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Trusted networks developed through partnerships made possible by the European Union

When Gaël Van Weyenbergh and Maxime Bouillard launched MEOH in 2015, they knew that their think-and-do tank dedicated to social trust had potential. They still had to make themselves known at a European level. Thanks to the support of the Enterprise Europe Network, the world's largest EU co-funded support network for small and medium-sized enterprises, MEOH participated in an important partnership meeting where it identified an EU consortium seeking its expertise: a major first step before many other EU-related projects.

Gaël is Belgian and Maxime is French. Gaël worked in collective intelligence and social entrepreneurship while Maxime specialised in European governance - i.e. the processes and rules that affect the exercise of powers within the European Union - at the European Commission. Each of them had become aware of the shortcomings in the functioning of the system. They met in 2015 in the coworking space Transforma BXL where Gaël gave a presentation on MEOH. "At the end of my talk, Maxime came to find me, and told me that this was exactly what he was trying to put in place at the European Commission. That's how we started working together," he recalls.

Based in Brussels, MEOH is a think-and-do tank conducting applied research that focuses on how to improve the quality of online relationships and therefore the issue of trust. While the young company has confidence in its own potential, it knows that it needs strong support to make its business viable. How can you make yourself known when potential partners and clients are scattered all over the continent and active in often remote areas? This is where Enterprise Europe Network comes in.

Participation in a first consortium thanks to Enterprise Europe Network

"When we were contacted by the experts of Enterprise Europe Network Brussels, we were not aware of these partner networks. So we met them and they monitored us from the outset. Without Enterprise Europe Network, we wouldn't be where we are today. Advice on financing, putting us in touch with partners and day-to-day support have all helped us a lot," explains the founder. Benjamin Carnec, ICT Advisor for Enterprise Europe Brussels (EEB) at hub.brussels, who monitors MEOH at Enterprise Europe Network points out: "The ICT Proposers' Day is an annual brokerage event. By participating in these professional speed dating events since 2016, MEOH has been able to meet several partners. In fact, most EU programmes require the creation of consortia bringing together companies, universities and research centres, etc. It's difficult for small organisations to seek partners on their own at the other end of the continent.

As a first major step in its development, MEOH has introduced an EU project called TRIPLE, funded by the European Commission and led by the CNRS, which aims to make human and social sciences accessible. Within this huge project, MEOH's role is to create a trusted social network between scientists from the humanities, social sciences and other fields of science, but also with citizens and public services.

Benjamin Carnec, their dedicated contact within Enterprise Europe Network, not only puts MEOH in touch with international partners but also advises them on how to find financing and, above all, monitors their progress like an account manager. "Benjamin really is a gift for us. I have a direct phone number, a

friendly person I can talk to and who answers all my questions or redirects me to the right person,” says Gaël.

A prototype, a new EU consortium and future clients

Enterprise Europe Network has already enabled the two young entrepreneurs to hire their first employee but also to approach potential clients. And the future is accelerating for MEOH. The team is currently participating in a second EU consortium on deliberative democracy, the application for which is currently being submitted. MEOH is here reflecting on the renewal of the European public sphere and on how to reduce the trust gap between public authorities and civil society. As part of the TRIPLE project, Gaël and Maxime have also started collaborating with the German company Nuromedia, which has enabled them to improve delivery of their prototype. This is a mobile application, a hybrid trusted network between WhatsApp (for messaging groups) and LinkedIn (for personalised recommendations).

“We’ve gained credibility at a European level. We’re now going to finish the prototype and then launch it. Looking ahead, we’ve got ideas for increasing supply and creating large-scale horizontal online cooperation to enable network-based governance. This is our vision of the future”. MEOH’s future is being written with confidence.

Disclaimer

The interviews with SME owner(s) and Enterprise Europe Network were conducted before the coronavirus pandemic that put many European companies in a difficult situation.

To support the economy and protect businesses like MEOH, the EU has been working closely with Member States since the emergence of coronavirus, putting in place support measures and recovery plans to deal with the impact of COVID-19. Learn more about the [management of coronavirus](#) and the [recovery plan for Europe](#).

About the Enterprise Europe Network

The world’s largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) brings together 600 member organisations in more than 60 countries, providing advice and support to help SMEs expand into new markets, innovate, access finance, understand and apply EU legislation and find business or technology partners across Europe and beyond. The European Commission launched the Enterprise Europe Network in 2008. It is co-financed by the [European Union programme for the Competitiveness of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises \(COSME\)](#).

For more information: www.brusselsnetwork.be