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Joint Cluster Initiatives: Presenting the new Euroclusters in Strand 2

Summary

EU Clusters Talks
14 January 2026, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

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Joint Cluster Initiatives: Presenting the new Euroclusters in Strand 2

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, hosted the EU Clusters Talk "**Joint Cluster Initiatives: Presenting the new Euroclusters in Strand 2**" on 14 January, from 8:30 – 10:00 CET. The session outlined outline the Euroclusters' objectives and scope and discussed how clusters and their members can actively engage in and benefit from these ambitious European initiatives.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Zivile Kropaite

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

   Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

2. Euroclusters in the context of the Competitiveness Compass and the new MFF proposal

   Marek Przeor, Team Leader Cluster Policy, DG GROW, European Commission

3. Results from previous Eurocluster projects

   Valentino Izzo, Programme Coordination Manager, EISMEA, European Commission

4. Presentation of Euroclusters

   1. ELEVATEX: Robin Oddon, Techtera

   2. FutureProof Textiles: Olena Mariuk, Greenwin LLC

   3. GATE5.0: Isabel Botey, Digital Cluster of Catalonia

   4. GRAPPA: Gus Verhaeghe, Flanders' FOOD

   5. MAT4EU: Elsa Cousin, POLYMERIS

   6. CITADEL: Alain Dinis, Systemic Paris Region

   7. CR.EU.IN.HERITAGE: Carlotta Campanini, Venetian Cluster

   8. ECDI: Laure Vidal, Aerospace Valley

5. Q&A

6. Funding opportunities

   Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- The Euroclusters cover a wide range of strategic sectors and consistently address the twin transition through cascade funding for SMEs, acceleration schemes and cross-sector collaboration.

- Beyond individual projects, Euroclusters act as catalysts for metaclusters and long-term interregional cooperation, reinforcing Europe's capacity to build resilient, place-based value chains at scale.

- The first generation of Euroclusters demonstrated strong impact, supporting thousands of SMEs and enabling skills development, internationalisation and new European alliances.

Strengthening the European economy through collaboration

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1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

The following news items were presented:

1. ECCP Investment Survey launched to collect information on major investments attracted by European clusters for the Summary Report 2025.
2. New guide: European Frameworks and Initiatives Supporting Clusters in the Green Transition
3. Clusters and Europe's Competitiveness: ECCP Summary Report 2025
4. Call for evidence on Simplifying the Better Regulation Framework; deadline 4 February 2026

2. Euroclusters in the context of the Competitiveness Compass and the new MFF proposal

Marek Przeor, Team Leader Cluster Policy, DG GROW, European Commission

Marek Przeor outlined the policy context for the Euroclusters initiative within the EU's competitiveness agenda. The European Commission's Competitiveness Compass sets the strategic framework for the next five years, focusing on closing the innovation gap, strengthening competitiveness alongside decarbonisation, and reducing strategic dependencies to enhance security. These priorities are supported by cross-cutting measures such as regulatory simplification, a stronger Single Market, better access to finance, skills development and improved coordination.

The next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be a key milestone, with negotiations expected to intensify in 2026. At the same time, the Commission's work programme foresees a dense legislative agenda, including simplification omnibus packages and major initiatives such as the Innovation Act, Procurement Act, Chips Act, Biotech Act and the forthcoming Industrial Accelerator Act, all of which are relevant for clusters. The draft MFF proposal is structured around three pillars: national and regional plans, a competitiveness pillar highly relevant for Euroclusters, and the Global Europe instrument. Within the proposed €2 trillion budget, €450 billion would be allocated to the European Competitiveness Fund, designed to support the full pathway from research to industrial deployment. Its main priorities are resilience and security, digital leadership, health and biotech, and decarbonisation and clean technologies.

Marek Przeor highlighted clusters as a key asset of the EU Single Market, helping to integrate SMEs, industry and research and to strengthen European value chains. In this context, the proposed Single Market Value Chains Builder aims to support value chain scale-up by mobilising public and private investment, with Euroclusters expected to play a central role. Sixteen new Eurocluster projects now involve 107 partners from 26 countries. The first group focused on net-zero and critical raw materials, while the second covers more diverse sectors such as textiles, defence and agri-food. With 75% of funding allocated to SMEs and the use of cascade funding, Euroclusters are positioned as a key instrument to close the innovation gap, support decarbonisation and strengthen EU competitiveness and resilience.

3. Results from previous Eurocluster projects

Valentino Izzo, Programme Coordination Manager, EISMEA, European Commission

Valentino Izzo summarised the results and early impacts of the first generation of Euroclusters, launched in 2022 and forming the basis for the current initiatives. A total of €42 million supported 30 cluster partnerships involving 171 beneficiaries from 23 countries, covering all industrial ecosystems.

