

A dark blue horizontal banner with rounded ends, containing the text 'Horizon of Innovations' in white, bold, sans-serif font. The banner is positioned across the upper part of a large, stylized head profile that serves as the background for the entire page. The head profile is outlined in blue and contains various icons representing innovation and research, such as gears, a lightbulb, a paper airplane, a pie chart, a checkmark, and various geometric shapes. Dashed lines and arrows also point upwards from the icons, suggesting growth and progress.

NCBR Conference

15 years of the National Centre
for Research and Development in Poland



National Centre for Research
and Development

NCBR Conference: Horizon of Innovations – 15 years of the National Centre for Research and Development in Poland

International cooperation – challenges ahead

Summary of panel discussions

European and international programmes and initiatives

NCBR International Office

– Scope of activities and support offer

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

Welcome to the NCBR international part of the conference. We highly appreciate your presence here and are delighted to host at our conference representatives of the European Commission, partner agencies and institutions from Poland and abroad. I'd like to extend our special thanks to those of you who have come from countries beyond Europe, the United States, South Korea and Taiwan. Thank you very much for your effort and for your commitment to this special event. As it has already been said, with this conference we are celebrating 15 years of NCBR's achievements, also when it comes to building and strengthening our international presence. Through its programmes and initiatives, NCBR was set up to build bridges between business and academia, to facilitate commercialisation and technology transfer, and to increase participation of the private sector in funding research and innovation. For the past 15 years, our agency has significantly contributed to building knowledge- and technology-based economy in Poland. Thanks to our programmes Poland has noted a threefold increase in business expenditure on R&I. In 2021 business expenditure on research and innovation, so-called BERD, exceeded 33% of the total R&I expenditure, which for Poland amounts to 1.4% of GDP, still less than the EU average which is 2.3%. It is worth noting that since its inception NCBR has granted more than PLN 70 billion to numerous projects and we have participated in 140 international programmes and schemes, with 56 of them still active, and we have awarded funding to 1,300 international research and innovation projects totalling PLN 1.5 billion.

According to the European Innovation Scoreboard of 2022, Poland is still in the group of emerging innovators with performance at 60.5% of the EU average. However, the performance is above the average of that particular group, that

is emerging innovators, and what is important, increasing at a rate higher than that of the EU average, which means that these countries' performance gap to the EU is becoming smaller and smaller.

According to the report, Poland's relative strengths are: design applications, job to job mobility in science and technology sector, population with tertiary education, broadband penetration and trademark applications. And our weaknesses, according to the report, include: environment related technologies, innovation expenditures per employee, PCC patent applications and business process innovations. In the long run, for our country challenges remain the same. Increasing R&I investment both by the state and the private sector, increasing the number of innovative technology-based companies, deep tech innovations as well as patent applications, and bringing up the level of commercialisation of technologies in general, so that we – as a country – could jump to the next group called moderate innovators.

NCBR, now by far the largest research and innovation funding agency in Central and Eastern Europe, has significantly increased its international presence. In 2019, due to a substantial increase in the scope of our activities, we set up the International Office, which apart from running international programmes, also includes in its structures the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe and the NCBR Office in Brussels. Our agency is currently present in 11 European Partnerships of Horizon Europe, runs several bilateral programmes with European and non-European countries and a number of multilateral initiatives of different types and scope, involving partners from different parts of the world. We support Polish entities in applying for Horizon Europe grants through many different activities and endeavours. When it comes to international cooperation, our long-term strategy is built on 3 pillars. We want to expand the portfolio of international

programmes to give opportunities to Polish research institutions, research teams and companies to participate in research and innovation projects in order to build their international presence and outreach. **In the long term we want to strengthen Poland's economy through participation in the European and global innovation ecosystem.** Our second goal is to increase Poland's participation in Horizon Europe. We want to further develop the services of the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe to help unlock the potential of Polish applicants. We want to improve statistics as to the number of participating institutions, project leaders and in general Poland's budget share. Actually, to our great contentment and satisfaction, we are witnessing some promising improvements in statistics, when we compare the situation after 178 calls for proposals in Horizon Europe with that in Horizon 2020. We can see that the number of proposals above the threshold has increased from 14.21% to 35.7%. And in general, Poland's success rate has gone up from 3.31% to 10.53%, and also the number of projects with funding awarded has increased by 6 percentage points. The third pillar of our strategy is to continue building our presence in Brussels through our Brussels Office and, of course, through cooperation, partnership and networking with the European Commission, with the offices of other European agencies and other actors present in the Brussels ecosystem. We want to continue running our educational and information activities, and through that we want to support Polish research institutions and companies in Brussels.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we are going to touch upon the New EU Innovation Agenda adopted by the European Commission in July 2022 and its ambition to make Europe the global powerhouse of deep tech innovations and start-ups. In the first panel, speakers discuss the five flagships foreseen in this new agenda and will dwell on chances of closing Europe's innovation gap with underlying challenges for

Poland in this long-term strategy. For those of you who are interested in applying for funding, current open calls for proposals and funding schemes will also be presented as well as NCBR's offer of support when it comes to Horizon Europe, that is consulting, training and matchmaking for future projects, services rendered by the National Contact Point and our Brussels Office. We have also foreseen discussion on benefits and challenges of international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral schemes and international projects – how they can bring research teams on a higher level and how they can build their international outreach. And last but not least, we are going to talk about one of our newest and perhaps the most challenging programme directed to start-ups and founders, which aim is to accommodate and accelerate Polish companies in the US market.

Ladies and gentlemen, since we are celebrating this very special anniversary, permit me to express my gratitude and appreciation of the whole team of our International Office for their hard work and commitment throughout all these years. My special thanks go to Directors: Cezary Błaszczuk, Ewa Kocińska-Lange and Magdalena Bem-Andrzejewska for their great leadership and vision in managing their teams. I want to thank all of you, dear colleagues: I want to thank our managers, coordinators, experts and specialists. Thank you very much for your dedication, hard work and for lending this agency your talents and skills. I must say that working with you throughout all these years has been for me an extremely rewarding and gratifying experience, and I hope you're going to stay with us on board for many more years to come. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to wish everybody a great day and an inspiring conference. And as always, please stay tuned. Thank you very much.

Agnieszka Ratajczak,
Director,
Office of International Cooperation, NCBR



NCBR International

Celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2022, the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR) is believed to be the largest R&D funding agency in Central and Eastern Europe. With an average annual budget to the tune of EUR 1.3 billion, NCBR has been Poland's foremost R&I funding executive agency, until recently supervised by the Ministry responsible for science, as of 1 August 2022 under the wings of the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy.

For 15 years NCBR has played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between public and private R&I funding in Poland. NCBR's often trailblazing programmes have effectively initiated an increase of private R&D&I spending by taking at least some of the risk off entrepreneurs, thus encouraging them to fund R&D&I activities.

With foreign cooperation as one of its statutory tasks, NCBR has long been involved in a variety of international programmes and boasts a broad international scope of activities. The majority of these are EU-funded programmes under Horizon Europe where NCBR is responsible for organising calls for proposals in Poland. NCBR also boasts 12 bilateral MoUs signed with equivalent agencies or Ministries across the globe. As a result, **NCBR's R&I collaboration spans from the US through the State of Israel to People's Republic of China, Japan and Taiwan.**

International cooperation has thus been one of the cornerstones of the establishment of NCBR in 2007, and has increased its significance with the creation of a dedicated Department of International Cooperation in 2018. Another one has been the idea of building a platform for an effective dialogue between business and academia. NCBR has since successfully been carrying out this task. An important element of this process is a constantly ongoing development of international cooperation. Its main goal is to increase the **international competitiveness of Polish research teams and entrepreneurs through dialogue and cooperation with foreign partners**, gaining

international experience, know-how transfer and **strengthening Poland's international position.** In practice, this means participation in the organisation of calls for proposals for international R&D&I projects, and thus financing Polish entities (research units, enterprises, scientific consortia) carrying out these tasks.

NCBR finances innovative research and development projects of significant international importance. As a result, Polish entities obtain a number of benefits, such as building a network of foreign contacts, exchange of knowledge and personnel, gaining experience in the coordination and administration of international projects.

NCBR cooperates with other institutions of a similar profile, operating abroad, also in countries that are innovation leaders. Joint undertakings allow us to gain new and valuable experience in preparing and conducting various types of calls for proposals. They also provide an opportunity to compare the procedures applied and choose some best practices. Contact with foreign experts helps in creating a network of international relations and facilitates establishing cooperation in the evaluation of applications submitted to NCBR.

For Polish researchers and entrepreneurs, international initiatives constitute an opportunity to take a broader look at research and innovation issues worldwide. When applying for funding, scientists have a chance to join efforts to solve a specific research problem with scientists and entrepreneurs from abroad. It is a unique possibility to exchange experiences and establish long-term cooperation with outstanding partners from other countries. An additional advantage of many of these projects is their interdisciplinary nature. Projects' implementation also provides marketing effects for scientific units, which are becoming more and more recognisable on a global scale. The impact of international cooperation on the economy should also be emphasized, as it gives a strong developmental impulse.

