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French technology clusters Route des Lasers and Elopsys merge to become ALPHA-RLH

Aggregate skills in photonics, lasers, microwave and digital technologies will enable ALPHA-RLH to prioritize strategic innovations for national defense

The new cluster's expanded capacity will further enrich the support provided to SME members exporting to global markets

Bordeaux, France, December 9, 2016 – Route des Lasers, a competitiveness cluster for photonics and laser technology companies, and Elopsys, a competitiveness cluster for photonics, microwave and digital technologies, today announce they will merge to become ALPHA-RLH.

The new cross-disciplinary technology cluster ALPHA-RLH inherits 250 members, including many major global organizations: Thales Group, Dassault Aviation, Airbus Safran Launchers, Safran Helicopters, as well as CEA, a world leading microelectronic and nanotechnology research center. Cluster members have contributed to economic growth and development in the Aquitaine region (pop. 5.8 million) by directly generating close to 6,500 highly skilled jobs and indirectly creating a further 20,000. ALPHA-RLH sees strong potential to increase membership by 20 – 30 per cent by 2018; it has already identified more than 250 eligible firms that could benefit from the cluster's expansion, greater efficiency of scale and synergy.

Jean-Pierre Giannini, director of CEA/Cesta and former director of Route des Lasers, will serve as president of ALPHA-RLH. Hervé Floch, former director of Route des Lasers, has been appointed general director of ALPHA-RLH. Thomas Colombeau, former director of Elopsys, will serve as deputy director of ALPHA-RLH.

"With our combined expertise and deep understanding of photonics, lasers, microwave and digital technologies that are deployed by most industrial firms, ALPHA-RLH has a major competitive advantage. We are now in a stronger position to accompany the rise and structural growth of the cutting-edge photonics sector at regional and national levels," said Hervé Floch. "The new cluster is better equipped to overcome all the challenges needed to successfully take a project from concept to end-product. We have the qualities, attributes and resources to become the benchmark for microwave and photonics in France and draw greater international business interests to the Aquitaine region."

According to a study on the photonics industry conducted in 2014 by France's Directorate-General for Enterprise (DGE), the European photonics sector generated €77M ($81.8M) in sales revenue, of which France represented €10M ($10.6M). In its findings, the world market for photonics exceeded $481 billion (€452.7bn) in 2012; projected to reach $620 billion (€583.5bn) by 2020, a growth rate of nearly 30%.

Although the market for microwave technologies is mature, growth does continue with innovation taking place in numerous areas. The technology is used by consumers on a daily basis, for instance in data transmission (mobile networks Wi-Fi, 3G, 4G and LTE). In Europe, the microwave market represented £23 billion (approx. €29bn, $29bn) in 2014. Leading countries are France, Germany and the UK (Source: Intelligence Seminar, Cambridge UK, June 25′ 2014). The development of 5G is seen as a growth driver.

In the next two years, ALPHA-RLH expects to attract at least half a dozen companies from other regions in France and abroad. Internationally, it plans to engage a representative in Japan in addition to the ones currently operating in China and the US. The cluster will continue driving efforts to encourage members to participate in key international trade events such as BIOS, Photonics West or EUMW (European Microwave Week), as well as join networks, such as la French Tech.

Key ALPHA-RLH objectives are:

- To make the Aquitaine region more attractive to industrial firms by proactively setting up inter-sector development projects
- To help SMEs drive exports and grow to medium-sized companies, all within a secure economic environment

About ALPHA-RLH– Route des Lasers & des Hyperfréquences

ALPHA-RLH (Route des Lasers & des Hyperfréquences) is a newly formed technology cluster specializing in photonics, lasers, microwave and digital technologies. It is the result of a merger between two French competitiveness clusters, Route des Lasers and Elopsys, both located in the Aquitaine region, a dynamic industrial area with one of Europe's highest concentrations of scientific expertise in photonics. As a priority, the cluster focuses on technologies and applications that are of strategic importance for national defense. These include the Laser Megajoule (LMJ), one of the two largest ever laser facilities in the world, and the Petawatt Aquitaine Laser (PETAL). It covers microwave communication, detection, navigation and localization, as well as other emerging technologies for digital healthcare, medical devices, renewable energy, smart buildings, embedded systems, aerospace, automotive clean tech and telecommunications etc. ALPHA-RLH currently has 250 members and has an operational budget of €2 million ($2.1M).

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