SAI EUROPE

STRATEGIC AGENCY FOR INNOVATION

A new pace for innovation in Europe

Only an innovative Europe is a sovereign Europe

Dr Anna Christmann
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About the author: As the long-standing Aerospace Coordinator for the German Federal Government and Start-up Commissioner for the Federal Ministry of Economics, Dr Anna Christmann has initiated many innovation projects. With the implementation of Germany's first start-up strategy and the flagship competition *Startup Factories*, she has made a significant contribution to a new start-up culture. After her time in the Bundestag, the Federal Government and administration, the political scientist decided to become a founder herself. With her newly founded innovation agency **SAI Europe**, she continues to work from Berlin to set a new pace for innovation in Germany and Europe.

*"There are innovations **made in Europe**. We just need more momentum to reach our goal. We must provide new technologies and companies with the best possible conditions and strengthen ecosystems that bring together strong SMEs, innovative start-ups, industry, and our excellent research. If we act quickly, the future is in our hands."*

Europe is by no means lagging behind in the global technology race. Europe has a stable value system, strong research and a wealth of talent. This is a good starting point for creating new prosperity through innovation.

We must decisively focus on creating the best conditions for the brightest minds of our time. It must become easier and therefore faster to develop and successfully scale an innovation in Europe.

I THE GOAL: INNOVATION MADE IN EUROPE

From economic policy to innovation policy

2024 was a year of landmark reports in Europe. First came the Letta report on the single market, then the Draghi report on European competitiveness. Both reports contain an urgent call to action, a call for immediate and swift action. Greater speed is the demand that runs through both reports. And we can only achieve speed by moving from analysis to action. One year after the publication of the Draghi report, many forces in European politics, business and academia agree in principle that we must move forward more quickly and courageously.

"There is still a lack of concrete implementation when it comes to speed – often simply because the necessary translation work is missing. More spin-offs must emerge from research; traditional industry and SMEs need access to the latest technologies; start-ups need more European venture capital, and politics must open up to new freedoms, funding programmes and public procurement. This is hard work that must take place in many areas simultaneously."

Translated, the Draghi report implies that economic policy today is essentially innovation policy. In Germany, the annual reports of the Expert Commission for Research and Innovation (EFI) also regularly provide important guidance that need to be implemented.

Whether established companies or start-ups, they all primarily need the best possible conditions for faster development, access to new technologies and markets, and more freedom to experiment. Innovations arise from ecosystems. Where business, research and government pull together, ideally at the European level, new opportunities arise for new industries that create jobs, attract capital and develop entire supply chains.

The economy needs old and new champions

Spending on research and development is a key measure of a country's innovative strength. In 2023, Germany ranked eighth with a research and development ratio of 3.1 % of GDP (OECD 2025), while the absolute frontrunners were Israel (6.3%) and South Korea (5%). However, a closer look at the expenditure reveals the risk inherent in these figures for Germany.

A third of internal R&D investment in Germany comes from the automotive industry alone, and external R&D expenditure is as high as almost 60% (Stifterverband 2025). If the automotive industry weakens, so does R&D expenditure. This dependency poses a high risk to Germany's innovative strength. We need, alongside the

tradition, new industrial sectors with a high level of research and development intensity to build up more speed and resilience. Many of the traditional industrial champions in Germany and Europe recognise that innovation and new technologies are key to their future viability. The famous German SMEs, often global players, are focusing on innovation and technology development in areas that are crucial for the industries of tomorrow.

This includes lasers and 3D printing machines for space travel and fusion energy, valves and sensors for hydrogen, and new chemical processes for recycling and biotechnology. It is crucial that both experienced and young companies join emerging industries created by these technologies.

"It is important, but not sufficient, to innovate existing industries incrementally. We also need new industries. New technological breakthroughs that will enable us to enter a new industrial era in Europe. Not to isolate ourselves, but to be able to help shape the global economy on an equal terms. Because we have something valuable to offer. Competitiveness is the best guarantee of safeguarding our values."

