



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

30 years and counting: Clustering in the EU Single Market

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
12 July 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

An initiative of the European Union





30 years and counting: Clustering in the EU Single Market

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 12 July 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET, to look at the achievements of the Single Market, speak about future challenges, and discuss the importance of the Single Market for collaboration between clusters.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Video: European Parliament – 30 years of the European Single Market
3. The EU Single Market – 30 years
Jakub Boratynski, Director, DG GROW, European Commission
4. Benefits and tools of the Single Market
Cristina Giménez Estol, Senior Expert, DG GROW, European Commission
5. Panel debate
Jakub Boratynski, Director, DG GROW, European Commission
Antonio Novo, President, European Clusters Alliance
Daniel Cosnita, President, CLUSTERO
Kristina Šermukšnytė-Alešiūnienė, Cluster Manager, Agri-Food Lithuania
6. Opportunities for the 30th Anniversary of the Single Market
Rafal Rudnicki, Head of Sector - Communication, Campaigns, Events and Outreach, DG GROW, European Commission
7. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- The Single Market has achieved a better participation of SMEs in a larger market, an intensified collaboration between European SMEs, and a network of clusters that support SME development. It serves as a framework to solve crises and enhance resilience of our industry.
- There is still potential to address strategic dependencies and map the own resources to be prepared for value chain disruptions.
- We need to further invest to innovation and skills to close the existing gaps in these areas.
- Clusters serve as connectors, accelerators, and early warning mechanism, providing information from the ground and supporting the SMEs in the green and digital transition and enhancing their resilience.
- Clusters are maturing, but there is still potential for wider recognition and involvement.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Jennifer Baker, the following news item were presented:

1. [Feedback to evaluate COSME programme](#) until 18 September
2. [Revamped Confidence Indicators](#) for the Industrial Ecosystems
3. Further integration of Ukraine into Single Market through [Connecting Europe Facility](#)
4. [Online meeting](#) “Focus Group Ukraine on EU-Ukraine Business Cooperation” on 13 July, 9:30
5. Register for the [Matchmaking Event in South Africa](#) on 24-26 October
6. Register for the [Matchmaking Event in Singapore](#) on 30 October – 1 November
7. [Feedback survey](#) to the EU Clusters Talks until 1 August

2. The EU Single Market – 30 years

Jakub Boratynski, Director, DG GROW, European Commission

Jakub Boratynski emphasised the importance of reflecting on past achievements and future challenges. He mentioned the four freedoms of the Single Market which need to be preserved: movement of goods, services, people, and capital. They serve as the cornerstone of a strong and resilient economic framework, even in times of crisis. The pandemic revealed the sensitivity of our supply chains within Europe and the significant impact of the Single Market on business and cross-border trade. Notably, clusters have played a vital role in identifying shortages during such challenging periods. He highlighted that the Single Market provides opportunities for businesses to easily find partners and build long-term relationships. It also serves as a shield during difficult times and defends against external shocks.

In addition, the Single Market gives a framework for pursuing the digital and green transition and tackling climate change. However, barriers still exist in the areas of services. The Commission has taken measures to improve the business environment and simplify processes, including establishing Single Market Offices in Member States. Jakub Boratynski welcomed the European Council's announcement of an independent report on the Single Market's future and highlighted the importance of remaining competitive and shaping the Single Market in the coming years through the engagement with clusters and discussions on competitiveness and innovation.

3. Benefits and tools of the Single Market

Cristina Giménez Estol, Senior Expert, DG GROW, European Commission

Christina Giménez Estol presented different tools for the knowledge about and implementation of the rights and obligations in the Single Market. She emphasised the continuous effort required to ensure the smooth functioning of the Single Market and the equitable distribution of its benefits. ["Your Europe"](#) provides practical information on rights and obligations in an easy-to-understand language. The “Single Digital Gateway” is the online access to information and procedures and should provide a once-only technical system for citizens and businesses for administrative procedures and

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documentation. She also mentioned the challenges for this system, as it needs to guarantee interoperability between all the different operating systems that are already in place. In addition, [“SOLVIT”](#), a network of assistance and services, helps resolve issues arising from incorrect application of EU law by authorities in other countries. The workflow involves filing complaints, reviewing the cases, collaborating with the Member States, and storing case data.

Then, Christina Giménez Estol introduced the [Internal Market Information System \(IMI\)](#), which facilitates the exchange of information across policy areas and languages. It serves as a generic online application for administrative cooperation between the EU-EEA authorities. She also presented the ["Single Market Enforcement Task Force"](#), which addresses barriers and reduces administrative burdens to improve the Single Market. It helps to promote good practices, and examine the necessity of regulations, such as the recognition of professional qualifications.

4. Panel debate

The panelists discussed the biggest achievements and barriers of the Single Market and the role that cluster have, can, and will play in it.

