**8. GRO/SME/20/C/09- STRATEGIC ALLIANCES FOR THE UPTAKE OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES BY SMES**

***Type of applicants targeted***

Consortium with representatives of industry (including SMEs, clusters, business/sector intermediaries), research community, and technology providers related to the prioritised strategic value chains.

***Description of the activities***

***Total amount of the action: EUR 5 000 000.***

***Rate of co-financing: 90%.***

***Description of activities:***

Advanced technologies - such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Advanced and Virtual Reality, industrial data, Internet of Things, cybersecurity, bio-based material, edge computing or blockchain, are transforming our societies and a range of industries from healthcare, food, robotics, automotive, to transport and tourism. They enable all kinds of innovations for a competitive, but also clean, sustainable, zero-emissions industry. Advanced tech is also transforming the way we regulate, ensure compliance, market surveillance and law enforcement.

European SMEs are lagging behind in embracing advanced technologies, while at the same time they need to maintain and enhance their competitiveness, upskill their workforce, increase their cybersecurity or protect personal data.

The lack of progress of Union SMEs in those domains and the need to support them in the adoption of advanced technologies are emphasised by:

- the Commission’s AI strategy and coordinated action plan,

- the renewed industrial strategy,

- the initiative on the Critical Industrial Applications of AI,

- the strategic forum on Important Projects of Common European Interest,

- the Digital Transformation Monitor,

- the ongoing pilots on data analytics in specific industrial sectors and the Digital Cities Challenge.

The objective of this action is to (1) build strategic alliances for the uptake by SMEs of advanced technologies in different strategic value chains; (2) identify appropriate industrial policy measures at Union, national and regional/local level; and (3) organise large scale promotion activities to support the adoption of advanced technologies by SMEs in particular sectors of the economy.

This action will build on the outcome of the “Critical Industrial Applications of AI” and the reports of the High Level Group on AI. It will be implemented in close synergy with the “Digital/Intelligent Cities Challenge”, a major initiative that helps 41 cities to develop thriving ecosystems for smart sustainable growth and the European Cluster Collaboration Partnerships, as well as the European AI Alliance. It will be developed in collaboration with relevant services, notably DG CNECT, REGIO, ENER, COMM.

About 25% of the action will be dedicated for communication and SMEs outreach activities.

***Expected results of the action:***

The action shall urge industry, governments, business, academia and citizens to build strategic alliances to seize the potential of advanced technologies. It shall offer evidence-based tools, support, advice and best practices. It shall support SMEs to achieve tangible progress in industrial modernisation, boosting their business growth and creating high-value jobs.

The action shall accelerate innovation, industrial modernisation, innovative business models and upskilling of the workforce among European SMEs.

It shall also contribute to the design and efficient implementation of smarter industrial policies and a modern Single Market in the 21st century.

It will contribute to shaping an ambitious vision for a modern Union industrial policy among all stakeholders, to accelerate the implementation of the industrial modernisation strategy and will stimulate strategic investments in smart infrastructures for SMEs.

***Implementation***

Implemented by EASME via a call for proposals to select SME alliance for two strategic value chains.

***Additional information***

***Specific objective:***

This measure addresses the objective of the programme to improve the Business environment for enterprises, including by fostering the competitiveness of enterprises and sectors.

More specifically, this action aims to mobilise a large number of SMEs through strategic alliances and support a large number of events and activities across the Union, focusing e.g. on:

- Applied technological solutions and best practices related to advanced technologies for SMEs in key sectors and implementing the recommendations of the Critical Industrial Applications of SMEs and the strategic industrial value chains;

- Promotion of advanced technologies to SMEs through the organisation of technology dedicated workshops, matchmaking events, technology challenges for SMEs and start-ups, professional mentoring and advisory services, and communication activities and events in cooperation with Union Presidencies, Member States, the Digital Cities Challenge initiative, sectoral associations, the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), the Network of SME Envoys, Digital Innovations Hubs, Technology centres and Clusters.

- Promotion of practical guidelines to help SMEs ensure compliance with existing regulation (e.g GDPR, the free flow of data, AI ethics guidelines, the Platform to Business (P2B) regulation, cybersecurity, copyright, IPR and standard essential patents (SEPs) etc.).

***Indicative implementation timetable:***

- Publication of the call for proposals: Q2 2020.

- Award: Q4 2020.

- Signature of the contract: Q4 2020.

- Total duration of the contract: 24 months

***Qualitative and quantitative indicators for the action:***

- Quality, impact and visibility of the deliverables, including reports and websites, soundness of economic analysis underlying these deliverables, and quality and relevance of workshops, matchmaking events, technology challenges for SMEs and start-ups, ***professional*** mentoring and advisory services and communication actrivities.

- Quality, number and impact of SMEs and policy makers participating actively in the activities organised to support the adoption of advanced technologies by SMEs.

- Number of cooperation agreements and partnerships among business, academia and governments to support the adoption of advanced technologies by SMEs.

- Increased level of technological maturity, growth and competitiveness of SMEs.