



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ECARE+ project was launched in 2006 as a follow up of the ECARE project (2003/2005) and as a consequence of the positive results achieved by this first phase. In two years, the ECARE Group of SME clusters and associations updated its outsider status to the one of a recognized interlocutor for the Industry, as expressed by the IMG4 chairperson during the final conference.

The objectives of the second project were to expand the ECARE Group while playing a coordination role for the network, and supporting SME participation in the two first FP7 Aeronautics Calls. The first objective has been reached during the life of the project, with some limitations due to the lack of visibility regarding the sustainability of the ECARE Group in the future. After a difficult start on Call 1, the second objective was fulfilled in the context of Call 2, with 5 SMEs taken onboard by Level 2 consortia as a direct result of ECARE+ activities.

The project method was derived from the first ECARE project, based on a multiplying model : first training the representatives of SME clusters and associations (or "ECARE Regional Contact Points"), then using them as relays of information for their local SMEs during "Regional Sessions". During the life of the project 30 members of the ECARE Group organised 20 such sessions, involving more than 500 SMEs.

Following the Regional Sessions, SMEs had the opportunity to demonstrate their competencies by entering or updating their entry in the project database, which included a Quality Control Process designed to help them presenting their technological offer in the most structured and attractive way possible. Entries in the database pointed to Level 2 project proposals, updated for each call.

The best ECARE+ results were achieved in the framework of Call 2, when Regional Sessions gave way to Technology-Based Workshops organised in four regions, involving a panel of SMEs from various countries and the Level 2 proposal coordinators from the Industry. Following these targeted workshops 5 SMEs were selected for participation within consortia.

The final ECARE+ event was the occasion for clusters and SMEs alike to deliver a very positive message on the effect ECARE+ had on their existence and involvement in European-funded research. The proof of its utility having been made, the ECARE Group now has to demonstrate its ability to become a self sustainable body at the European level.