues, spread of risks, increased levels of innovation, job creation and more tax revenues for governments. Having said that, a number of challenges and pragmatic barriers exist as SMEs going abroad have to adapt and understand a different (business) culture, language, legislation, regulation, etc. Time differences and travel distances should also be taken into consideration. Hence, there is a need to support the internationalisation of SMEs by providing information and advice, organising missions and events, public-private collaboration and using economic diplomacy. An important role in that can be played by governmental agencies as they have contacts in other countries to supports SMEs, such as embassies. In terms of how a platform such as GreenEcoNet could support internationalisation of SMEs, Mr Van Leeuwen recommended to intensify exchange of experience between SMEs, guide SMEs towards coaching and innovation support, help SMEs to identify specific market opportunities, tap into (local) networks and show SMEs, via success stories, what could be the added value of operating in international markets.



## ***Key messages***

- The internationalisation of SMEs has multiple benefits for the SMEs but also for the overall EU economy;
- A number of barriers (cultural, linguistic, legislative differences, lack of finance, etc.) makes the internationalization of SMEs challenging;
- Support at both the EU and Member States level is necessary in terms of legal, technical and policy frameworks, so that SMEs can enter international markets more easily;
- Clusters and associations of SMEs can play a key role in the successful internationalisation of SMEs, with a view to coaching, showing added value, networking, etc;
- GreenEcoNet would be a useful instrument to facilitate the formation of such clusters.