The implementation of innovative projects together with foreign partners also brings with it a lot of challenges. One of them is the multiplicity of administrative tasks related to the implementation of programmes, which do not always translate into a greater number and value of projects funded. This experience, however, allows beneficiaries to build a network of cooperation and gain knowledge that facilitates applying for much larger funds in competitions under the EU research and innovation framework programmes, such as Horizon Europe partnerships or actions. Beneficiaries participating in international projects co-financed by NCBR gain experience in the implementation of complex projects, also from the formal and financial point of view.

It also happens that cultural and language differences, different pace of work as well as suspension or slowdown of activity by one of the international partners put the effective and timely implementation of the project under question. It is therefore worth being aware of the partner's potential, and already when establishing cooperation, clearly outline its framework, time horizon and scope of responsibility for individual stages, so that you can then enforce your rights and obligations under the grant agreement.

To sum up, participation in international programmes allows for financing Polish entities participating in international research and development projects on topics of great transnational importance. Thanks to this cooperation, Polish entities obtain a number of benefits, among which it is worth mentioning:



increasing the level of research quality and the range of achieved effects (e.g. the number of citations),



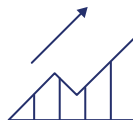
increasing the international recognition of the individuals and institutions involved,



cooperation (through a network of informal contacts),



access to unique tangible (e.g. research equipment) and intangible resources (knowledge, experience),



increasing productivity (e.g. number and rank of publications),



cost reduction.

It goes without saying that supporting innovative projects involves certain risks. NCBR has been taking up this challenge for years by co-financing and co-creating the foundations of modern science and economy in Poland.

With all the above in mind, it was therefore a no-brainer to hold a dedicated international block of panels and host an array of participants from across the globe at our celebratory event to mark the 15th anniversary of NCBR. Not least because it was partly meant as a follow-up to the international conference hosted by NCBR's Department of International Cooperation almost 3 years before to the day, in October 2019 in Warsaw. It simply felt right to see what has changed in the international business & science environment throughout these 36 months marked by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the breakout of war in Ukraine.

Looking at NCBR's international side, the key changes that took place in that period include setting up of the Office of International Cooperation in 2019 as well as taking over the role of the Polish National Contact Point by becoming its host organisation in Horizon Europe in late 2020. Added to that, NCBR now represents Polish research & innovation interests within the EU as a scientific partner of Business & Science Poland (BSP). Also established in 2019, the key purpose of our Brussels office activities is to promote and increase Polish participation in the EU programmes for research and innovation, especially in the aforementioned Horizon Europe.

To cap it all, perhaps the main side event of the 15th anniversary conference was the signing of the MoU between NCBR and Korea Institute of Energy Technology Evaluation and Planning (KETEP). NCBR and KETEP have decided to prepare and open joint calls for proposals for R&I projects. Opening of the first one is planned for 2023. Budget, eligible applicants as well as the way of submitting applications will be jointly decided upon in due course. However, some thematic areas considered by both institutions include renewable energy, hydrogen and fuel cells, nuclear energy and security, energy storage systems, energy effectiveness, distributed energy and smart network technologies. Possible further areas shall be identified and agreed upon by both entities based on exchanging information as well as the interests of business and academia from both countries. The MoU with Korea, preceded by a visit of NCBR to Seoul and Singapore, demonstrates NCBR's constant readiness to expand its network of global contacts and an increased interest in collaboration with Asian partners.

We very much look forward to continuing to have a direct say on the EU innovation policy by means of sitting within a number of EU-funded initiatives, as well as by maintaining and extending our group of foreign partners from across the globe. Do watch this space!



Panel I

How to make the New European Union Innovation Agenda a reality?

Panel discussion „How to make the New European Innovation Agenda a reality” focused on the document adopted by the European Commission (EC) in July 2022. It is an initiative that aims at building a pan-European innovation ecosystem and making Europe a home for the deep tech while reducing the innovation gap between European regions.

The guests in the panel represented different institutions and perspectives. In their interventions, they raised issues related to all five flagship projects included in the New EU Innovation Agenda (NEIA). The discussion was moderated by Ms. Ewa Kocińska-Lange, director of the NCBR Office in Brussels.

As she noted in the introduction to the debate, the individual issues included in the Agenda are not entirely new, but the way they are presented and combined allows us to talk about a new opening. The debate on the EU Innovation Agenda organised in Warsaw by the National Centre for Research and Development is a part of the ongoing international discussion on ways to strengthen the position of the European innovation ecosystem against its global competition. There is a general agreement as to the goals enlisted in the Agenda, but the implementation will remain a challenge. **Commissioner for Research, Innovation, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, recently declared that the EU’s ambition is to create a pan-European innovation ecosystem in just 2 years.**

Anna Panagopoulou, Director of the European Research Area (ERA) and Innovation at the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the EC, responsible for co-creation with Member States and stakeholders of EU policy that shapes the European research and innovation system, pointed to the ERA and the NEIA as the most important initiatives.

“Today we speak what needs to be done more from what has been foreseen in this Agenda and how we collaborate and work together to deliver the expected outcomes at European

level, but also at regional and national level. It’s very clear that depending on the country the challenges are different. So it’s very important that each one of the country and each of regions and stakeholders identifies what is the most challenging and most interesting for them and to contribute to our entire vote to deliver this very challenging Innovation Agenda” – noted Ms. Panagopoulou.

According to the EC, it is high time to ensure Europeans prosperity, security and strategic autonomy. The Agenda marks an important step in the advancement of Europe’s innovation ecosystem. And also it’s not only going to help Europe to develop its new technologies and to address the most pressing societal challenges and bring them to the market, but it is also going to address the innovation divide.

Innovation will benefit all sectors, from renewable energy to architecture, from constructions to mobility and health. And also we know that innovation across Europe will contribute to the green and digital transition. But this document is really focusing on deep tech. And deep tech innovations are emerging from growing cohort of innovative startups in the EU, and have the potential to drive innovation across the economy and society” – stated Ms. Panagopoulou.

NEIA is organised around 5 flagships that result from a long consultation process with stakeholders and Member States. So the 1st flagship is the funding for the scaleups. The 2nd one is about enabling innovation through experimentation spaces and public procurement. The 3rd one is about accelerating and strengthening European innovation ecosystem. The 4th one is about fostering and attracting deep tech talents, and the 5th one is to improve policy making tools. Each of these flagships is an European answer to the challenges that Europe is still facing and aims at deploying its full innovation potential.

Mateusz Gaczyński, deputy director of the Department of Innovation and Development at the Ministry of Education and Science (MEiN), dealing with the policy of innovation in scientific research in the national and European context, including cohesion policy and programmes such as Horizon Europe, focused his intervention on the Polish perspective.

“The beauty of the new Innovation Agenda is that it is very cross-sectoral. It covers two separate but key domains, science and business. **The State Science Policy, which was adopted in Poland almost simultaneously with NEIA, defines 6 different areas of scientific activity that are a priority for the development of society and the economy and are key to tackling social and economic challenges.** NEIA gives us a set of tools that we can use to implement Polish science policy, but not only, because it is also a bridge linking science with the industrial policy, which was also adopted by the Polish government in 2022. We therefore have a very handy toolkit for implementing both policies with the possibility of using very helpful European instruments” – stated Mr. Gaczyński.

In his opinion, funding of deep tech skylabs is very important for the industrial – therefore not scientific – policy, while in the second pillar of the Agenda two actions are particularly important. The first is the revised state aid framework for research, development and innovation. The state aid rules can be perceived sometimes as a bottleneck in supporting innovators, thus the revised framework seems to be going in a good direction. It opens some channels that were closed under the previous framework. The one question open for the ministry is the issue of the so-called technological infrastructures, because of the high hopes connected to this idea, especially with regard to the Łukasiewicz Research Network’s central role. The mode of its implementation will be determined in parallel by the legal services of the EC and the Polish competition authority. The second issue is a special advisory service in the field of innovation procurement. MEiN, together with

the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, continuously supports all forms of the innovative procurements. **NCBR, as one of the few entities in Poland, has implemented innovative purchasing activities on a large scale, which allow it to carry out public contracts for the benefit of society and business.**

“We also care about synergies, we will look at how the Agenda will translate into rapprochement between entrepreneurs and innovators, because we have been trying to implement such systems on a smaller scale in Poland for years and have not had much success. We are therefore very curious how the EC will prepare, launch and implement this programme, also in order to use the best experience in our own activities. We hope that the experience from the European Scale Up 100 will be explored in the Łukasiewicz scaleup initiative” – continued the representative of the Ministry of Education and Science.