Startup Germany & Scaleup Europe

We must be serious about becoming a start-up nation and a scale-up continent. We need high technology made in Europe that will lead us to new boom industries while also contributing to solving important challenges. This high technology, or deep tech, is currently being developed in many production halls of start-ups and scale-ups.

They need more attention and strategic support – from policymakers and from traditional industry – so that they can be part of the boom we need. Access to venture capital, contracts, digitalisation, a common European single market, a uniform company form with EU Inc – the means are recognised, they must be consistently implemented at national and European levels.

New jobs are created in new companies. Studies from the USA indicate that start-ups create jobs after their first year until they are five years old (Kane 2010[1]). In 2020, the German Start up Association commissioned a study to assess the potential for Germany and estimated a direct labour market effect of over 400,000 jobs and an indirect effect through suppliers and consumption of 1.2 million jobs. The study estimated that the potential for the direct effect could exceed 900,000 jobs by 2030.

The important point that, in addition to the direct job effects of start-ups

[1] Kane, Tim The Importance of Startups in Job Creation and Job Destruction (July 2010). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1646934 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1646934

themselves, the ecosystem effects are also relevant, supports the argument for entirely new industries. Suppliers are often highly dependent on specific industries, and small and medium-sized automotive companies are increasingly looking for alternatives.

In the aerospace sector, rocket companies in Munich and Augsburg have established stable relationships with automotive suppliers, some of which have completely moved away from the automotive industry as a result. New biotech processes require more and different laboratory technology, which also traditionally comes from medium-sized companies.

The importance of ecosystems

Old and new champions, science and research – these are the ingredients for dynamic ecosystems that attract international talent and produce innovation. In the latest Global Innovation Index, Germany ranks in the upper middle range rather than among the top group (recently falling slightly to 11th place, with Switzerland ranked first).

It is noteworthy, however, that seven innovation ecosystems from the top 100 are located in Germany – more than in any other country in Europe. It is not just a cluster around the capital – or, more recently, around Munich. Cologne, Stuttgart, and Frankfurt are also sources of innovative strength because companies and research institutes work together, creating a high level of dynamism and the necessary scale for international visibility.

Overall, Europe ranks second behind the USA in terms of visible ecosystems, leaving China behind in this category. We must continue to strengthen such ecosystems.

European cooperation

Europe is more than the European Union – this is even more true after Brexit. Top universities in Cambridge and Zurich, spaceports in Norway and Scotland – cooperation beyond EU borders is essential if we want to accelerate European innovation.

Bilateral and multilateral innovation projects and cooperation initiatives are an important complement to the highly successful EU Horizon funding programme, enabling targeted acceleration in specific technology fields.

A successful example of such cooperation is the EMBL – the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, which is funded by several European countries and has six locations, including Heidelberg and Hinxton (UK). It attracts the best researchers from around the world and was, among other things, the workplace of Christine Nüsslein-Vollhardt, the first German Nobel Prize laureate.

ELLIS is a comparable initiative in the field of machine learning, but it still lacks the necessary support to generate similar momentum and visibility. In principle, such speedboats for multilateral technology cooperation within Europe are a blueprint that should be further expanded.

II THE WAY FORWARD: A NEW SPEED FOR INNOVATION

"Speed means moving faster into experimentation and to market. This requires more regulatory freedom in the form of sandboxes and more start-up ecosystems around universities. We need to scale new technologies in Europe."

Technology transfer from research to the market

It is now widely acknowledged that Germany and parts of Europe produce excellent research but have a significant transfer weakness (the UK and Switzerland in particular, as non-EU countries, are doing better in this respect). Patents and inventions too rarely result in marketable products or start-ups that will become the market leaders of tomorrow.

There have been several attempts to change this in the past, with varying degrees of success. The SPRIND agency for disruptive innovation is certainly the best example of how success stories from other countries, such as DARPA, can be successfully imported. We must expand this approach of consistently accelerating transfer.

European SPRIND

Europe also needs a SPRIND. The further development of the European Innovation Council (EIC), which already invests in European start-ups, could be one way of achieving this, provided it is given similar freedoms to SPRIND.

