

## South Africa – European Union Summit 2009

### Side event on “Enhancing SME participation in South Africa – EU science and technology partnerships”

#### Background Note

##### 1. Introduction

Cooperation in science and technology (S&T) is one of the most active components of the South Africa – European Union (EU) Strategic Partnership. It is therefore only appropriate that the many successes of this cooperation, as well new opportunities for partnership, be highlighted at and within the margins of the South Africa – EU Summit. (The 2009 Summit is scheduled to take place on 11 September 2009 close to Cape Town.)

As was done for the 2008 Summit, the South African Department of Science and Technology (DST) will organise a seminar as a side event to the 2009 Summit, to examine a specific strategic theme related to the enhancement of S&T partnerships between South Africa and the EU. The objectives of the seminar will be twofold: to raise awareness of the strategic importance of S&T cooperation within the broader context of deliberations at the Summit and its associated events on South Africa-EU cooperation; and to leverage the engagement between experts and stakeholders at the seminar to provide strategic input for the strengthening of South Africa – EU S&T cooperation.

##### 2. Focus on the enhancement of SME participation in partnerships

The theme of enhancing the participation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa-EU S&T partnerships has been chosen for the 2009 side event. The topic is a policy priority both in South Africa and Europe. The theme further has the merit of being directly relevant to other important areas of South Africa –EU cooperation, such as trade, economic and industrial development, or development assistance, and therefore offers great potential for synergy with these domains to be exploited. Promoting the greater involvement of South African SMEs in research and innovation activities, including international cooperation, is a tenet of South Africa’s Ten-Year Innovation Plan as well as a major focus area of the new Technological Innovation Agency. It is also a policy priority for the European Commission to promote greater SME participation in the Framework Programmes for Research.

The theme also represents an area where an important effort is required to improve South Africa – EU cooperation. South Africa's participation in successive Framework Programmes only includes a minimal involvement of South African SMEs and neither South African nor European SMEs are major actors in the various bilateral S&T partnerships between South Africa and EU Member States. No concerted effort has yet been undertaken by any of the parties to address this situation and the seminar will therefore be a valuable first strategic reflection to consider initiatives, which could promote greater SME involvement.

### **3. Seminar programme**

A one-day programme will be arranged, which will consist of four distinct components: (1) a session sketching the policy and institutional background; (2) a session examining instruments for cooperation (3) a session learning from past experiences of SME involvement in South Africa – EU S&T cooperation; (4) and a concluding discussion on strategies to improve cooperation.

The event will be organised two days before the Summit, on 9 September 2009 in Cape Town.