MEiN intends to implement the fourth action of the Agenda (retention of the deep tech talents) in the field of education. Strong support for cross-programme innovation results from the link with the industrial doctoral programme, which the ministry already has in its portfolio. Further efforts are planned to develop this programme among doctoral students and postdocs. Equally important for MEiN is the Erasmus Alliance as the ministry is its managing authority in Poland. “In addition to deep tech, we will continuously support also more >>traditional<< innovations, very important for the development of SMEs, which are the backbone of our industry” – concluded Mr. Gaczyński.

Next speaker was Kinga Stanisławska, the founder of the European VC platform for women, member of the board of the European Innovation Council (EIC), very active in the European discussions, also on NEIA. Ms. Stanisławska shared her experience in the field of financing and scaling.

“We should make it easier for innovators to raise capital. We should allow them to have access to talent, and we should allow the innovator not to have regulatory roadblocks.

We should allow them to make it easier to be truly competitive in the global landscape. There are of course special situations that we are in as Poland is a very male dominated space of venture and startups. **Every year only 2% of venture capital money goes to female led companies. 2%! That’s 2% of 100 billion EUR in Europe, and every year it’s the same. It does not change. And only 9% of assets under management are in the hands of females in venture. That does not change. That’s 9% of 20 billion EUR. We’re not making progress there. And the truth is that we need more access to capital, we need more diversity, because we need to address various challenges in the way we are creating society, and those challenges are often addressed by female founders. And as Poland, a widening country, we have our own challenges. We know that we are one of the most challenged countries in terms of energy transformation, in terms of pollution. These are the areas that we truly need to focus on for the good of every Polish citizen and for the good of our neighbours”** – demanded Ms. Stanisławska.

Piotr Garstecki, professor of chemistry with extensive scientific achievements, founder and president of Scope Fluidics – a deep tech company in medical diagnostics, winner of ERC and EIC grants, focused his speech on the entrepreneurship, conditions that innovation ecosystems must create to enable success, and then indicated what he values NEIA for.

“I find the Innovation Agenda positive – facilitating exchanges, stock options, regulatory framework, all of these are very good initiatives. I also appreciate the Agenda for its brevity and the talent section. **I think that at the national level we have an additional opportunity to use the very good technical training we have in Poland, with more open work on projects, to build entrepreneurial skills in parallel!”** – argued prof. Garstecki.

In Poland, there are over 160 startups that can be classified as deep tech. They mainly operate in the chemical industry (applied chemistry), advanced materials, medtech and civil engineering. With this opening Katarzyna Dąbrowska, the advisor responsible for shaping and implementing the NCBR’s strategy, talked about how the Centre supports them.

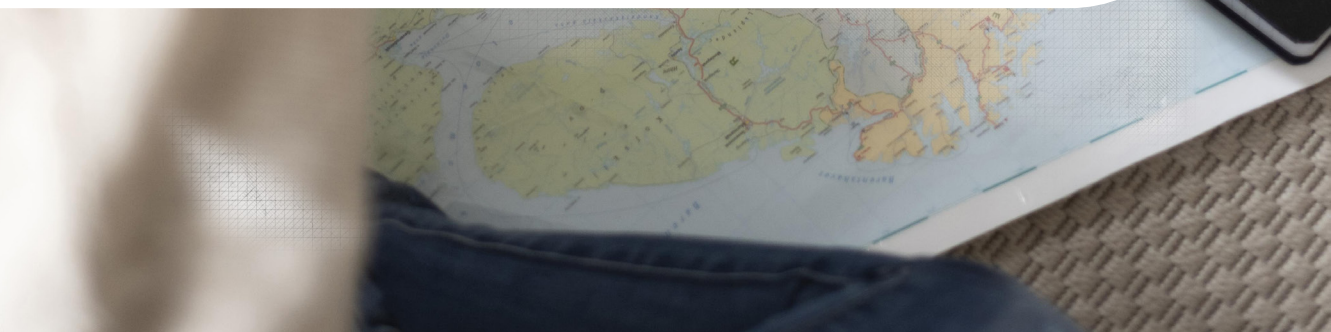
“The uniqueness of our Centre lies in the fact that we deal with both business and science. We not only funding, but we can support in a much more comprehensive way. The deep tech area is so specific that it requires a huge amount of assets, not only time and money, although the lack of funding is naturally a complete obstacle. Deep tech requires talent. Requires enablers. It requires researchers, in case of individual innovators, with great ideas. It also demands market access. **And here we are as NCBR. We support startups with our funds, we can scale and mentor researchers. We deliver near-to-market prototypes and working prototypes for our innovative public procurement. We also have programs such as Leader, to which we invite young scientists and young innovators.** We lead them to develop ideas, we enable them to get this business mindset that is so different from science” – as Ms. Dąbrowska pointed out.

“The New European Innovation Agenda gives also an opportunity to create regional innovation valleys, of which exactly 100 are to be created according to the document. The challenge will be to direct the stream of funding from various sources, i.e. from the cohesion policy, from the Horizon Europe programme, as well as from other programmes, so that these valleys are created in Poland and translate into the development of the country” – concluded Ms. Ewa Kocińska-Lange in her closing remarks while wrapping-up the debate on the New European Innovation Agenda in Warsaw.



Panel II

International projects – why bother?



International projects – why bother? – a panel discussion on the advantages and benefits of international cooperation, with representatives of various types of institutions (moderator: Magdalena Bem-Andrzejewska, director of the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe, NCBR).

The progressing process of globalisation causes the network of mutual connections and dependencies to involve more and more countries. The field of research and innovation is par excellence concerned. Few remain areas in which an individual research effort can lead to significant discoveries. Yet international cooperation can have various faces. The world is changing very quickly. The economic, legal, political circumstances change. What really can push research organisations to face these issues, to take on difficult challenges rather than benefit from more available national funding? The session's aim was to collide different perspectives on the subject.

Panellists in this session were:

Prof. Mikko Alava – a Finnish physicist working in Poland, head of NOMATEN Center of Excellence in multifunctional materials for industrial and medical applications. The CoE has been set up in the National Centre for Nuclear Research in Otwock, Świerk. NOMATEN is a project funded under Horizon 2020 as a Teaming for Excellence grant.

Dr Torsten Fischer – director of the European Liaison Office of the German Research Organisations (KoWi), based in Bonn and Brussels.

Prof. Iwona Ługowska – oncologist, Head of Early Phase Clinical Research Unit, Plenipotentiary for International Cooperation, National Institute of Oncology in Warsaw.

Mr Kamil Maszczyk – project manager in K-FLEX, multinational company operating in the sector of thermal and acoustic installations in Poland, based in Uniejów.

Prof. Piotr Stepnowski – chemist engaged in research dealing with environmental protection, initiator and 1st director of the Fahrenheit Association of Universities in Gdańsk, Rector of the University of Gdańsk.

In the first round of questions the aim was to gather a full range of perspectives represented by the panellists. Professor Piotr Stepnowski, rector of University of Gdańsk, underlined the importance of support for well standing research groups which then function as scientific locomotives, serving as example and also taking onboard further participants. The real challenge is to stimulate those numerous researchers who are less active because the community cannot be only based on the leading actors of research; the question of incentives appears then. Rector Stepnowski described also opportunities of international development gained thanks to the membership of the UG in the European University Programme, concluding that after all there definitely must be a multilayer strategy, swiftly coordinated in a big organisation like university.

Professor Mikko Alava characterized the context of a high-class research institute performing as a CoE. NOMATEN Centre of Excellence, based on a consortium of three partners (National Centre for Nuclear Research, Poland, Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique et aux Énergies Alternatives, France and Teknologian Tutkimuskeskus VTT Oy (VTT), Finland), is supposed to be international – an international viewpoint on how to do research, a huge contact network, research excellence and facilities to reach and exploit easily, partners to help further in the broader international landscape. One have to use this strength to actually become even stronger. Research and science are about communication and networking (and this is also one of the crucial features of Teaming for Excellence grants). But there are two sides of the coin! **On the Polish side, there is the challenge of using all these abundant opportunities accordingly. Fortunately, it pays you back the effort that you put into that.**

Mr Kamil Maszczyk was then asked to analyze the case of his company – K-FLEX – which is a coordinator of a big project FRONTSH1P under Horizon 2020 (called “the most Polish of Horizon projects”, with 10 participants from Poland). EU Framework Programmes are more and more focused on innovation while Polish companies are unfortunately not yet very active in Horizon Europe. What provoked the involvement of K-FLEX in the project, and what were the reasons to take on the leadership role in the consortium, which is additionally uncommon? What are the profits apart from the grant funding itself? The company’s first rationale was to solve its problems via such a project. That was the reason for searching other partners for the consortium and join efforts by complementing some competency gaps. It is also worth to stress that it is an example of a big company (EU FP being an identified good source of funding for big companies), and multinational one.