Overall, the projects reinforced EU value chains by delivering 219 resilience and business continuity plans and supporting the development of over 500 new products and services, helping to reduce dependencies on critical inputs and technologies. Nearly 2,000 SMEs adopted more resource-efficient processes and technologies. These outcomes were largely enabled by cascade funding, which channelled €31 million directly to over 2,000 SMEs across the EU and 14 non-EU countries. Skills and internationalisation impacts were also significant. Nearly 2,000 cluster employees and 2,700 SMEs benefited from upskilling and reskilling activities. More than 3,500 SMEs received internationalisation support, resulting in 237 collaboration agreements with partners in third countries.

Beyond quantitative results, the Euroclusters generated important qualitative impacts, such as the creation of meta-clusters in the cultural and creative industries, the launch of the European Cluster Alliance for Green Manufacturing, and the mobilisation of additional private investment. The RE-CENTER Eurocluster was highlighted as an example, having profiled around 1,500 organisations, produced publicly available training resources and business continuity plans, and supported innovative projects such as solutions transforming discarded gardening plastics into high-quality products.

Valentino Izzo concluded by encouraging stakeholders to further exploit the extensive and largely public results of the first Euroclusters, available via the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and the Funding & Tenders Portal, as a valuable resource for current and future cluster initiatives.

4. Euroclusters in Strand 2

The following Euroclusters were presented:

ELEVATEX: Robin Oddon, Techtera

Robin Oddon introduced the ELEVATEX project, coordinated by the French textile cluster Techtera together with four partner clusters from Portugal, Italy and Spain. The project covers the entire textile value chain, including traditional uses and emerging markets such as transport, defence and infrastructure. ELEVATEX supports the twin transition of textile SMEs, combining environmental sustainability and circularity with digitalisation to modernise processes and improve efficiency, with the overall aim of strengthening international competitiveness. Key activities include two cascade funding calls: a first call opening in June for individual textile SMEs close to market launch, and a second call planned for February 2027 for consortia of textile SMEs and solution providers. The project also foresees strategic partnerships with application markets and technology providers, as well as internationalisation support, including exploratory missions to the USA and Japan starting in 2027.

FutureProof Textiles: Olena Mariuk, Greenwin LLC

FutureProof Textiles is a 36-month initiative aimed at strengthening the digital and green resilience of textile SMEs across Europe. It addresses a key challenge faced by the sector: limited capacity to adopt advanced digital technologies and circular economy practices despite growing market and regulatory pressures. The project is coordinated by a technical university in Greece and brings together research institutions and experts from Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine. It supports 40 textile SMEs through a cascade funding scheme, providing €50,000 per SME, complemented by training, mentoring and innovation collaboration activities. Funding is equally focused on digital innovation—such as automation, artificial intelligence and data-driven processes—and green innovation, including circularity, waste reduction and sustainable materials. Expected impacts include improved resilience, competitiveness and sustainability of participating SMEs, replicable best practices across Europe, and a contribution to the EU's Green Deal and digital transition goals.

GATE5.0: Isabel Botey, Digital Cluster of Catalonia

Isabel Botey introduced GATE5.0, a Eurocluster supporting the green and digital transition of the European agri-food ecosystem. The project is coordinated by Cluster Digital of Catalonia, with partners from Portugal, the Netherlands and Lithuania. Its aim is to help agri-food and digital SMEs turn innovation into market-ready solutions over the next three years. GATE5.0 provides financial support and capacity building through an acceleration programme, combining direct funding with training and mentoring. It also seeks to build strong regional and transnational ecosystems, foster Agri-Food 5.0 innovation, and support SMEs in international expansion. The project follows a challenge-driven acceleration model, starting with the identification of real market needs, followed by matchmaking between agri-food and digital SMEs. Selected consortia enter a three-phase acceleration journey, moving from business modelling to prototype development and finally to market validation and real-life demonstration. Currently, market challenges have been identified, solution workshops are under way, and the open call and matchmaking process will launch in February, with the acceleration programme starting in July.

GRAPPA: Gus Verhaeghe, Flanders' FOOD

GRAPPA is a follow-up to the previous Eurocluster BeResilient. The project focuses on the upcycling and valorisation of agri-food side streams, co-products and biomass, helping SMEs develop and commercialise innovative solutions while addressing environmental impact, resource inefficiencies, regulatory pressure and changing consumer demand. GRAPPA integrates technological, digital and green transition aspects. The project is implemented by six core partners and embedded in a wider European meta-cluster for circular economy ingredients, involving 15 partners from eight countries and reaching over 3,000 companies. Its objective is to support SMEs through financial support, training, skills development, networking and systemic innovation. GRAPPA follows a three-pillar approach: learning and connecting through system thinking and capacity building; innovation and demonstration supported by cascade funding; and scaling up, including policy integration. A key action is a €2 million cascade funding scheme supporting at least 35 SMEs, opening in March, with cut-off dates in May and October 2026 and a minimum 15% co-financing requirement.