A European SPRIND would also be the right complement to the European Research Council and Horizon Europe, the world's most successful research programmes – this should also be mentioned here. It is as much part of European as of German innovation identity that we have excellent research and research funding, but that the transfer into products and start-ups, both in Germany and in the EU, still receives too little attention.

Transfer and innovation at scale

In addition to the major breakthroughs, which also need more attention at the European level, transfer is also a question of breadth. Instruments such as innovation competitions, called SPRIND Challenges, must not be limited to major breakthroughs. The challenges represent development contracts in which several teams compete to solve a specific problem on a milestone basis. They thus differ significantly from traditional research funding.

In terms of breadth, there is a need for more focus on concrete product development from basic research, which can be implemented with challenges. In principle, all public innovation funding for research associations or institutes should be reviewed to assess whether challenges could be a suitable implementation option.

From paper to product

With application-oriented research and a strong SME sector, the conditions for intensifying transfer are fundamentally good. With the DATIpilot[2] lines, innovation communities, and sprints, new formats have been added that are even more strongly aimed at bridging the gap to the market. The aim is to make new technologies, such as sensor technology, marketable and to further strengthen networks with industry, SMEs, and start-ups. This is a path that should be further intensified. A scientific paper does not automatically result in a product that is manufactured by a company; this only happens once prototypes have been successfully tested. This is a process that companies are often unwilling or unable to undertake without cooperation or support as long as it is still uncertain whether a development will be marketable.

Patent world champion, so what?

In Germany specifically, we have a focus on patents that has not yet paid off in terms of innovation and start-ups. Germany is the European leader and country of origin for 12.5% of patents registered with the European Patent Office – directly behind the USA. And yet these 25,000 patent applications are not reflected in a higher number of start-ups. Just like a paper, a patent is not yet a product. The path to higher Technological Readiness Level (TRL) still must be taken. Whereas other countries, such as Switzerland, have institutionalised funding procedures with Innosuisse to bring patents to market, in Germany they too often remain on the shelf. With only 5% of applications to the European Patent Office, Switzerland is nevertheless the most innovative country in the world according to the Global Innovation Index.

The approaches of DATI and the SPRIND 3.0 project for better IP transfer conditions from research institutions to start-ups are important ways to close this transfer gap. The question for every patent must be: who will bring it to market and how?

More freedom for research and development

We need more room for experimentation with new technologies in order to build up speed. The new AI Regulation for Europe explicitly provides for so-called sandboxes for AI – in other words, the opportunity to test AI in practice without all the intricacies of regulation already applying. We urgently need such an AI real-world laboratory in Germany. It should be prioritised and not become the last building block in the implementation of the AI Regulation. The one-stop shop for real-world laboratories should also enable the testing of new technologies more effectively. So far, only what is feasible within the legal framework is possible; otherwise, a law must be amended. An experimentation clause that is temporary and allows for genuine deviation from current regulation within a fixed framework should definitely return to the political agenda.

[2] DATI stands for German Agency for Transfer and Innovation. However, only the pilot lines have emerged from this concept so far, while the establishment of the actual agency remains open. However, the founding commission has issued a recommendation paper explaining why such an institution is relevant and how it should be structured.

Full steam ahead for Startup Factories

Accelerating the transition from research to market is also the goal of the 10 new Startup Factories that Germany gained in 2025. Startup Factories are ecosystems around universities designed to accelerate the creation of spin-offs from research. This is an important step forward for the start-up culture in science. They are the result of a excellence competition for university start-up activities, which has produced the best initiatives.

The crucial factor is the combination of public and private funding. With 50% funding from the private sector, the networks that are also important for financing the start-ups that emerge from them are directly established. They join the already very successful start-up factories in Munich, Potsdam and Heilbronn, which benefit particularly strongly from private funding.

Together, the Startup Factories can become a strong and internationally visible brand that attracts talent and creates new companies. To achieve this, the competition must now be followed by strong implementation on the ground.

Start-up and scale-up strategy for Europe

The competition for Startup Factories is also an ideal blueprint for Europe. In its new start-up and scale-up strategy, the Commission also wants to bring together the best European start-up networks around universities and make them visible. Europe also wants to counter the lack of venture capital with a European Growth Fund.