Doctor Torsten Fischer is very much focused on the European cooperation, being the head of a Liaison Office for German Research Organisations in Brussels and Bonn. KoWi is an exposure of the German Research Organisations to European programs. Why is it so important to have such a representation in Brussels, even from the point of view of a very strong research sector, as it is the case in Germany? What is exactly the role and principal goals of its activity? Dr Fischer pointed out that KoWi’s mandate is very similar to the mandate of the NCBR Office’s in Brussels. It has been in Brussels for more than 30 years and Germany is in a quite different situation compared to Poland, being a bigger country, and having worked with European funds for so many years. There was enough time to tackle the challenges or the obstacles of European funding. Still, even for German participants it is complex to apply for projects and it is complex to administer those projects. KoWi tries to explain to the researchers how this is working; it offers all kinds of services: traditional

activities like revising project applications, free of cost, and helping to manage the funds. But it also gives information to the Presidents of the universities, assisting them (on demand) with the creation of a proper Horizon Europe approach strategy. **It is always important to understand the EU funding as a complementary element of funding in institutions – that is the same in every Member State.** A hint from Dr Fischer: try to see the EU funding as an element of your individual strategy or as an element of the institutional strategy, and start with smaller programs. If you put a lot of work into applications and if you don’t get the funding, although maybe you have a good rate or a good final score by the experts, then there’s a little bit less frustration, if you start with the smaller programmes.

Professor Iwona Ługowska, not only an eminent researcher in a very demanding domain of oncology, but also a plenipotentiary for international cooperation for the whole National Institute of Oncology, is a representative of the Institute in numerous international initiatives. She quoted the opening question of the panel: Why bother about international cooperation? For oncology it is a momentum and the Institute needs to be present at every level, also international. **And thanks to the European Commission, together with researchers across Europe, oncologists can apply for numerous grants released under Horizon Europe, especially with the Mission Cancer agenda.** And what we can see at present is an absolutely multi-instrumental and multi-disciplinary level of the communication and also a lot of important topics dedicated to cancer patients, starting from prevention, early detection, diagnostics, treatment and survivorship. Another part is data – European cooperation enables access to incredible stock of medical data. Currently, the Institute, together with the Ministry of Education and Science, with the Ministry of Health and with the National Contact Point for

Horizon Europe is building a National Cancer Mission Hub where should be combined all kinds of information to distribute among not only clinicians, universities or centres, but also patients, advocacy groups or research agencies and many other stakeholders. Probably in December there would be known results of a dedicated Horizon Europe call and our Polish and European initiative dedicated to Mission Cancer Hub would start.

Analyzing the topic of international cooperation, it is impossible to skip the difficulties that may be connected to this kind of relations. What is the main obstacle when a new international initiative is being considered?

Dr Fischer claimed that it is the same thing in administration or corporation: the more participants you have, the more difficult it is to build it up. 20 years ago, he tried to build up Polish-German collaboration in basic research. It is of course relatively easier to act in bilateral relations than on the EU level, because on the EU level there are also more bureaucratic obstacles. One needs more advice as a researcher or as a university or as an SME, if he or she goes on the European level than on the bilateral level. **Maybe in Poland there should be more effort put into building up an effective research management.** Maybe also in collaboration with EU partners: the European Research Area Policy Agenda, for the next years to come, has a point called Improving Research Management.

Prof. Alava took a different viewpoint as a director of a research center, saying that it is for him a practical management problem. You apply for 5 reasonably large projects, you get one. Then there are 4 good research directions that have to be abandoned. That is a practical problem number one. The second one is an obvious thing: first, you have time of preparation for a consortium for a project. It is a year. It will take another year to get the grant awarded, so there are internal timescales in the system that are

difficult for managing the budget and research agenda. Also the people who are supposed to be engaged in the project cannot always be ready to involve. It is a juggling operation.

To close the discussion, panellists were asked what are the main reasons to commit into international cooperation, from an individual perspective and from the institutional one.

Professor Stepnowski thanked Dr Torsten Fischer for the practical recommendations on how to support Polish higher education institutions and research institutions and be more effective. He said he has no complexes relating to the level of research delivered, but there is need for the project engineering and practical support. His individual perspective is that he is a scientist, even being a rector. And he is from Gdańsk, a coastal city, so marine analogies are very appropriate in this context.

This is like endless waters, when you have an international perspective of what you do and you have partnerships. Endless possibilities and this is a joy and pleasure and the never ending satisfaction from what you are doing and inventing and supporting each other. There is no other way, at least in natural sciences, than to do it in international mode. Commenting on that from the institutional perspective, he recalled European University Programme. After the first phase of the Programme a pan-european campaign was run, it was like a floating European university. 70 scientists took part in this cruise, the team partly changed in each port starting from Gdańsk, then Kiel, Bresse and Cadiz in Spain. Prof. Stepnowski thinks that this was the best way to communicate to society the significance of science and the significance of international cooperation. It was also a very joyful experience for the research community.

Professor Ługowska noticed that statistics are unpredictable: sometimes even when we feel the proposal is just perfect, we can fail in the contest. But during the last year the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Institute applied for 16 grants and got 15 of them. This is the pure benefit of the international collaboration. Three of those projects are joint actions. We definitely need to have the experience in working and applying

for grants, how to write a good application, and then how to get support from people who know how to support researchers with the administrative part. Clinicians usually prefer to work with patients and they are often overloaded with work and paperwork, and this is very difficult for them to find time for research. In the British approach, you are researcher and clinician. You've got 4 days of clinic and 1 day for research in a week and it is clear. This is something that the National Institute of Oncology is working on and it will be a pleasure to expand this idea in Poland, fostering this way hopefully the international cooperation.

Mr Kamil Maszczyk had the last word in this panel. He remarked that, as an international company, K-FLEX knows a lot of suppliers and international suppliers, knows a lot of its international competitors. But when they started working with partners in the European project, they met **more than 100 companies, institutions, universities that opened their minds for completely different, unexpected sectors.** Now, they are partners in 5 different European projects, at least 20 partners are involved in each of them. In FRONTSH1P there are 34 different companies from 9 countries. For the company it is a very good opportunity to increase the portfolio, to upgrade or diversify products, to grow. It is also a good opportunity to meet all these people, to travel a lot. Only good things can happen during such an international adventure.

The panellists, representing very different actors of the research landscape in Europe, agreed unanimously that international cooperation is a fundamental part of every progress in their respective fields of activity, source of enormous satisfaction, including financial one. The answer to the initial question: why bother, would then be: because it's simply a must, for many practical reasons. And a pleasure, too.





Panel III

**Bilateral cooperation: strengths & weaknesses.
Future scenarios vs. wide catalogue of
multilateral programmes in Horizon Europe.**

A panel discussion focused on bilateral cooperation vs. multilateral cooperation – its strengths, and weaknesses. In the era of globalisation, multilateral programmes operating with multi-billion budgets are the most visible. Some funding agencies prefer to focus on multilateral funding schemes rather than bilateral ones. What are then the benefits of bilateral cooperation that justify the efforts made by funding agencies and collaborating countries? Should we develop bilateral programmes, or we should focus on large multilateral ones?

Experts tried to answer the question about future cooperation within Europe and beyond. Representatives of various NCBR equivalents and partners from across the globe – their short presentation and summary of main issues/challenges discussed as seen from different countries and perspectives.

The following panelists took part in this session

Hong-Wei Yen, Ph.D. – director of Science and Technology Division, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, Taiwan.

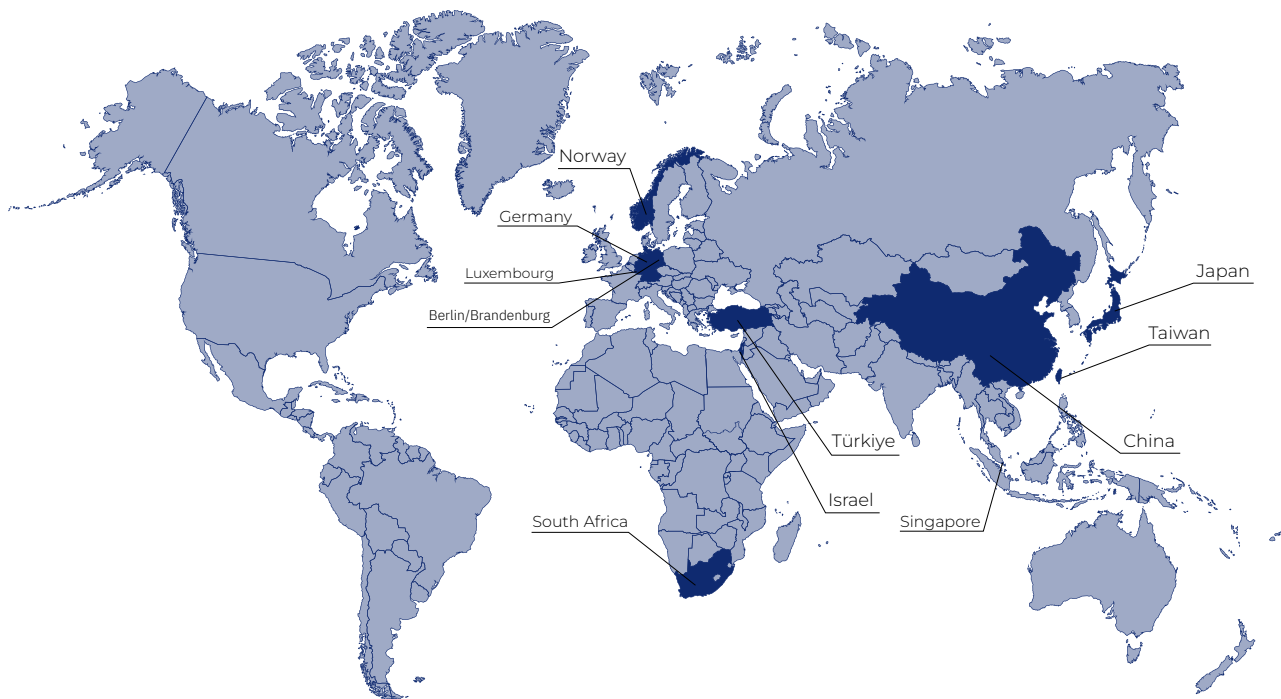
Olga Polotska – executive director of the National Research Foundation of Ukraine.

