

Subject : press release: Photonics consortium tests new subsidy model to support industrial innovation in Europe

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Technology-driven innovation requires top-experts and expensive technology supply chains to turn novel concepts into practical and manufacturable products. Companies however – and in particular small- and medium-sized enterprises – often do not have direct access to such infrastructure. In addition the highly-skilled people that can operate these technology platforms are hard to find. In such cases high-technology becomes a show-stopper rather than a catalyst for product innovation and economic growth.

To overcome this hurdle the European consortium “ACTMOST” is currently testing a new industry support model with financial support from the European Commission. The initiative should enable companies – and in particular SMEs – to access top-level technology platforms and experts in no time, at no cost, and risk-free. Photonics – one of the key-technologies that support our present-day information society – was identified as ideal test-case for this new subsidy model.

“ Photonics exploits the unique properties of light to produce durable, energy friendly, innovative products that improve the quality of our lives, “ explains Prof. Hugo Thienpont from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and coordinator of this European support action. “Today already photonic components find widespread applications in the domain of information and communication technology. Optical fibers for example form the backbone of our high-speed internet while photonic components are vital parts in displays, projectors, DVDs, digital cameras, laser scanners and printers. Photonic technologies recently also penetrated the renewable energy sector with solar cells and highly-efficient LED-based lighting that will soon replace the classic light bulb. Currently photonics is conquering the safety and security market with low-cost night vision systems, optical fingerprint sensors and retinal scanners. Market forecasts also predict a bright future for photonics in the medical world with new minimally-invasive optical diagnostic tools and with micro-photonic chips for health monitoring.” (Information on the photonics market in Europe and in the world can be found in the text box)

The European Commission recently identified photonics as a Key Enabling Technology for the 21st century with a great potential for product innovation. Meanwhile the design, fabrication, integration, and testing of cutting-edge photonic components remains very complex and photonic technology platforms that enable this innovation are not always easily or directly accessible for industry.

“To solve this issue and to lower the barriers for photonics-driven product innovation in Europe we have created ACTMOST,” says Hugo Thienpont. “ACTMOST stands for Access Centre To Micro-Optics Expertise, Services and Technologies. It is a European consortium of 14 high-tech research laboratories from 6 European member states. In September 2010 we joined forces and created a unique "one-stop-shop-solution-provider" for micro-photonic technologies. Our main goal is to pro-actively provide European companies with timely, cost-effective, and investment-free access to professional, cutting-edge micro-photonic technologies and knowledge to support the development of new products. The technology support that we can provide encompasses the entire food-chain of micro-photonics: from optical design, to measurement, prototyping, replication and packaging, all the way to proof-of-concept demonstration,

prototyping, reliability testing, and pre-production level fabrication. We aim at providing complete solutions for companies through focused collaborations and through hands-on training of industry staff in the highly advanced laboratories of the ACTMOST technology partners”.

Thienpont adds: “Important to remark is that the support we will provide to industry is –under certain conditions and up to a certain level- financially fully subsidized by the European Commission. With this cost-efficient and risk free support we aim at lowering the barriers for industry to start working with us and validate micro-photonics solutions for product innovation. ACTMOST will be a major driving force to sustainably support European industry in keeping a leading position in micro-optic and micro-photonics enhanced products, strengthening the competitiveness of Europe and creating new jobs. The first feedback we received from industry is overwhelmingly positive and points out that more initiatives like ACTMOST are needed at the European level because they closely match the real needs of European SMEs and large companies.”

To inform European companies about the opportunities ACTMOST has to offer a first “Workshop for Industry” will be organized on December 3rd 2010 in Brussels, Belgium. The workshop is open to all European companies interested in product innovation with micro-photonics. With the 1.2 Million Euro funding ACTMOST received from the European Commission it targets to serve more than 30 companies during a first test-phase. ACTMOST will start serving European companies from January 2011 onward. More information can be found on www.actmost.eu.

* Photonics Market in Europe and the world.

According to the European Technology Platform “Photonics 21” that represents the European photonics industry, research institutions, and universities, the global photonics market in 2008 was estimated to be around €270 billion, of which Europe took €55 billion. This corresponds to a share of more than 20% of the worldwide production volume in the photonics industry. In Europe more than 5000 companies are involved in photonics, most of them SMEs. The core sectors are lighting, production technology, medical technology, defense photonics and optical components and systems with market shares ranging from 25 to 45 %. Photonics companies themselves employ about 290.000 people in Europe.

