

## Position paper on the programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME)

### Abstract

- Despite the great need of supporting businesses competitiveness by adoption of new business models, innovative practices and access to new markets, the COSME programme has been sparsely exploited in our regions during the current programming period<sup>1</sup>. The COSME funding in our region is mainly connected to the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) actions.
- While we entirely support the idea that SMEs should be the primary beneficiaries of COSME, we believe that it is important to distinguish between the beneficiaries of the programme and the target audience of the calls.
- Clusters play an important role in our regions implementation of the smart specialisation strategies and thereby an important role in strengthening SME competitiveness and SME internationalisation.
- We believe that if COSME-calls would be more focused at supporting cluster activities related to smart specialisation, the programme would ultimately provide greater benefit for SMEs and move from being one of the most underexploited, to become one of the most important programmes in supporting SMEs growth and internationalisation in our regions.

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<sup>1</sup> In the COSME Data Hub, which only features beneficiaries who have been awarded grants co-financed by the COSME programme (not guarantees, loans and equity capital 'financial instruments' channelled by the European Investment Fund through local financial institutions in EU countries, nor actions delivered through procurement and calls for tender, including studies and campaigns), there are only four beneficiaries listed in the whole North Middle Sweden and East Central Sweden area.

## The future of COSME

- a) Smart specialisation has proven to be an effective and transformative tool for increased research and innovation (R&I) contributing to higher competitiveness on the regional and European level. The approach has been successful in refining priorities and achieving a more long-term and systematic approach to R&I policy. The smart specialisation concept should thus be further strengthened in the coming programming period and we believe that the success of smart specialisation is dependent on the alignment between European initiatives and other existing instruments, such as the COSME programme. An alignment would be very rewarding in creating synergies between the ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds) and the Framework programmes.
- b) We welcome the action *GRO/SME/17/C/06 – Industrial Modernisation and Smart Specialisation* in the 2017 COSME work programme, as an action in line with our comment (a). In the remaining work programmes in the present programming period, and for the planning of the programme priorities in the next programming period, we encourage even further actions directed towards cluster initiatives and the industry to support the industry participation in the implementation of the thematic smart specialisation platforms and other smart specialisation initiatives.
- c) The variety of support actions in the COSME programme creates a challenge in communicating the opportunities in the programme. We believe that while the beneficiaries of the calls ultimately should be growth and internationalisation of SMEs, the programme would benefit from including and concentrating its calls also on actors providing support for SMEs. In particular, we believe that providing resources for clusters to participate in pan-European investment and co-learning projects such as the Vanguard Initiative and the S3-thematic platforms is well suited to this purpose. To enhance the communicability of COSME we suggest introducing a “Cluster-pillar” to the programme, alternatively lift out the financial instruments from the programme and streamline COSME to a programme entirely directed at Clusters.
- d) The design and implementation of Smart Specialisation, as an important tool in building regional innovation ecosystems, have so far largely been a priority at regional and European level. We are largely referring to the situation in Sweden, but this is generally the governance structure in other parts of Europe, based on our experience. We very much welcome the dialogue and cooperation with the European Commission within the field of smart specialisation. We would ask the European Commission to also keep a dialogue with the member-states on how the national level in the member-state can support the regional work on smart specialisation. In Sweden, this discussion is ongoing and the European Commission is an important partner in this dialogue to achieve an efficient multilevel governance. The COSME programme, should help support our efforts in implementing smart specialisation strategies, and the COSME national contact point could further promote the programme as an opportunity in the realisation of the smart specialisation strategies.

- e) As stated earlier, the COSME programme has been sparsely exploited in our regions during the current programming period. The COSME funding in our regions is mainly connected to the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) actions. We believe that the EEN has the potential to further be a utilised resource in the implementation of the smart specialisation strategies and development of regional innovation ecosystems.



**Abbe Ronsten**

*Chair of the Regional Executive Board*

Dalarna Region – The Regional Development  
Council of Dalarna County

**Irén Lejégren**

*Chair of the Committee for Regional Growth*

Region Örebro County – The County  
Council of Örebro County



**Tomas Riste**

*Chair of the Regional Executive Board*

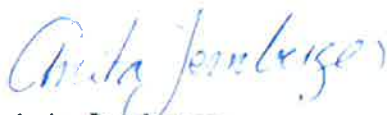
Värmland Region – The Regional  
Development Council of Värmland County



**Stina Höök**

*2nd vice chair of the Regional Executive Board*

Värmland Region – The Regional  
Development Council of Värmland  
County



**Anita Jemberger**

*Chair of the Committee for Regional Growth*

Region Östergötland – The County  
Council of Östergötland