Aleksandra W. Haugstad – Special Adviser, The Research Council of Norway.

Umut Ege – Program Coordinator, International Cooperation Department, TÜBİTAK, Turkey.

Dr Birgit Ditgens – Senior Scientific Officer and Head of Department at the International Bureau (IB) of the Project Management Agency in care of German Aerospace Centre.

Krystyna Maciejko – Innoglobo Programme Coordinator, NCBR.



In the first round of questions, the panellists shared their views on the main strengths of the bilateral programmes.

“Finding research groups and companies in other countries that fit in with what the research group in your country is doing is sometimes easier than finding good complementarity nationally. It is related to complementary competence as well as complementarity in terms of the infrastructure. Getting access to the specific equipment can benefit research. It is also complementarity in terms of sharing data, access to samples. Getting young researchers involved in bilateral projects gives them international experience early on. Bilateral cooperation allows researchers to concentrate on the relationship with other partners and dig deeper into what can be done. Bilateral projects can be a place where the results and the benefits that were created in a big multilateral project may be adjusted and implemented in the regional and national setting of a particular country – stated Ms. Aleksandra W. Haugstad.

Dr Birgit Ditgens said that there are almost 1500 bilateral contracts between German universities and Polish universities which were concluded without any funding. “It’s already a challenge to keep this higher level of cooperation but this could be done, if we manage to include more young researchers into the corporation. We want to have the young researchers building up their own networks and taking advantage of the bilateral cooperation. Bilateral cooperation can put in the PhD students, the postdocs and give them a clear and very prominent role in the project” – argued Dr Ditgens.

In Mr. Hong-Wei Jen’s opinion, two things are quite important. The first one is the geographical location. **Taiwan is in Asia and Poland is in Europe. Poland can use Taiwan as a window to Asia. Vice versa, Poland can be one gate for Taiwan to Europe.** “The second thing is diversity – the education background restricts or limits your way of thinking. Bilateral cooperation can invite people from Poland, and make joint research more successful” – said the representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office.

“Bilateral collaboration is the main and the first step to co-create. Impact analysis show that with the help of bilateral relations within the project, there are many national and international articles and also projects including EU projects and even patents. Prioritization of the EU collaborations and success in the bilateral relations are also reflected in the EU programmes” – stated Umut Ege from TÜBİTAK.

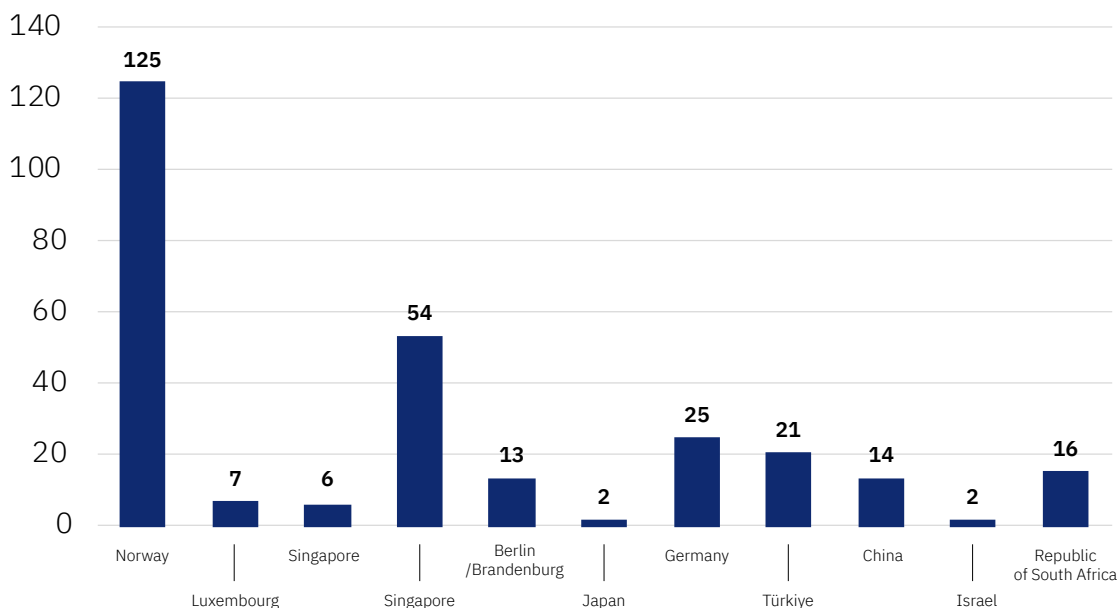
In Ms. Olga Polotska’s opinion, for Ukrainian researchers the most important are involvement and education. “Education is going to pay off a little bit later. Much emphasis should be placed on involving as many early career researchers as possible. Bilateral cooperation is an opportunity of having a dialogue while working it is very effective in itself and it is by a certain extent breaking some kind of limitations. Even on the level when the programme is just designed and developed by agencies. As well as during the implementation phase” – explained Ms. Polotska.

As Ms. Krystyna Maciejko pointed out, **NCBR has successfully been carrying out** international programmes, both bilateral and multilateral, for many years now. But they are limited to the certain cooperating countries. That is why NCBR wanted to change the situation and to allow Polish entities, research organisations and companies finance their **ideas and innovations**

in cooperation with any country and any foreign partner. The only criterion is to represent an adequate excellence level and potential for success. This is the rationale behind the establishment of Innoglobo programme.

In the following part panellists shared their experiences in the field of challenges of bilateral cooperation. They talked about bottlenecks and how we can cope with them.

Number of financed projects broken down by partner countries



“The beginning is to determine the country you want to collaborate with and to create the agreement or the MOU. Then prepare the allocation, evaluation details and call rules. The call cycle is a challenging process. New pilot calls are very fragile because they are getting affected by the diplomatic and political relations of the countries involved. And this is the most fragile point of the bilateral course. The other challenge is synchronisation of the whole process. Good, effective dialogue with the country you are collaborating with is crucial. And this dialogue should be constant, and it should be flexible and very transparent. If you keep this dialogue, you can overcome any kind of challenges” – advised Mr. Ege.

Mr. Hong-wei Jen thinks that the first challenge is how to encourage young generation to join the projects. The second is how you commercialise or how connect your bilateral research project to the market.

Director of the NFRU has a different view: “Number one is the difference in the national legislature. For Ukraine it’s also the financial part, because we are a foundation that operates public funds only, so there is a lot of control and monitoring. Then the financial part becomes even bigger challenge than sketching the goal. But if there is a will any challenges can be faced and overcome”.

“Sometimes it seems that the topic of the call or the budget is appropriate and the thematic field for cooperation between partners from different countries is adequate. But then there is collision with reality, and it turns out that the cooperation has failed, and researchers want to cooperate with each other, but not under the framework of our programme” – noted Ms. Maciejko.

As Dr Ditgens pointed out, the main challenges are different legal systems and ways of project implementation. We can align the timeline during the approval of the projects. We can also align the process of evaluation of the project. But when the project is running, we have to deal with changes within the projects. So we should work on developing a kind of a joint framework for administration, not only dealing with the legal issues, but also with the implementation. Because now we have to define this framework whenever we start a new cooperation. It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort.

Aleksandra W. Haugstad focused on the solutions: “Firstly it is good to start with the smaller program first, so that you can discover the conflicts between the national systems and the administrative barriers. You can work them out on a smaller scale before you launch into a bigger one. Secondly, we should have very big ears and listen to the frustrations and the complaints of the beneficiaries and address them” – concluded adviser of the Research Council of Norway.

The last issue raised by the panelists referred to why we should continue our efforts in the development and implementation of bilateral cooperation. Or maybe we shouldn't?

According to Ms. Ditgens unique selling point of bilateral cooperation is that you can design projects and programmes which are tailor made for the two countries. Whenever you work in a multilateral context, it's always a compromise between many countries. Bilateral cooperation brings not only the researchers together, but it also brings the governments together. So bilate-

ral cooperation is always a reason for ministers, for governments to talk with each other.