And last but not least, there are to be legal simplifications, for example with a uniform legal form for start-ups across Europe under the so-called 28th regime. Here, too, speed and genuine competition will be crucial. With Horizon Europe, the EU has written a real success story because it is based exclusively on excellence criteria. It should have the same courage when it comes to start-up ecosystems, just as in Germany, where more than 20 start-up ecosystems competed against each other, ultimately resulting in the creation of Startup Factories.

The state as a driver of innovation

SPRIND and similar initiatives are testing many things that need not be limited to a few actors. SPRIND has made the format of pre commercial procurement (PCP) the standard for its challenges.

At an early stage of technological development, the aim is to argue from a general need for technological development that the state should award a contract for this development without there being a finished product at the end. Once the prototype level has been reached, an innovation partnership can follow if there is a real need for a new product and corresponding procurement. In this case, part of the development is paid for, but the full amount is only paid once the finished product can actually be delivered.

"With innovative procurement procedures, the state could make much greater use of its purchasing power to act as an anchor customer for new technologies and new companies."

With both procurement procedures, the EU has aimed to support development from research to market. They must now be applied more widely and expertise in innovative procurement must be brought to all parts of public administration.

Open source and digital sovereignty

If the state wants to be an anchor customer, this also means not always taking the most readily available off-the-shelf solution from the international market, which reinforces dependencies instead of reducing them.

A middle ground must be found where European solutions are not available, helping to make them available in the future. Where European solutions already exist, they must also be applied.

Billions for the Hightech Agenda

Germany is aware of the challenge posed by new technologies and aims to provide the necessary support with its Hightech Agenda. With a focus on artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, microelectronics, biotechnology, fusion and climate-neutral energy generation, as well as technologies for climate-neutral mobility, it is moving in the right direction (space travel has ended up among the strategic research fields, although the classification is not always clear) – here, too, implementation is crucial.

The Hightech Agenda offers the opportunity to put the focus on start-ups, networks between science and industry, innovative funding instruments and procurement procedures into practice. It is not enough to simply serve all the technologies mentioned with classic project funding and a scattershot approach – the right strategy is needed in each case.

And, of course, the right amount of money is also needed to support such a Hightech Agenda. Each of the technologies mentioned requires billions rather than millions. However, with a special fund of 500 billion, this is not utopian, especially if the money is to be spent in an innovation-oriented manner. The key insight here is that economic policy today is essentially innovation policy.

And the relevant budgets should be concentrated in a few large flagship projects rather than being spread across many small-scale projects. Competitive procedures offer the opportunity to select the best projects on a milestone basis, which, with government support and, of course, private capital, can then make the big leaps we need in Europe.

And the good news is that we have a good chance of doing so in the areas mentioned in the Hightech Agenda – and even in a few more.

III BOOMING INDUSTRIES: WHERE EUROPE CAN GROW

The most promising sectors of the coming decades

Breakthroughs rarely happen overnight. They take time. But once they reach the market, they can lead to entirely new industries that bring with them an entire ecosystem of jobs and suppliers. Germany and Europe have some of these potential breakthroughs in their hands.

Robotics

Many will still remember the Kuka moment when the company was taken over by a Chinese company in 2016. Cutting-edge technology from Germany, controlled from Asia almost overnight.

Today, however, we once again have many promising robotics start-ups in Germany that have already raised a large amount of venture capital. The crucial step of integrating the right AI-driven software with the hardware is still ahead. With several robotics start-ups in the industrial, healthcare and defence sectors, the industrialisation of AI-driven robotics is the next logical step that Europe can help shape.

Artificial intelligence

We are at the forefront of research – and this also applies to artificial intelligence. Of the top 10 institutions in AI research, only two are from the EU, alongside Chinese, American and British institutions – and both are from Germany:

The Max Planck Society and the Helmholtz Association[3]. With Cyber Valley in Tübingen and Stuttgart, Germany is also home to the first ELLIS institute, the European AI network. Cyber Valley is also extremely active in spin-offs and has built up an active start-up network – as have Munich with applied.ai, Heilbronn with the IPAI, Berlin, and other locations.