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MAT4EU: Elsa Cousin, POLYMERIS

MAT4EU is a three-year Eurocluster project on advanced materials for a sustainable European future, involving six partners from Spain, Poland, France, Lithuania, Denmark and Germany, with a budget of over €2 million. The project addresses key challenges in the advanced materials value chain, including ecosystem fragmentation, limited private investment, slow innovation, gaps in circularity and digitalisation, weak links between research and industry, lack of testing infrastructures and skills shortages. MAT4EU covers polymers, composites, ceramics and metals, applied across strategic sectors such as mobility, aerospace and defence, construction, agri-food and packaging, renewable energy and health. It will support 46 SMEs through cascade funding, with two open calls focusing on advanced-material-based products and processes, alongside internationalisation and training activities. The first open call is expected before the summer. A survey has been launched to gather input from SMEs, industry and research organisations to help define priority topics for the calls.

CITADEL: Alain Dinis, Systemic Paris Region

Alain Dinis introduced CITADEL, a 36-month Eurocluster project coordinated by the deep-tech cluster Systematic. The consortium includes six partners from France, Romania, Lithuania and Finland. CITADEL aims to strengthen the resilience of European critical infrastructures by promoting collaboration between digital and security SMEs and accelerating the adoption of advanced digital technologies, while supporting access to security markets. The project will launch two cascade funding calls with a total budget of around €2 million, supporting 33 projects with up to €60,000 each, typically involving two partners. Funding focuses on critical infrastructures, resilience and urban environments, covering areas such as energy, transport, healthcare, smart cities and crisis management. Supported projects will address the full security cycle, from risk assessment and prevention to detection, response and recovery, with the goal of improving protection, crisis response and business continuity.

CR.EU.IN.HERITAGE: Carlotta Campanini, Venetian Cluster

CR.EU.IN.HERITAGE, coordinated by the Venetian Cluster in Italy, aims to transform European cultural heritage into a driver of innovation, strategic autonomy and sustainable growth. The project views cultural heritage as a cross-sectoral innovation hub, linking creative industries with areas such as digital technologies, health and agribusiness. It builds on two previous Euroclusters, FriendCCI and CreaThriv-EU, and brings together 10 partners from nine EU countries. It will launch one call for proposals, organised in two strands—product innovation and business/process innovation—and implemented in two steps, starting in February. Selected ideas will receive capacity-building support before submitting full proposals. The project aims to support around 40 SMEs through 20 innovation projects and focuses on strengthening technological independence, fostering innovation and skills, building long-term partnerships through the CR.EU Creativity Europe metacluster, and increasing global recognition of cultural heritage as a high-tech, high-growth ecosystem.

ECDI: Laure Vidal, Aerospace Valley

The European Cluster for Drone Innovation (ECDI) is a 30-month Eurocluster project aimed at strengthening and structuring the European drone innovation ecosystem by fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing and technological development among SMEs. The project brings together a consortium of European clusters with complementary expertise in aerospace, digital and

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environmental technologies, communication, and dual-use applications. ECDI will support SMEs through three cascade funding open calls, combined with a wide range of services, including support for digital and environmental transition, dual-use development, access to a European drone meta-cluster, internationalisation activities such as participation in fairs and events outside the EU, and training for upskilling and reskilling. The first open call, the Civil Drone Innovation Programme, will support 25 single-SME projects focused on adapting civilian drone products or processes towards dual-use applications or new markets. Two additional calls, planned for 2026 and 2027, will target dual-use drone projects, supporting both individual SMEs and small consortia of two SMEs.

5. Q&A

Addressing the questions form the audience, Valentino Izzo answered whether a new partner cluster can join an existing Eurocluster. It was clarified that this is possible in principle, either as a beneficiary or as an associated partner not receiving funding. However, such a change would require a formal amendment to the grant agreement and must be agreed by the Eurocluster consortium, which is responsible for assessing whether the addition brings clear added value to the project.

The speakers further emphasised the strategic importance of Euroclusters in supporting the development of meta-clusters across Europe. Euroclusters were highlighted as one of the few EU instruments that directly strengthen clusters and their capacity to support SMEs, making them a crucial mechanism for building resilient value chains. Thanks to Euroclusters, large-scale collaborations such as meta-clusters can emerge and operate effectively.

Valentino Izzo noted that future Euroclusters funding remains uncertain, as under the current Multiannual Financial Framework there will be no further Eurocluster calls, making this the final call in the present period. Any future opportunities will depend on reaching agreement on the next MFF. It was also clarified that while some sectors, such as textiles and agri-food, appear more strongly represented among the 16 selected projects, this reflects the competitive nature of the call, with projects selected purely on quality rather than sectoral quotas. Other sectors, potentially including health, are also covered, even if the overall distribution is not fully balanced. The possibility of future sector-based ranking approaches remains open but undecided.

6. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [Pilot access schemes to Technology Infrastructures for European startups, scaleups and innovative SMEs (CSA)](#); deadline 21 April 2026.
2. [Interregional Innovation Investments Instrument (I3): CAPACITY BUILDING CAP2B](#); deadline 19 March 2026
3. [New mobile app eases access to EU funding](#): To make applying for these funds easier and more user-friendly, a new mobile app 'EU funding & me' was launched.

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