“Diversification and participation in any kind of international collaboration is good in itself for researchers. We understand that modern research cannot be limited nationally, otherwise it's not effective. If there is an unsolved research problem, which is timely and important for two states, it can be easily done by means of bilateral programmes, concentrating on some specific research needs and specific research agendas” – stated the representative of the National Research Foundation of Ukraine.

Ms. Haugstad noted that bilateral cooperation can help us build a base for participation in multilateral cooperation, because bilateral cooperation allows us to get to know each other. “We have learned a lot about our partners in the bilateral programmes. Bilateral cooperation will continue to be very important on project level for research organisations and companies. But it will continue to also be important for research funding agencies because this is the way we can learn about each other and be more efficient in creating a cooperative environment for the researchers” – she added.

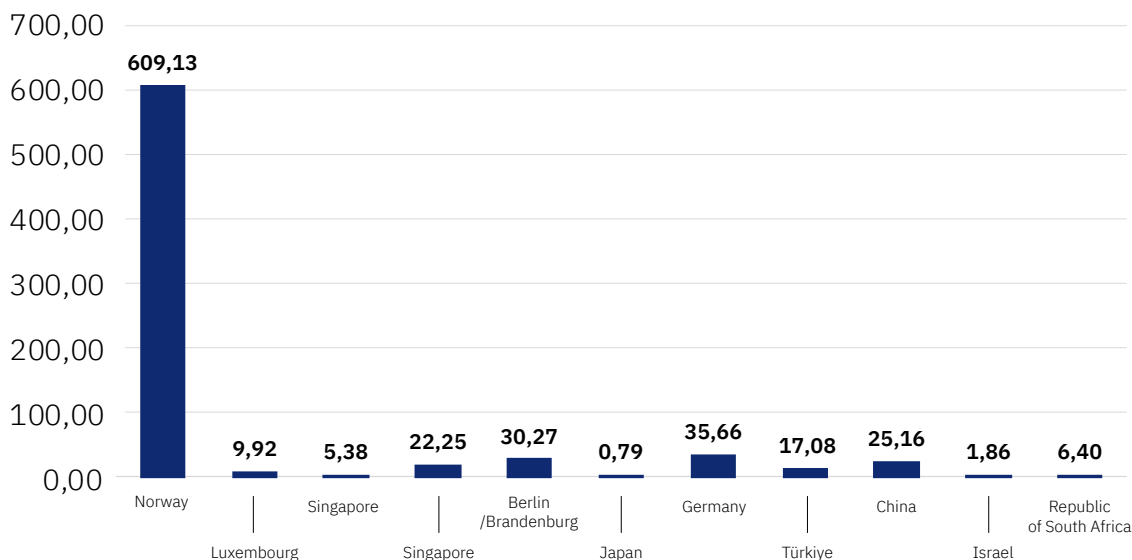
In the opinion of the representative of NCBR, we should help our researchers to cooperate with the foreign partner and to give them the chance to learn from each other.

“Bilateral projects are very focused and tailor-made for the country's interests or the national priorities. You can design this bilateral relation or the funding program by their needs and it gives you the opportunity to take advantage of your country's strength, your interest, your needs, or maybe the comparative advantage with the country you are collaborating with. It also gives you an opportunity for the science diplomacy activities and it also contributes to a country's soft power in the international area. If you're an early career researcher it is much more understandable and easier to get involved in the international area, and it gives

you a space for development or establishing a new network or expanding the existing network. If you create bilateral relations in the right time, with the right team, with the right country, the results can be much more impactful than the multilateral ones” – concluded Mr. Ege.

“It can be one kind of preparation step for you to go to the worldwide projects” – stated representative of Taiwan.

Value of project contracts signed under bilateral cooperation [PLN million]



In conclusion, **bilateral cooperation gives access to complementary competences** offered by each of the two partners involved. Moreover, bilateral cooperation helps overcome limitations we might have and thanks to it, we simply get to know each other as we work together in order to achieve a common goal. However, to have a more balanced view, let’s not forget about challenges linked with bilateral cooperation,

from planning budgets working in sync with your partner, to differences in national legislations and implementation of the projects. Let’s also have in mind that bilateral scientific cooperation help bringing the two governments and its people closer to each other. **It gives us a good start to establish or upscale a multilateral cooperation as well.**



Panel IV

US/Nevada market entry for Polish start-ups: present experience & look ahead



Moderated by Agnieszka Ratajczak, Director of NCBR's Office of International Cooperation, the panel consisted of a discussion among high-level representatives of Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development and the University of Nevada, Reno, Warsaw School of Economics as well as NCBR.

The panellists were:

Kristopher Sanchez – Deputy Director of the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED). As deputy director Mr Sanchez is responsible for facilitating economic development opportunities with new and existing businesses, identifying industries and creating synergies to serve entrepreneurial environments to further grow and diversify Nevada's economic base. Mr Sanchez was joined by two renown academics.

Professor Mehmet Tosun – Director of the Ozmen Center for Entrepreneurship and International Business Programmes in the College of Business at the University of Nevada, Reno, Professor of Economics and the Barbara Smith Campbell Distinguished Professor.

Professor Paweł Pietrasieński – Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) International Business Professor and SGH plenipotentiary for cooperation with Nevada.

Andrzej Wajs – International Projects Coordinator at NCBR, responsible for NCBR's acceleration activity with Nevada.

The guests representing Nevada and SGH focused mostly on the Nevadan ecosystem of innovation. Kris Sanchez underscored **the importance of collaboration with Poland to Nevada, dating back to 2015 and marked by nearly 40 trips since made by GOED delegations to our country as well as President Andrzej Duda's visit to Reno in June 2019.** He thought one of the unique opportunities for Nevada was to try to mitigate risk for early-stage companies. And what GOED found being so close to California and South Nevada was that

the runway for companies to be successful was very short and in Nevada there was the opportunity to perhaps extend that runway so that companies could spend more time understanding the market there, understanding how to do business in the United States and formulating those important partnerships that would yield success in the long term for them. GOED thus thought that Nevada could be a location for risk mitigation in terms of the timeline to access the market, as well as mitigating cost. As it is quite costly to travel internationally, to break into a new market to attain the legal advice so that one can get the proper accounting in place, GOED therefore sought to provide an opportunity for companies to leverage the ecosystem in Nevada to be successful. Mr Sanchez also added that Nevada was one of the lowest tax states in the US and that GOED's overarching goal with acceleration programmes was to have Nevada as a kind of the 1st place of entry and in many cases the place where the permanent home would be established. As supply chains change and become restructured, Nevada saw a lot of household names, long standing companies looking at Nevada for expansion in this region, in the western US, making Nevada feel that its business climate was competitive. Nevada continually remains in the top 10 in the US in terms of favourable business climate and often in the top 5 – depending on how those ratings and those systems are established.

Mehmet Tosun elaborated on the so-called Triple Helix Model consisting of a relationship among business, academia and government, and how it worked so well in Nevada. He highlighted that academic research required profit maximisation, commercialisation and thus cooperation with business. And the best interconnector for business and academia he thought were government agencies. Adding to that the internationalisation component in the form of cooperation with e.g. Poland might contribute to an even greater diversification in Nevada, with the new companies, new relationships with the universities and some new

technologies and new sectoral concentrations happening. He also described Ozmen Center as the place where students are thought how to become entrepreneurs, including by mentoring. Professor Tosun also underscored the importance of female entrepreneurship and the current underrepresentation of women in start-ups. Ozmen Center tries to tackle this, including through organising the annual International Women's Entrepreneurship Symposium.

Paweł Pietrasieński shared his insights into why acceleration programmes are so important for Polish technology start-ups that are planning to enter the US market. He focused on the 4-C model as a road map how an acceleration programmes should look like. First of all, those programmes have to be Competitive, therefore competitive admission is key. Secondly, companies participating should do so in Cohorts. When they working as a group, they come up with great ideas, they start to learn the American style of teamwork and they also attract more attention when they are together. Thirdly, the programmes should be Cyclical, i.e. not every company is instantly ready to enter the U.S. market, so even if they are not admitted to the programme at the beginning, they will have a chance to come back and reapply when they are ready. Lastly, the fourth C, perhaps the most important one, is Customer development. This is performed in Nevada through extensive mentoring. Even if everyone perhaps associates the best mentors with Silicon Valley, probably half of Nevada mentors basically came from California and are living in Nevada right now. Professor Pietrasieński also spoke highly about the value and importance of the strategic collaboration agreement between SGH, (Warsaw School of Economics) and University of Nevada, Reno, run between 2017 and 2022, and both universities' decision to extend it for another 5 years. He thought that the best partnerships are formed when both sides are very engaged from the outset and that he had never seen such an engagement and multi-level collaboration between just two universities in his professional career.