Even though the large models for generative AI have so far come from other regions, we also have relevant global players in Germany in the fields of automated translation and image generation.

Making data more accessible, activating the sandboxes of the European AI Regulation, further promoting spin-offs from strong research institutes, and using the purchasing power of the state for European solutions – these are the tasks at hand to harness AI for prosperity and humanity. AI is a cross-cutting technology that will continue to gain relevance beyond the hype.

New generation solar, wind and battery

Perovskite is a new material for solar cells that is being researched at the Centre for Solar Energy in Stuttgart, among other places. In Oxford and China, commercialisation is already underway, but we in Germany still have the opportunity to industrialise these new possibilities. Cooperation between science and industry and the state as a potential first customer could pave the way here.

[3] Nature AI Ranking (2024): https://www.nature.com/nature-index/supplements/nature-index-2024-ai/tables/overall

"After the loss of the solar and parts of the wind sector in the 2000s, which cost Germany many jobs, there is a renewed chance for innovative technologies."

Wind power is also opening up new opportunities with the world's tallest wind turbine, supported by SPRIND funding, which is currently being built in Lusatia, as well as with completely new approaches to wind power on ships that operate at sea to harvest wind energy.

Last but not least, the battery race should not be abandoned. Research spin-offs are developing both recyclable batteries and completely new battery architectures. For solar energy and wind, the next technological generation is a new game, and Europe should be playing it.

Fusion energy

Fusion energy research is at a very high level in Germany. The Max Planck Society, the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and Fraunhofer have been conducting intensive research for years to develop this pathway for clean and safe energy. With the Wendelstein 7-X test reactor in Greifswald, Germany therefore also has an outstanding research infrastructure.

A new dynamic has emerged in recent years thanks to start-ups, some of which have already raised considerable private capital and established industrial partnerships. This signals that the transition from research to industrialisation is feasible. It is not yet possible to say when the first fusion power plant that can actually supply electricity to the grid will be ready.

But with the necessary capital and the first demonstrators, a new industry could emerge here, bringing with it a broad ecosystem of spin-off technologies and suppliers. The US and China have of course also discovered this field, and there too, a lot of capital is flowing into the construction of demonstrators and power plants.

However, we have all the cards in our hands to take a leading role in the industrialisation of fusion energy – especially since the world's biggest stellarator is located in Germany – a technology that only a few have yet dares to tackle.

The new space race

Spaceflight has become significantly cheaper in recent years, and access to a previously state-dominated market has become easier for private and young companies. Accordingly, there are many space start-ups entering the growing market and offering important solutions for climate and security.

The traditionally state-led nature of the space sector still too often leads to very large government contracts being awarded to large consortia, which set the barriers for start-ups and SMEs too high. German start-ups therefore often grow initially with international contracts – partly more than with German or European ones.

The Space Innovation Hub at DLR and the DLR Startup Factory are initiatives that have been created to facilitate access for emerging companies. They need sufficient freedom to pursue new approaches in procurement and formats. Budgets from ESA and the European Union must be more open to young companies.

In the security sector, new public budgets are currently being created which, with innovative procurement, can offer the necessary anchor contracts to new satellite and rocket start-ups in Germany and Europe. Greater competition can provide the dynamism we need for the international market.

Quantum computing

According to McKinsey Quantum Monitor, a market volume of up to 97 billion US dollars is expected by 2035. And Germany and Europe are in the race. Eight out of nineteen start-ups have been established in Europe.

The distribution of investment is also interesting. Around 70% flows to more mature companies with proven technologies and early-stage start-ups that are still in their infancy.

With its Quantum Computing Initiative, Germany has also invested over €1.5 billion in quantum technologies. The DLR has awarded contracts to many start-ups that require follow-on projects in the near future. It will also be necessary to focus on the most promising technology platforms to scale them up with sufficient private and public investment. Then, German and European companies will have every opportunity to achieve a real quantum advantage soon.

"In quantum computing, the DLR has already demonstrated how government contracts can promote innovation."

