



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

New collaboration opportunities in the Republic of Korea and Japan

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
29 January 2025, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





New collaboration opportunities in the Republic of Korea and Japan

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organised the EU Clusters Talk "**New collaboration opportunities in Korea and Japan**" on **29 January, 8:30 – 9:45 CET**, to explore new collaboration opportunities with these two economies and markets.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Ángela Negrete Benedí, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. New collaboration opportunities in the Republic of Korea and Japan
Emmanuelle Chauvin-Henry, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission
3. Introduction to EU Business Hub programme
Paulo Gontan Arano, Junior Project Officer, EUROCHAMBRES
Thomas Mavrogonatos, Deloitte Consultant
4. Presentation of the EU Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation
Manuel Hubert, EU-side Managing Director, EU Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation
5. Panel debate
Loïc Marin, Head of projects and interclustering networks, CIMES
Thomas Mavrogonatos, Deloitte Consultant, EU Business Hub programme
Manuel Hubert, EU-side Managing Director, EU Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation
6. Funding opportunities
Ángela Negrete Benedí, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- EU–Asia collaboration is delivering tangible business results through clusters' activity.
- Horizon Europe now opens strategic gateways for cluster-led partnerships with Japan and Korea.
- The EU Business Hub turns missions into market access—with tailored support before, during and after.
- European clusters are shaping resilient supply chains through direct engagement with Korean and Japanese ecosystems.
- Missions aren't one-off events—clusters can turn them into long-term, funded pathways for SME growth
- Cultural distance is no longer a barrier—clusters are essential guides in navigating trusted partnerships.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Ángela Negrete, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Chris Burns, the following news items were presented:

1. Apply to the [call for proposals](#) for stakeholder sessions for the EU Industry Day.
2. [Consultation](#) on the future of the International IP SME helpdesk in China, South-east Asia, Latin America and India.
3. Register for the [EU agri-food business delegation to Japan, Tokyo and Osaka](#).

2. New collaboration opportunities in the Republic of Korea and Japan

Emmanuelle Chauvin-Henry, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission

Emmanuelle Chauvin-Henry outlined the new opportunities for collaboration with Korea and Japan under Horizon Europe. She explained that Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship research and innovation programme with a **budget of €93.5 billion**, is open to global cooperation, particularly with like-minded countries. The core focus for collaboration with Korea and Japan lies within Pillar II of the programme, which funds research addressing global challenges such as climate change, digitalisation, public health, and green energy. While **Korea** has completed negotiations for association and is already able to participate in the 2025 calls under transitional arrangements, **Japan** is still advancing through formal negotiations, with potential full participation expected from the 2026–2027 work programme.

She acknowledged that cooperation has not yet reached its full potential and stressed the need to raise awareness on both sides. She highlighted tools like the [EU Funding & Tenders Portal](#) and the Euraxess network to help researchers and organisations find partners and build consortia. Outreach activities are already ongoing in Korea, and similar efforts are expected in Japan. She concluded by encouraging participants to spread the word and take advantage of this strategic opening, which offers new ways for clusters and researchers to work together on global priorities.

3. Introduction to EU Business Hub programme

Paulo Gontan Arano, Junior Project Officer, EUROCHAMBRES

Thomas Mavrogonatos, Deloitte Consultant

Paulo Gontan Arano and Thomas Mavrogonatos introduced the [EU Business Hub](#), a new EU-funded programme designed to help European SMEs and startups enter the markets of Japan and South Korea. Building on the success of the **former EU Gateway initiative**, the programme focuses on three key sectors: green and low-carbon technologies, digital solutions, and healthcare. Over the next four years, it will organise **20 business missions**—10 in each country—with the goal of supporting 50 European companies per mission to connect with local partners and explore business opportunities.



What makes the programme stand out is the **tailored support** it offers before, during, and after each mission. Companies receive hands-on help with matchmaking, logistics like accommodation and booth setup, and visibility through local promotional efforts. They also benefit from briefings on local market conditions and policy landscapes. One example is the **upcoming mission to Seoul in June 2025**, which includes company visits, networking events, and participation in a major green technology trade fair. Everything is designed to make the most of the limited time companies have on the ground while building long-term connections.

To apply, companies need to meet a few basic criteria—such as being based in the EU, having some international business experience, and operating in one of the focus sectors. The process starts with submitting an expression of interest, followed by a full application. Both speakers encouraged companies to act quickly due to the **competitive selection process** and emphasised that participation is a strategic opportunity to grow in new markets with strong institutional backing. Clusters were invited to help spread the word and support companies in applying.

4. Presentation of the EU Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation

Manuel Hubert, EU-side Managing Director, EU Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation

Manuel Hubert introduced the Centre's mission to **strengthen industrial collaboration between Europe and Japan**. Established over 37 years ago and co-funded by the European Commission and Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Centre operates from offices in Tokyo and Brussels, supporting a wide range of stakeholders, including SMEs, clusters, and research agencies. Hubert explained that the Centre offers a comprehensive suite of services aimed **at helping European actors enter and succeed in the Japanese market**. These services include hands-on training programmes such as 'Get Ready for Japan' and the 'World-Class Manufacturing Programme', in addition to sector-specific market access workshops, help desks for trade and legal issues, and extensive market intelligence resources.

The speaker highlighted the Centre's commitment to fostering cluster cooperation, noting that while **the Japanese concept of "clusters" differs from the European model**, there are still strong regional ecosystems that can offer collaboration opportunities. The Centre supports matchmaking and regional dialogue, hosting webinars that connect Japanese prefectures with European clusters sharing sectoral interests. He also presented the [Enterprise Europe Network activities in Japan](#), mentioning that while success rates for partnership agreements are low due to the Japanese market's complexity, patience and persistence often yield results. Through both online platforms and physical business missions, the Centre facilitates hundreds of B2B meetings and encourages clusters to take part directly, as this creates a broader impact.