Andrzej Wajs recapped on the pilot edition of NCBR – Nevada Acceleration Program (NCBR-NAP). Started in early 2020, it had to be postponed after the selection of participants in March 2020 due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the suspension of flights between the US and EU for nearly 2 years. It was only in February 2022 that it was possible to carry out the intensive series of workshops called Bootcamp Warsaw and eventually select the 10 best companies which then accelerated in Nevada in two cohorts of 5 in May and June 2022. A number of participants had already made their mark in Nevada and Mr Wajs thought NCBR would be able to capitalise on that in the second edition of the acceleration activity between NCBR and Nevada to be held in 2023. Some novelties in 2023 edition include parts of the pre-acceleration done remotely and one cohort of ten participants accelerating in Nevada.

Agnieszka Ratajczak summed up the panel by cordially inviting and encouraging founders and companies present at the conference in person or online to submit their applications to the 2023 edition of NCBR-NAP and use this unique opportunity to expand their businesses in the US market. Preference will be given to those that would fit both national smart specialisations of Poland as well as the key economy areas for Nevada.



Panel V

What more can we do to support start-ups with global aspirations?

The panel was moderated by Cezary Błaszczuk, Director of NCBR's Department of International Cooperation. It focussed on the needs of Polish start-ups with worldwide market potential and how best can these be facilitated by public authorities and independent bodies, including from abroad. An exchange of ideas between Nevada mentors and leading Polish start-ups to fill the audience in on how well Polish start-ups are doing globally and what could be done to assist them in going forward. The discussion delivered thoughts shared by Nevada mentors and founders of Polish start-ups on ways to develop businesses by first time entrepreneurs and how to help them in a meaningful, concerted or tailor-made approach.

The panellists were:

Matt Westfield – a serial entrepreneur, co-founder of BizAssembly and investor in tech companies with over 30 years' experience;

Alex Wolfe – principal at BizAssembly, a seasoned technology leader with over 20 years of operations and engineering leadership in product development and valuation, due diligence, acquisitions and technical operations experience across the East Coast South and Silicon Valley in the US;

Jacek Maciak – CEO of Salesbook. Jacek has extensive experience in the business area of new technologies, combined with technical knowledge in the field of IT, telecommunications and banking;

Radek Wierzbicki – co-founder of Ideal Bistro – Eat Better. Ideal Bistro is a scaleup digitising employee canteens into the digital era of automatic restaurants. Radek is also a co-founder and board member of Pureco Natural, a global producer of biodegradable packaging;

Mateusz Jarus – co-founder of 3 start-ups: Grinfinity, Expansio and Lexpansio, currently fully focused on the development of Expansio, which develops artificial intelligence solutions for clients from the B2B sector and for individual clients.

The panel was divided into three parts where speakers replied to specific and general questions as well as gave their feedback on the completed first edition of NCBR-Nevada Acceleration Program to make sure the second one brings more value for the newcomers.

In the first round Matt referred to his experience as a founder of 7 companies and that he learned more from those which failed than those which were successful. He talked about knowledge and inspirations he had received from other founders and had tried to learn from their lessons as well. Collaboration is what pushed him forward and gave incentive for new ideas and breakthroughs. The premise for his efforts to build the largest mentoring organisation in Nevada was founders helping founders because nobody knows what a founder goes through except for another founder. Matt's advice which resonated from his input was that an entrepreneur should like his company and what he or she is doing to make it big. He said: "So for other founders we found that the collaborative nature of bringing founders together, honestly and openly, to assess the challenges, work through those challenges and help each other provide solutions can be extremely dynamic and extremely powerful."

Matt put much emphasis on the role of mentoring which is not just asking simple questions and trying to find the right answer, it is more to challenge the start-up in an intensive collaborative environment and put it through the ringer. The business developed by a first-time founder goes through many obstacles, it needs difficult decisions, requires risky pivots, entries or exits. At the beginning the founder with his often-disruptive idea is confined in a very isolated environment but when he starts exchanging

with like-minded people it is easier to find good solutions. Matt stressed the role of mentoring to those founders who have excellent ideas but not much experience or the best connections. Another aspect for those who have global aspirations is adaptation to the United States market with its size, culture, competitiveness and legal framework.

Alex followed with a single case approach to each entrepreneur as every start-up is different. The same applies to mentors. “Mentorship has a lot of flavours” – he said. A good mentor should be flexible and not treat founders with one measure. He described the role of a mentor by words which need to be cited here: “We can share experiences, we can share common pitfalls, common upsides and downsides and also hopefully share some experience about things that do and don’t work in different facets of the things that we have to do to build a quickly growing small enterprises.”

Based on his business experience, Jacek explained how he sees the role of mentoring in accelerating start-ups. Nevada mentors offer unique skills to go through market analysis which is crucial for Salesbook. As a result Jacek undertook efforts on renewables which have already been successful in Poland and also constitute a hot topic in the US. Jacek underlined how valuable it is to exchange experience with other entrepreneurs: “it’s nothing more valuable than first-hand experience from people that are already serious entrepreneurs.” He referred also to important next steps with Matt as a follow-up of NCBR-NAP.

Radek, who was the next speaker, related to the size of American food sector but also to the features of this highly competitive and diverse market. He invoked to the start-up which needs soft-landing in this market with an aid of skilled and experienced mentors. Good mentors can not only link new founders to other founders with similar challenges, but also direct them

to support programmes or investors which in a new and difficult market as the US might be crucial for further development.

Mateusz was encouraged by the moderator to share his opinion on benefits he received from acceleration programmes so far and which of them offered the most opportunities. He described how his approach to multiple programmes has changed throughout the years when his business became more mature and started to bring profit. He underlined benefits he had got as any other start-up participating in these programmes such as possibility to meet other entrepreneurs in the country or abroad, to exchange ideas with like-minded people, to become engaged with entrepreneurs that think the same way, and finally to become confident in this crowd and to practise pitching or talking to investors.

In the following part all panellists were asked to give their opinion on the essential aspects standing behind successful acceleration programmes that can give a true value for start-ups.

Radek put people in the spotlight, i.e. potential customers, potential users, business angels, venture capitalists, business associations, other institutions that can support start-ups in further business development on a regional or country level. Then he talked about the meaning of collaboration, listening and talking to others, trying to avoid their mistakes and sharing yours. The last factor was international communication and cultural exchange which in globally thinking companies plays a pivotal role.

Jacek added the role of people who stand behind the acceleration programmes, like mentors who act as “deal makers”, investors or potential customers. Mateusz referred to programmes that target the needs of specific start-ups which differ depending on their maturity, strategy or potential clients. A good acceleration programme for the company with marketable product should offer not only workshops and

pitching classes but rather B2B meetings and linking the start-up with big companies. Alex tried to show advantages of acceleration which provides risk mitigation to start-ups who think high but can drop to the first pitfall. Acceleration should show how to avoid mistakes and how to climb up without being thrown out.

Matt explained how a good mentor should think of businesses he or she is mentoring. It's like trying to be in the head of the entrepreneur, predicting his strategy and sharing with him your own mistakes or successes. It is also finding the difference between fake and true opportunities and choosing those fitting your real needs.

The last question raised during the panel was on future editions of the programme, how to make it more attractive, what shall be modified, what can NCBR do better and what can be skipped without losing its edge.

Speakers in one sentence each mentioned:

- more tailor-made workshops and B2B meetings,
- identifying new engagements and local links,
- focusing on how to serve the individual needs of businesses,
- showing how to pursue new ideas if one gets stagnant,
- looking at the challenges that start-ups face in order to identify the best way to tackle them,
- more personalised programme and meetings,
- timeframe of the programme extended by 1 week.

The panel was concluded in a friendly manner since all speakers became close to each other as in a good mentoring environment.

The Office of International Cooperation, NCBR

The Office of International Cooperation carries out a wide range of activities related to international cooperation. It is responsible for establishing and maintaining international contacts, as well as the Center's participation in international programmes and initiatives, under which international projects with the participation of Polish research are funded. It also conducts information, mentoring and educational activities for Polish entities applying for grants in Horizon Europe. Through its Office in Brussels, it represents the interests of the Polish scientific and innovation community in the Brussels ecosystem, and builds NCBR's position through networking and consultation processes.

I. Department of International Cooperation

The main tasks of the Department of International Cooperation (DWM) focus on international programmes of research funding. NCBR as a funding agency has a wide portfolio of national and international programmes that offer funding opportunities for Polish public and private research-performing organisations. DWM prepares and opens calls for R&D projects conducted by Polish and international research teams. This is done together with bilateral and multilateral partners from Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and Australia. NCBR's role in these programmes is to negotiate the best possible conditions for projects implemented by Polish researchers, allocate funds, prepare and open calls, select the best projects together with other agencies, issue funding decisions, sign contracts and monitor projects implementation. DWM acting on behalf of NCBR assigns programme coordinators who invite external experts, gather expertise in areas related to the topics of the initiative, represent Poland in bodies of national representatives, give voice on key issues for Polish S&T&I and make sure

the applications with Polish partners receive a fair assessment.

