



INTERVIEW



DR.-ING PETRA PÜCHNER



**Steinbeis
 Europa Zentrum**

Dr Petra Püchner is Commissioner for Europe of the Minister of Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism Baden-Württemberg as well as Head of Steinbeis Europa Zentrum.

Steinbeis Europa Zentrum connects industry and research in all technology sectors with European counterparts with the mandate of Baden-Württemberg.

Well-connected with international partners and networks, Steinbeis Europa Zentrum stands by companies, start-ups, universities, research institutions and cluster initiatives on issues of innovation management, financing, EU applications, international markets, regional and social transformation, and innovation policy.

How can the EU support the deployment of hydrogen projects?

After a successful second European Hydrogen Week (29.11 to 03.12.2021), we asked Dr Petra Püchner, Commissioner for Europe of the Minister for Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism of Baden-Württemberg, how the EU can support the deployment of hydrogen, both at regional level, and for very practical projects, such as the COSMHYC series.

1. Dr Püchner, can you briefly describe how you support innovation and research as Commissioner for Europe of the Minister of Economic Affairs?

The main task of my role is to connect SMEs from Baden-Württemberg with innovation actors and ecosystems in other European regions. This includes understanding and developing the right framework (policy) conditions on European level in cooperation with other innovative regions in Europe and relevant EU institutions. Stimulating transnational technology transfer is an important aspect of that. By supporting cutting-edge research and innovation in the region, we keep Baden-Württemberg part of the conversation when it comes to transnational partnerships and EU funding schemes. By contributing to the development of strategies on a European level, my team and I ensure that the perspective of SMEs is considered in European research programmes.

2. With the Green Deal and the new Fit or 55 package the EU has set ambitious measures to transition to climate neutrality. From your point of view: what are the priorities that need to be addressed to meet this goal?

Baden-Württemberg strives to be in front when it comes to supporting and enabling our innovative companies, especially our SME and Start-ups, to deliver the necessary new technologies needed to achieve climate neutral production and zero emission.

Many smart and innovative projects will be needed for this, in particular for accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility, supplying clean, affordable, and secure energy, and mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy. For implementation, the regional level is key.

We also need the smartest and most innovative minds working on the energy transition and achieving climate neutrality – we are thus encouraging to invite female and male talents from all cultural backgrounds to join us in this transition.



COSMHYC has received funding from the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen 2 Joint Undertaking under grant agreement No 736122. This Joint Undertaking receives support from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and Hydrogen Europe and Hydrogen Europe Research.

COSMHYC^{XL} has received funding from the Fuel Cells and Hydrogen 2 Joint Undertaking (JU) under grant agreement No 826182. The JU receives support from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and Germany, France, Denmark.

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3. Following up on inclusivity in the emerging technology sectors: what aspects need to be addressed besides equality in the workplace?

As senior expert in the Gendered Innovation Advisory Groups of the European Commission, I worked on different kinds of technology sectors and topics. Whether we look at Artificial Intelligence or the energy sector, we identified issues where gender awareness can make a difference and create better results. Some of this is connected to user design and applications, but there is also the need to look closer into project set-ups to avoid a gender-biased approach. More information on this is available in the Policy Review [Gendered Innovations 2: How Inclusive Analysis Contributes to Research and Innovation](#).

4. In the COSMHYC project series, our contribution to a climate-neutral future is hydrogen-based. How can EU policies contribute to the fast uptake of hydrogen mobility?

Clean hydrogen, fuel cells, and storage solutions are clear priorities outlined in the recent action plans of the EU. We need to advance this key industrial sector by 2030 as hydrogen will have a big impact on transport, in particular heavy-duty transport such as long-haul trucking, shipping, and vehicle fleets and here Baden-Württemberg can contribute with its various hydrogen-related actors and innovators. Hydrogen is also already used in the steel industry with an existing hydrogen infrastructure where the focus must now be on making the switch to green hydrogen.

The COSMHYC project series is a perfect example of how the former EU research programme H2020 can accompany the research effort on a particular hydrogen technology from its early stage to prototyping and demonstration. The new Horizon Europe programme will play an even bigger role here. It includes funding schemes for all level of research, development, and innovation. Especially the Clean Hydrogen Partnership will focus on developing further hydrogen technologies.

For the COSMHYC consortium it is soon time to think about market entry and deployment. I'm convinced that at this stage the EU can help with specific instruments, such as the European Innovation Council which supports companies for transforming research results into business. In terms of policies and frameworks, it is important to get into exchange with the relevant European players in the EC as well as in the EP. As Commissioner for Europe, I can help our companies, but all entrepreneurs and innovators are encouraged to use the portal [Have Your Say](#) to let the European Commission know about missing or hindering EU frameworks and policies.

5. Coming back to the regional level: is Baden-Württemberg following a specific hydrogen strategy?

Yes, following the National Hydrogen Strategy of the federal government, Baden-Württemberg published the [Hydrogen Roadmap for Baden-Württemberg](#) in December 2020.

Measures include – to mention only a few – the implementation of hydrogen technologies in companies, especially SMEs, and demonstrating market readiness of these new technologies. We are also increasing research capacities at universities. A new platform, *H2BW*, will be established to collect and connect all activities and actors in the hydrogen sector and to use all the potential in the region most effectively. Lastly, and this is where the work at Steinbeis Europa Zentrum plays the most significant role: we are emphasising our support of transregional European projects for scaling up and making our region a European champion in hydrogen technologies.



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