Antonio Novo highlighted that the Single Market has enabled the creation of networks and **facilitated the participation of small and medium enterprises SMEs in a larger market**, reducing barriers and providing growth opportunities. Through cluster support, e.g., provided by the Single Market Programme, SMEs can engage with real opportunities in the European economy and align themselves with European priorities. This demonstrates how the Single Market supports collaboration between companies through intermediaries like clusters. Daniel Cosnita emphasised these collaboration opportunities from the Romanian perspective. The main advantage is the **increased visibility and cooperation** between Romanian clusters and other European clusters. This, in turn, has facilitated more intense collaboration between Romanian and European SMEs, which has contributed to economic development and growth opportunities for Romanian businesses. Kristina Šermukšnytė-Alešiūnienė adds that the **clusters and the cluster concept is still evolving**, from geographical conglomerates to developing ecosystems. This level of collaboration and networking are major achievements, and clusters play a significant role in boosting startups and building trust to support SMEs. Jakub Boratynski agrees that clusters are a valuable resource for the Single Market in the coming decades, contributing **expertise** and acting as **accelerators**. For example, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform is a strategic investment by the European Commission, recognising the significant role of clusters.

Talking about challenges, Antonio Novo talked about improving crisis preparedness and resilience. **Strengthening linkages and mapping resources** and dependencies is crucial to effectively solve problems and address critical issues. Another area that requires improvement is the simplification and standardisation at European level, which can further improve collaboration between companies and countries. He also spoke about the **skills gap** and the need to provide industries with the necessary skills to adapt to new global competitive rules quickly. Clusters provide re- and upskilling, but outside of the recognised education system. Additionally, there is a need to enhance support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with clusters being a key tool for supporting them. Kristina Šermukšnytė-Alešiūnienė said that the more the clusters act together, the easier it will be to make the transformations due to the geopolitical changes. However, it is recognised that different countries and



regions have varying levels of support for clusters. Daniel Cosnita added that the **growing innovation gap** remains a challenge. It is crucial to support the increase of innovation levels in European SMEs. The European Commission has implemented several programs, including non-financial instruments such as the Enterprise Europe Network, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, and the Digital Innovation Hubs, to address this support innovation. In addition, new challenges arise from disruptions in value chains. Clusters can act as dialogue partners for regional and national authorities in the development of regional or national innovation strategies and can contribute to foresight processes. Jakub Boratynski agreed that clusters can function as an **early warning system**, providing valuable signals about supply chain issues and other challenges. Collaboration with clusters is a long-term resource for understanding on-the-ground realities and receiving feedback to adapt policies.

Regarding the Digital Single Market, Kristina Šermukšnytė-Alešiūnienė highlighted that clusters participate in **European Digital Innovation Hubs**, creating platforms for digital solutions to be implemented. They can bring the knowledge and be involved in the skilling process, e.g., for big data, AI. The European Clusters Alliance has initiated a mapping of the clusters that are part of Digital Innovation Hubs.

In terms of the future development of clusters in the Single Market, the speakers agree that there is a **growing maturity** but still potential to improve. The aim is to ensure that the right set of tools are in place to effectively address a range of challenges. Daniel Cosnita emphasised that clusters contribute to making the industrial ecosystems resilient. Kristina Šermukšnytė-Alešiūnienė sees them as partners for the twin transition and building cross-sectoral collaboration in Europe. Antonio Novo spoke about the need to **enhance the recognition and strength of networks** to foster the cluster's growth and maturity at European level.

5. Opportunities for the 30th Anniversary of the Single Market

Rafal Rudnicki, Head of Sector - Communication, Campaigns, Events and Outreach, DG GROW, European Commission

Rafal Rudnicki presented the [communication campaign](#) for the 30th anniversary of the Single Market. There are some interesting upcoming events with the EU Industry Days in Malaga on 4-6 October and the SME Assembly in Bilbao on 13-15 November. These events will provide platforms for discussions and collaborations among key stakeholders.

Additionally, they have an online quiz aimed at informing and engaging younger Europeans about the benefits of the Single Market. The quiz has received an impressive number of submissions, and participants have a chance to win two rail passes for Interrail.

Moreover, the Commission will launch a traveling exhibition at the end of August, starting in Slovenia and then moving to Bulgaria and Romania in September. This exhibition aims to inform people about the benefits of the Single Market and will be flexible in its setup, allowing to reach smaller cities and towns. He encouraged anyone organising events related to the Single Market to inform him so that



the Commission can provide support in terms of promotional materials and assistance. These events can be registered on the website map to give them visibility.

6. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

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

1. [RESIST](#): Internationalisation support for SMEs from the Automotive, Transport and Mobility ecosystem; different cut-off dates
2. [ELBE](#): Innovation support targeting Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) sector SMEs; Deadline 30 September 2023
3. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)