Types of programmes under which NCBR opens bi-and multilateral calls

- ERA-NET scheme
- ERA-NET Cofund scheme
- Horizon Europe Partnerships
- The EEA and Norway Grants
- Multilateral initiatives beyond the above-mentioned types such as NCBR-Nevada Acceleration Program, INNOGLOBO, AAL, CORNET Initiative, ECSEL, JPI, V4-Japan Cooperation, V4-Korea Cooperation
- Bilateral initiatives

Selected international programmes in NCBR's 2023 offer

- NCBR-Nevada Acceleration Program (NCBR-NAP)
- INNOGLOBO
- Poland - Taiwan bilateral call
- Poland - Türkiye bilateral call
- The ERA-NET TRANSCAN-3
- ERA-NET Cofund ICRAD
- ERA-MIN 3: ERA-NET Cofund on Raw Materials
- Neuron Cofund 2
- European Joint Programme on Rare Diseases (EJP RD)

- The Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP)
- Water4All Partnership – Water Security for the Planet
- Clean Energy Transition Partnership (CETP)
- Driving Urban Transitions to a sustainable future
- ERA4Health (Fostering an European Research Area for Health)
- The European partnership on Transforming health and care systems (THCS)
- Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme

A flavour of NCBR's international partners

- The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA)
- National Science Centre (NCN)
- Research Council of Norway (RCN)
- Granite Landings, State of Nevada, US
- The Polish Science Contact Agency PolSCA
- The European Network of leading national innovation agencies (Taftie)
- TÜBITAK (Türkiye)
- National Science and Technology Council (Taiwan)
- National Research Foundation of Ukraine (NRFU)
- Ministry of Science and Technology (China)
- BMBF, The Senate of Berlin, AiF (Germany)
- Korean Energy Technology Evaluation and Planning (KETEP)

II. National Contact Point Department (NCP)

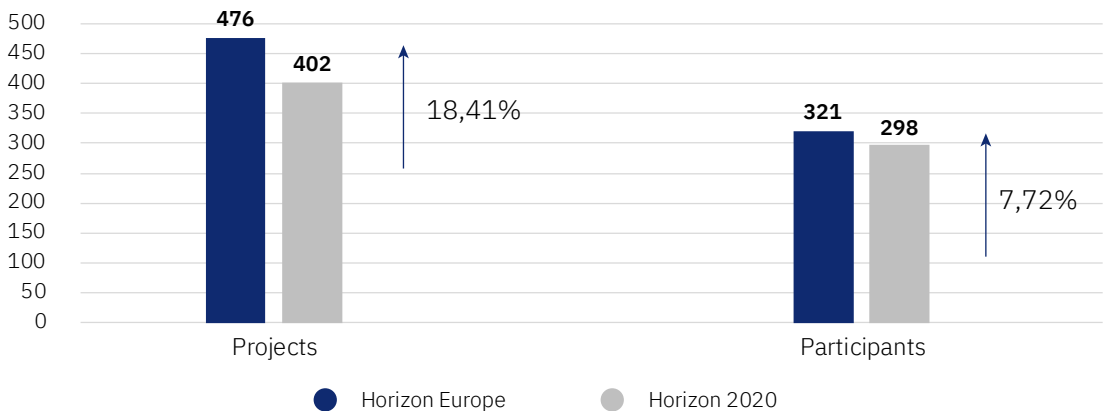
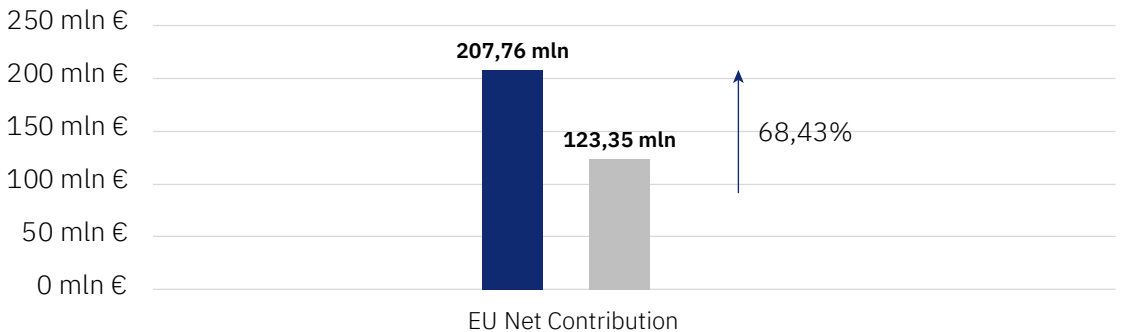
The National Contact Point Department (NCP) supports the participation of Polish research institutions, enterprises and other entities in the European Union’s Framework Programme for research and innovation – Horizon Europe.

The NCP’s task is to inform about competitions, organize information days, seminars, conferences, run a thematic website and related social media platforms, prepare detailed statistical analyses, publications and newsletters. For more advanced beneficiaries, offers in-depth consulting services, direct advice on the preparation of applications and support at various stages of project implementation. NCP

Department counts fifty high-class experts with knowledge in the field of sectoral programmes as well as consortia matchmaking, negotiations, project applications, lobbying, coordination and formal and financial settlements of projects, ready to help Polish organizations – always free of charge. Polish organizations will also receive significant support in solving legal problems, intellectual property matters, participation in dedicated technology development programmes based on public-private partnership.

In 2022, the NCP for Horizon Europe provided approximately 15,000 consultations of various types and organized notably a large-scale training cycle for HE project administrators, called Academy of Horizon Europe Project Managers, with almost 1000 participants and 600 alumni.

Participation of Poland in projects in Horizon Europe
~(data after first 188 calls)



The NCP finances and coordinates the network of 6 Horizontal Contact Points – located in academic centres of Gdańsk, Gliwice, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź and Poznań. Since 2022, these entities have supported the NCP mainly in the field of horizontal activities, aimed at increasing the participation of Polish entities in Horizon Europe. The network is integrated with the NCP in terms of visual identification and organization, and its crucial task is to adapt the methods and ways of working to the specificity and needs of individual 6 macro-regions in which they operate.

The NCP uses all its potential and almost 25 years of experience in conducting EU policy to support mechanisms boosting Polish R&I system. NCP experts are officially appointed by the European Commission and act as National Contact Points – which means that their duty is to provide assistance to interested entities in participating in the EU FP, but also guarantees access to information directly from the European Commission and participation in the work on assumptions and principles of any initiative under Horizon Europe. NCP experts are at the same time active members of Horizon Europe Programme Committees which are managing bodies for respective elements of the Framework Programme. The NCP team has made a significant contribution to the construction of the European Research Area (ERA) and the preparation of subsequent framework programmes – FP6, FP7, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. As part of the NCBR, of which it has been a part since November 2020, NCP cooperates in programming activities from Eu-

ropean funds for the new financial perspective and works to harmonize the national grant offer with the European one. Although the NCP is constantly focused on the international issues, internally it cooperates very closely with the Ministry of Education and Science and other relevant ministries, National Science Centre, Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange, Foundation for Polish Science and a wide range of Polish research organizations.

www.kpk.gov.pl

III. NCBR Office in Brussels

The National Centre for Research and Development Office in Brussels was set up in 2019 and performs advisory, networking and information activities in Brussels to support the representation of the Polish research and innovation community in Europe. The target is to strengthen the cooperation of Polish companies, universities and research institutes with foreign partners in order to increase the Polish participation in the EU programmes, in particular Horizon Europe.

The NCBR Office in Brussels conveys the perspective and interests of the Polish R&I sector in consultations and negotiations over the relevant policy of the EU. Representatives of the Office participate in meetings of expert bodies and other events organised by the European Commission, as well as network with partner institutions active in the field of R&I in Brussels – to highlight the cooperation with the Informal Group of R&I Liaison Offices (IGLO) and Science|Business association with their outreach to the policy, industry and research.

The Office cooperates closely with the Polish governmental administration, primarily with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union in the strategic planning of the Horizon Europe programme. One of the Office's major activities is having an overall perspective on the focal points of the EU R&I policy, including European Research Area (ERA) and European Partnerships and EU missions as a cutting-edge approach to tackling global challenges. Besides monitoring, analysis and dissemination of the information on these policies the Office organises matchmaking

events, study visits, in-person and online meetings for the stakeholders. The Office is also involved in EU-funded projects (coordination and support actions), which on one hand help monitoring different initiatives at the European level and conveying the findings and insights to the Polish stakeholders and on the other hand allow expanding contacts network, including the EC. Last but not least the aim is to facilitate Polish entities' participation in the HE projects international consortia and to promote Polish R&I success stories, initiatives and the R&I community – researchers, scholars, innovators – on the Brussels scene.



NCBR

National Centre for Research
and Development

The National Centre for Research and Development

Chmielna 69 Street

00-801 Warsaw, Poland

Phone: +48 22 39 07 401

gov.pl/NCBR

gov.pl/innowacje