European data centres

Data centres are the factories of artificial intelligence; their raw materials are data and electricity. In the US, a fierce competition is currently underway to deploy the greatest amount of computing power in the shortest possible time and, by extension, to secure sufficient energy supply. Recently, the growing demand for CPUs has led to rising CO_2 emissions from data centres.

It is therefore welcome that the EU has taken a significant step forward with AI Gigafactories, aiming to expand computing capacity in Europe and make it accessible to start-ups. But what if European data centres were not only using chips from Asia or the US, but also from European start-ups? This would demonstrate how data centres can be operated in a sustainable and energy-efficient way.

The Leibniz Supercomputing Centre in Munich is testing photonic microchips that require a fraction of the energy consumed by conventional technology. This is exactly the needed kind of acceleration: a new development from a start-up that is tested early on by a public player to enable market entry. Microelectronics is therefore far from lost – with relevant new settlements in Silicon Saxony and completely new approaches to chips and successful energy efficiency concepts, Europe can remain a relevant player in this field.

Security and defence

Times have clearly changed, and the question of how we defend our freedom has also led to new realities in innovation policy. There are already several drone and robotics start-ups that specialise in security, intelligence and surveillance which have been able to grow rapidly due to high demand.

Cyber security has also taken on a new dimension and is of paramount importance for all areas of our infrastructure. With new opportunities for greater investment, including from the public sector, there is further potential for development here.

It is crucial that a significant portion of defence spending also flows into technology development in Europe rather than being sourced primarily on the global market. The Bundeswehr's procurement policy should also make use of the innovative procedures tested by SPRIND and DLR.

With the Cyber Innovation Hub and the Cyber Agency, there are two players that can and must play a stronger role in this area in order to be able to use the spin-off technologies that arise in the dual-use sector for the entire innovation ecosystem.

Electric aviation

Taking off with batteries – this concept has been under development worldwide for years. In Germany, there have recently been setbacks with two insolvencies in this sector. However, beyond the well-known names, there are other companies working on electric or hydrogen-powered aircraft.

The electrification of classic small aircraft or vertical take-off and landing aircraft that fulfil a specific use case, such as in rescue services, continues to be driven forward by young companies. After a strong focus on a few high-profile companies, exciting developments could emerge from the slipstream that make aviation more flexible and lower-emission.

Synthetic fuels

E-fuels are famous – or rather notorious – in Germany. Many consider them to be too inefficient, expensive and an excuse not to switch to electrification. In aviation and shipping, however, they will be the only viable option for reducing CO_2 in the foreseeable future.

When it comes to industrialisation, however, we are faced with the typical chicken-and-egg problem. Investments in the first-of-a-kind-e-fuel production plant (or PtL fuels, power-to-liquid) are risky and therefore difficult to secure from the private sector. At the same time, however, there are also emerging companies in the synthetic fuels sector that are starting with small plants and scaling them up gradually. Ideally, CO_2 will also be extracted from the air and processed together with green hydrogen to produce synthetic fuel.

What makes this potential new industry particularly interesting is the strong mechanical engineering component. This involves large-scale facilities with substantial industrial technology requirements – even if they are more likely to be located in Chile or South Africa due to their high electricity demands.

New materials

Because it sounds so general, this highly innovative area is sometimes overlooked. The aim is to save CO_2 and costs by using alternative construction materials, plastic substitutes or lighter materials. Often in areas where innovation is slow and subject to extensive regulation.

But if we succeed in industrialising a new process for concrete that reduces a large share of CO_2 emissions from cement production and the price, this would almost be too good to be true.

When such solutions emerge from research, the transfer to industrialisation must be achieved quickly. The market potential is similarly large for alternatives to plastics, sustainable packaging made from renewable raw materials, which can also redefine the circular economy. They must not remain in a supposed green niche but must be consistently brought to a global market.

Biotechnology

It has been clear for some time, even before BioNTech, that modern biotechnology is key to innovation in healthcare. New genetic engineering methods such as mRNA, CRISPR/Cas gene editing, better modelling thanks to artificial intelligence and excellent medical research in Germany make biotechnology a potential boom industry.

