Switzerland*

Strategic framework, action plan and scope for procurement for innovation policy

Switzerland does not have a specific strategic framework for procurement for innovation nor a stand-alone procurement for innovation action plan.

Regarding research and innovation in Switzerland, the bottom-up approach dominates. Moreover, the Federal Council applies an integrated approach with regard to innovation, combing the promotion of education, research and innovation in one federal act with new legislation. The new State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) defines the overall (legal) framework for innovation support, whereas the Commission for Technology and Innovation (CTI) is the Swiss innovation promotion agency that encourages scientific innovation in Switzerland by providing funding, advisory services and networks to improve the Swiss economy. Support is based on the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. only stepping in when innovation and market opportunities would remain untapped without the CTI’s support. While Swiss businesses undertake and finance a large part of their research and innovation (R&I) activities themselves, the total amount of public funding for innovation activities is much lower than for basic research and is only available for publicly-oriented R&I partners, such as public universities or research and technology organisations carrying out applied research with or for Swiss enterprises.

With this policy, Switzerland views itself as an exception among the member countries of the OECD. Switzerland’s innovation policy assumes that the generation of innovation is a core task of industry and SMEs and that the private sector has to contribute own effort and money to a large extent. Consequently, the Swiss government only rarely intervenes directly in the innovation process. Instead, it focuses on setting the legal framework and providing the necessary infrastructure (i.e. the adequate regulatory framework for the actors involved in innovation, mainly from industry).

Implementation

With regard to specific actions supporting procurement for innovation in Switzerland, there is - apart from funding R&I projects - a strong emphasis on mentoring, coaching and teaching business knowledge and entrepreneurship skills as well as providing small companies and start-ups with a network of partners in the R&I sector as well as along their value chain. Support is also available for export and internationalisation.

As pointed out, Switzerland is not inclined towards a strategic framework for procurement for innovation. However, for the time being, the following measures can be considered as aiming at promoting innovation in general (besides the above mentioned measures by CTI):

- The SwissEnergy programme encompasses the promotion of progressive projects relating to energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. In 2011, the

programme entered its third decade of activity. The decision by the Federal Council to withdraw from the use of nuclear energy on a step-by-step basis means that the objectives of SwissEnergy will grow in importance, and the programme will therefore play a significant role in the restructuring of Switzerland’s energy supply in the coming decades. The Swiss Federal Office of Energy (SFOE) is responsible for the operational management of the programme.

- The National Research Programmes (NRP) was established in 1975. Since, the NRP’s mission has been to generate scientific knowledge aimed at solving Switzerland’s most pressing problems. The Federal Council specifies the research topics of the individual programmes. NRPs are contributing scientifically to the solution of these problems, for example by developing action plans, providing political advice and creating special research infrastructures. NRP 62 “Smart Materials” initiative is a good example of the routes that research can take, from the initial idea through to product development. The Federal Council usually commissions two to four NRPs at a time with a budget of 10 to 15 million Swiss francs per project. Proposals are evaluated by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

- The Swiss Competence Centres for Energy Research (SCCER) are contributing to innovation in the area of renewable energy. In order to implement the decision by the Federal Council and parliament to phase out nuclear power by 2035, the efficiency of renewable energies must be increased and new opportunities in this area must be exploited. The Federal Council intends to boost research into renewable energy under the Coordinated Energy Research in Switzerland Action Plan. The key element in this plan involves establishing inter-university research networks, or Swiss Competence Centres for Energy Research (SCCER). This task was given to the CTI, with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

**Challenges, risks and solutions to overcome obstacles**

A recent report on the Swiss innovation policy dating from 2013 (Franz Barjak, Wirkungen innovationspolitischer Foerdermassnahmen in der Schweiz, Studie im Auftrag des Staatssekretariats fuer Bildung, Forschung und Innovation, 2013) highlights the lack of co-ordination and co-operation between the various stakeholders as a shortcoming of Swiss innovation policy. Moreover, the measures mentioned above were launched as singular measures without integrating them in an overall innovation strategy.

**Measurement and impact assessment**

As procurement for innovation is not at the centre of Swiss innovation policy, there is no measurement of the impacts of actions related to procurement for innovation nor does the government or other institutions define targets with regard to procurement for innovation. However, the above mentioned recent report on Swiss innovation policy dating from 2013 comes to the conclusion that no fundamental changes to the support measures are required as the Swiss system proves to be generally adequate and consistent, efficiently implemented, effective and to have a positive impact on technical progress. Yet, the report also highlights some shortcomings, especially with regard to the “culture of support” that constitutes a mental barrier to new approaches among companies and academic institutions.