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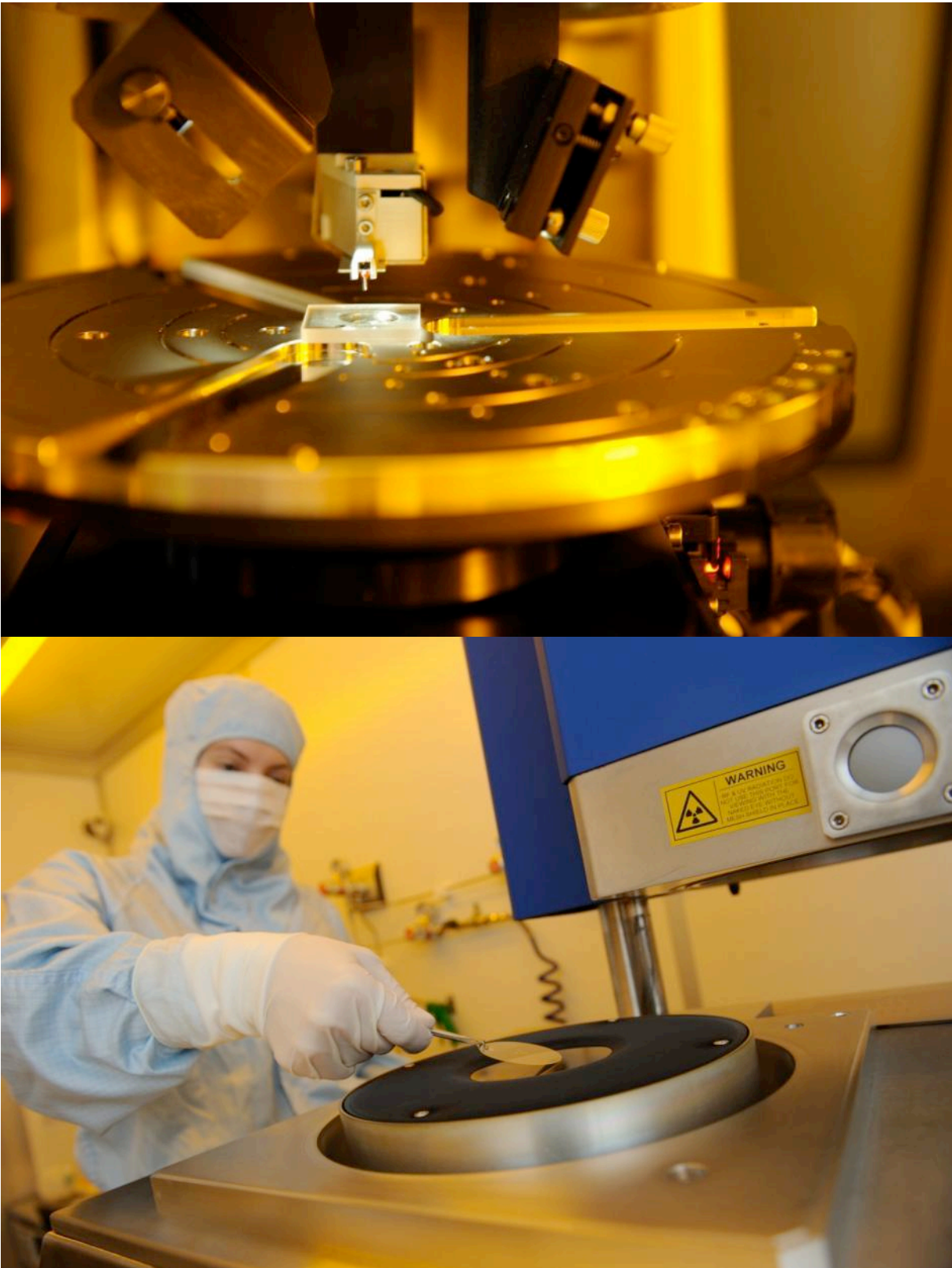
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Caption: ACTMOST aims at supporting European companies with cutting-edge micro-photonics technologies for product innovation and will also open up its facilities for hands-on training of company staff





Additional photos can be downloaded from www.actmost.eu