Looking ahead, Manuel Hubert detailed **upcoming business missions** focused on green tech, biotech, and digital sectors, as well as the Centre's ongoing training opportunities. He emphasised that many activities are open to clusters and encouraged interested organisations to apply, especially for the May–June edition of the 'Get Ready for Japan' programme. His key message to clusters was clear: the



Centre is not only a gateway to Japan, but also a strategic partner offering practical tools, tailored guidance, and valuable access to a market that rewards long-term commitment and collaboration.

5. Panel debate

Loïc Marin opened the panel by sharing CIMES' recent journey in **developing ties with Japan**, noting how Japan's ageing population has created significant industrial challenges, particularly in labour shortages and a pressing need for innovation. He highlighted that these pressures have opened the door to external collaboration, especially in sectors where **European technologies** can offer concrete solutions, such as robotics, advanced manufacturing, and healthcare. This demographic shift, Loïc Marin argued, represents a timely and valuable opportunity for European actors to contribute.

Building on these reflections, Manuel Hubert elaborated on Japan's broader industrial and policy alignment with Europe. He identified green **technology, cybersecurity, and digital transformation** as areas where European companies can provide immediate value. Citing frameworks like the [EU–Japan Economic Partnership Agreement](#) and recent digital and green alliances, Hubert noted that the political and economic landscape is conducive to deeper collaboration. However, he stressed the importance of preparation: building trust with Japanese counterparts takes time, consistency, and often the involvement of a reliable intermediary. Success, he said, rarely comes from a single visit, but instead from repeated engagement and a long-term mindset.

From the **Korean perspective**, Thomas Mavrogonatos presented a parallel set of opportunities. He identified three priority sectors for EU–Korea cooperation: **digital technologies (including AI, semiconductors, and cybersecurity), green tech, and healthcare**. He pointed to Korea's Digital New Deal as a major driver of investment and openness to foreign expertise, while also noting that EU regulatory knowledge, especially around data governance, could support Korea in shaping effective digital policy. Thomas Mavrogonatos also emphasised the need for SMEs to be **highly prepared before joining business missions**, given the limited time available on the ground and the high stakes involved in making the right connections.

Paulo Gontan Arano focused on the **concrete support available** through the EU Business Hub. He explained how the programme facilitates tailored matchmaking by allowing SMEs to indicate their preferences for the types of local companies they wish to meet. Dedicated teams in Korea and Japan then arrange relevant contacts, helping European companies navigate complex markets. The speaker also clarified the **eligibility criteria** for joining the missions and highlighted that even companies with previous international experience could apply. He underscored the value of repeat participation, noting that it increases visibility and fosters continuity in building long-term partnerships.

Throughout the panel, there was strong alignment on **key success factors**: thorough preparation, patience, and local support. Marin emphasised that while language and cultural differences might seem like barriers at first, Japanese partners are generally open and well-prepared to collaborate, provided that the European offer is clear, relevant, and built on trust. Manuel Hubert echoed this view, highlighting the need for pre-arranged meetings and a thoughtful entry strategy. Thomas Mavrogonatos added that local OEMs and tier-one suppliers were increasingly involved in missions, but that SMEs must actively do their homework and engage strategically. The role of clusters as multipliers and intermediaries was also repeatedly emphasised.



Audience questions helped steer the discussion toward SME engagement and sustainability alignment. Speakers acknowledged that smaller firms often face resource constraints but pointed to a growing ecosystem of support, from logistical and financial aid to soft-landing services. Manuel Hubert gave examples of **successful SME contributions to Japan’s green transition**, including offshore wind and circular economy projects. Bonta confirmed that the Business Hub allows companies to participate in multiple missions and welcomes those who have previously engaged in similar initiatives. These cross-programme synergies were seen as essential to sustaining momentum and impact.

In closing, each speaker offered a final piece of practical advice. Paolo Gontan Arano encouraged participants to **actively explore EU support mechanisms** and take the time to build lasting relationships. Thomas Mavrogonatos underlined the **need for wider awareness of available tools** and called on cluster organisations to act as key disseminators. Loïc Marin stressed the **accessibility and value of current EU-funded missions**, encouraging clusters and SMEs to stay informed via official channels like the ECCP. Manuel Hubert concluded with a strong reminder that **Japan is a rewarding but demanding market**. Success, he said, comes from planning, persistence, and proximity—often requiring several visits to build trust. But once achieved, the business relationships formed are enduring and high in value.

The panel finalised with a shared recognition that EU–Asia collaboration, particularly with Japan and Korea, relies on strategic preparation, robust local engagement, and long-term commitment. The tools and frameworks are in place; the challenge now lies in making the most of them.

6. Funding opportunities

Ángela Negrete, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Ángela Negrete shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [European Partnership on Innovative SMEs/Eurostars: joint transnational call for proposals \(CALL 8 of Eurostars-3\)](#); deadline 13 March 2025.
2. Support for simple programmes targeting China (including Hong Kong and Macao), Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, South-eastern Asia or Southern Asia; deadline 23 April 2025.
3. [Scale-up and optimisation of manufacturing processes for electrolyser materials, cells, or stacks](#); deadline 23 April 2025.
4. [EUROCLUSTERS for Europe’s recovery](#); deadline 5 February 2025.
5. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#).