However, the need for laboratories and demanding regulations make access challenging for start-ups. This makes it even more important for ecosystems to attract young companies by offering laboratory space and attractive partners. Longer development cycles necessitate the patient capital that biotech start-ups need in their early stages.

Positive developments are already evident: in 2024, €1.9 billion was invested in German biotech companies, an 80% increase on the previous year and, apart from the one-off effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an all-time high.

Food and agritech

Whether it's targeted and therefore reduced pesticide use via drones or weeding robots, digitalisation, satellite-based crop planning, algae-based fish substitutes or vegan meatballs made from mushrooms – agriculture and nutrition are highly innovative industries.

Rural businesses are often pioneers in the application of the latest technologies and generate vast amounts of data with their agricultural machinery, from which new applications can be developed.

In the right ecosystems with universities and start-ups, new products with global potential can be created here. In the food sector, regulation is often a challenge when it comes to obtaining food safety approval. Once these hurdles have been overcome, however, there is significant growth potential, especially in the area of vegan and healthy nutrition.

IV THE MISSION: ACCELERATING INNOVATION WITH SAI EUROPE

"If we need a new speed for innovation, we also need more players who lead the way and bring others with them. The Strategic Agency for Innovation in Europe is leading the way and building the bridges that have been missing so far. As a partner alongside all those who are working on the defining solutions of our time."

Actively building ecosystems

Whether it is start-up factories, DATI communities, UnternehmerTUM, Silicon Saxony or Cyber Valley – new technologies emerge where science and business come together, where public and private capital work together, and where talent is drawn by dense expertise and attractive networks.

Such ecosystems do not arise from nothing, but when people and organisations actively develop them. Networking across Europe and internally helps to achieve the visibility and impact needed.

SAI Europe is an active partner in the establishment and further development of these ecosystems.

Strategic support for innovation projects

Innovation projects by start-ups or from research institutions require the right enabling conditions. The available budget is crucial, but the HOW of funding is also important. The flow of information between start-ups, SMEs, research institutions, and policymakers is a common gap that needs to be closed on an individual basis, especially in the case of complex and long-term developments.

Active support from SAI Europe helps accelerate innovation projects – with expertise in technology, innovation ecosystems, politics and administration, obstacles that often exist at interfaces between actors or sectors can be addressed.

Gaining the state as a customer

For public procurement to become more innovative, best practices are needed from which lessons can be learned. With pilot projects and the broader use of challenges as competitive procurement for technology development, government funds can be used more effectively to support innovation. To achieve this, knowledge of innovative procurement needs to be strengthened on both sides. More expertise is needed within contracting authorities and among teams aiming to engage the state as a customer.

SAI Europe supports the adoption of innovative procurement procedures on both sides – those who want to use the procedures and those who need them to implement their innovation.

Communicating innovation to society

New technologies do not always gain traction with politicians and the public. The right approach and communication are needed to explain why innovation projects are of crucial importance for our location, even in times of great uncertainty. In dialogue with politics and society, it is important to gain support for technology and innovation that will enable us to compete effectively on the international stage. SAI Europe designs suitable formats and runs stakeholder processes, discussions or events that contribute to accelerating innovation.

Introducing international best practices to Europe

In Germany, there are AI trainers, and in Singapore, there is the AI Apprenticeship Programme. The difference: AI trainers are accessible via SME digital centres and can be met a few times to provide guidance. Afterwards, companies are left to implement what they have learned on their own.

In the Singapore programme, people are recruited for a career switch into AI. After initial training for a specific AI project, they go to a company and implement it within the company. This way, Singapore gains new AI specialists and companies gain new talent. SAI Europe is a partner in the implementation of successful tech programmes in Europe.

Establishing and intensifying European cooperation

Europe is only relevant if it acts collectively. In practical terms, this means actively establishing and nurturing networks – not only within the EU, but also with close partners such as the UK, Switzerland and Norway.

Role models such as the EMBL, the AI initiative ELLIS and potentially others in other technology areas must be activated and supported socially and politically. SAI Europe partners with international networks to enhance their effectiveness and visibility.

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