

'EU offers unparalleled opportunities to Indian entrepreneurs'

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In his exclusive interview with *BioSpectrum's* Raj Gunashekar, he shares the facts and insights about the EU markets, opportunities and programmes designed to assist international companies from countries like India in the area of Lifesciences. He also advises entrepreneurs who are keen to establish organizations in the EU circle.

Dr Dambois also speaks on the initial challenges companies will face and how EU can help organizations financially all the way from the beginning to the end.

Excerpts:

Q: What opportunities does EU offer to Indian biotech, pharmaceutical and other lifesciences companies?

Dr Denis Dambois: Europe is especially interesting for lifesciences companies from emerging economies like India, seeking to leverage potential advantages in the largest economic market of the world.

With its technological leadership and manufacturing knowhow, Europe offers interesting opportunities for the acquisition or development of intellectual property (IP) as well as the development of sophisticated products.

For example, tax holidays are available in Switzerland for substantial investment projects. Also, France, UK and Ireland have similar provisions for startup companies.

Access to new technologies, products, skills and markets is critical for life science companies in order to maintain competitiveness and generate growth in an environment characterized by price pressures, fast technological changes and increasingly sophisticated consumers.

The vocational training systems in many countries and top academic educational systems guarantee sizeable highly skilled workforces.

Meanwhile, mandatory health insurance systems in most European countries, together with ageing populations, ensure strong and steady demand.

Furthermore, products accepted by European consumers, or even those manufactured in Europe, can benefit from a 'Europe bonus' in emerging markets in terms of credibility and desirability.

These are factors that explain that the EU biotech and lifesciences 'eco-system' is well developed and quite effective, in particular thanks to a number of clusters, Heidelberg in Germany, for example.

In its Framework Programmes (FPs), the European Commission does not practice any discrimination linked to the public or private sector nature of the participants.

This means that Indian companies, and Indian researchers from the private sector, can participate (and, in certain cases, be funded by the EU) under the same conditions as public sector Indian organizations and researchers.

Q: What would be the initial challenges for Indian companies who want to establish themselves in EU?

Nothing in particular, apart from the usual commercial risk assessment and due diligence practices, and the need to properly understand a diversified but equally rewarding EU landscape for lifesciences.

Clearly, participation in large scale collaborations operating under accurate rules such as those made possible under the European Commission's Framework Programmes is an excellent way to get in touch with the European lifescience landscape, before considering a possible establishment in the EU thus reducing the risks.

Q: Any message for Indian entrepreneurs who are apprehensive about investing in EU?

Despite the world's currently low economic growth rate, the EU remains India's largest trading partner, and the very first source of FDI to India.

Additionally, as the largest market of the world, EU is a central pillar of the world economy, offering some unparalleled opportunities to Indian entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the EU remains a top-level worldwide player regarding research and innovation, as evidenced, for example, in the EU's 'Innovation Union competitiveness report 2013'.

Q: How can Indian institutions and universities leverage on what EU has to offer?

Practically, again, the European Commission's Framework Programmes (in particular the new one, Horizon 2020) offer an excellent opportunity for Indian institutions to take advantage of the European expertise in the lifesciences area and many

others-not only through one-to-one interactions but much more so by integrating themselves into consortia including several European public and private organizations from both European and non-European countries.

Moreover the rules of the EU FPs ensure a very systematic and professional management of the related projects.

Once acquired, such methodological and management skills are obviously valuable in other contexts as well.

Q: What are the advantages that EU offers over other countries?

The openness of Europe-both in economic terms and regarding research and innovation-is well-known and represents a major advantage.

Its cultural and linguistic diversity has resulted in European researchers and economic factors being very open to international interactions and collaborations, which are also a necessity for the smaller European countries.

Therefore, European stakeholders have been used to international collaborations, and are often well integrated in trans-national networks of various sorts.

Thus, partnering with a European (public or private) research organization usually takes place very smoothly, and is often an effective way to gain access to one of such networks and also, to first-class skills, facilities, and equipments.

It should be noted that participation of non-European companies or research organizations in the EU Framework Programmes is often of great help for them in the perspective of accessing not only the EU research community but also the European market, which is the largest in the world.

In India, the EU has launched a "European Business and Technology Centre" (EBTC-www.ebtc.eu), which aims at promoting research and business collaboration in terms of joint ventures, research collaborations, technology transfer, contract services in particular regarding biotech, life sciences and health.

Under this initiative, there is a deliberate attempt to showcase collaborative opportunities across EU-India, the result of which has been several success stories on initiating or helping to build consortia to bid joint research proposals and connect companies in the field of bioindustrials, molecular diagnostics, bioinformatics and remote diagnostic tools.

Furthermore, the EBTC is the Indian arm of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (<http://www.clustercollaboration.eu>), connecting EU and Indian clusters.

Q: In terms of finances, how would you help companies who want to collaborate or establish with EU counterparts?

Under specific conditions, European funding may be available for Indian (public or private) organizations participating in joint research projects, either under the EU Framework Programmes such as the new 'Horizon 2020' or under national programmes of EU member states or multilateral funding programs.

Q: Post establishing a company, what kind of support would 'Horizon 2020' programme extend?

When participating in publicly-funded programmes such as the new 'Horizon 2020' Framework Programme, European private companies in all sectors enjoy the same participation and funding rules with a few minor exceptions as European public-sector research organizations - in particular they are automatically eligible for funding.

Whereas the funding of Indian participants is much more selective, and not automatic. This is thus a significant advantage for Indian companies establishing themselves in Europe.

EU companies, in particular SMEs, can also access a number of European financing mechanisms.