

4.5. SUPPORT TO INNOVATION

Research and Technology (R&T) is one of the areas where SMEs can succeed in direct competition. Therefore, actions fostering government cooperation with innovative and responsive SMEs are needed to support a vibrant EDTIB.

The innovative and creative capacity of SMEs is not always fully exploited as many SMEs are not aware of the intellectual property (IP) system or the protection it can provide for their inventions, brands, and designs. Also, due to their size, SMEs have limited resources to protect, monitor and claim infringements of their IP.

SMEs participation in innovation is also hindered by the lack of funds or resources to comply with co-funding rules and lack of knowledge on the key stakeholders within the MoD.

Collaborative programmes between government and industry provide good incentives to increase SME participation in R&T. This requires however appropriate provisions for IP and for exploitation of the technology developed.

Innovation remains however unexploited if not transformed into commercialised products or equipment. Therefore actions to foster and facilitate industrialisation and commercialisation of innovation should be set up, including partnerships between SMEs and big companies which can provide the necessary basis to bring the technology into markets.

Recommendations to Member States

- » To distribute to the industry and SMEs particularly relevant information on future R&T priorities, new projects and cooperative opportunities.
- » To organise targeted workshops on future R&T priorities in order to foster possible proposals from SMEs;
- » To make contractual processes related to the collaborative programmes simple and reactive with the purpose of providing quick feedback from the industry.
- » To establish a dedicated body to provide an efficient support to SMEs with innovative concepts and technologies that may have defence applications.
- » To increase the specific defence budget for R&T and guarantee a minimum number of contracts on R&T to SMEs.
- » To encourage establishment of partnerships with civil research organizations to support dual-use innovations.
- » To set up measures to help to bring innovation and technologies into markets, and to encourage partnerships between SMEs and big companies in order to contribute to this objective (however considering carefully IP issues to facilitate SMEs to address also other market opportunities).
- » To ensure that information on IP is available within MoD (e.g. contact details to appropriate institution dealing with IP, booklets available within MoD facilities).
- » To encourage Prime Contractors to deal with their subcontractors on not less favourable IP protection terms than those agreed between contracting authorities and Prime Contractors.
- » To provide information on contractual process and IP provisions to the Prime Contractors and SMEs.

