



EUROPEAN
CLUSTER COLLABORATION
PLATFORM .eu

European Cluster Matchmaking Event

13-14 September 2017



Three-month follow up survey Report, enriched with feedback after one year

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1. Introduction

The tenth European Cluster Matchmaking mission took place from the 13th to the 14th of September 2017 in Thessaloniki, Greece. The event was supported by EASME and the DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW, European Commission), and organised by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform in collaboration with the Centre for Research and Technology – (Hellas), the Chorus and Corallia clusters and with the support of the Region of Central Macedonia, the local European Enterprise Network (EEN) Hellas and of the Balkan Cluster House network.

The matchmaking event was conducted back to back with the 82nd Thessaloniki International Fair (9-17 September).

inno TSD (inno) was in charge of the preparation and onsite organisation of the event. The event included a policy session with speakers from the European Commission presenting new policy initiatives notably the forthcoming European Strategic Cluster Partnerships for smart specialisation investments (ESCP-S3) as well as various speakers from regional and national organisations presenting the role of clusters in their respective territories and the Seville based JRC concerning S3 strategies in the Western Balkans. The event also included a matchmaking session as well as a programme of on-site visits at Hellas covering three thematic areas: smart city and creative industries, energy and agrofood.

The Thessaloniki Matchmaking Event gave the opportunity to participants to enhance relations between EU organisations and Balkan-Med region organisations, with an average of 2 cooperation activities initiated or established by participants and a strong interest in the scope for “Knowledge sharing & information exchange” and “Establishment of business contacts among members”.

In order to measure the on-going impact and the relevance of the event for the participants and to investigate the nature of the relationships that were established and developed with Balkan-Med region participants, the EECPP team sent a follow up online survey three months after the event to the 42 participants.

The overall comments received from survey participants indicated that the event allowed for fruitful exchanges between the EU Clusters Delegation and Balkan-Med Region Clusters. They declared their intention to pursue increased cooperation activities.

This three months follow up online survey comprised 3 major topics to cover all the outcomes of this event:

➤ Cooperation initiated



- **Specific cases of how SMEs benefited from the event**
- **Final observations**

Out of the 42 EU clusters delegation, only 13 participants were able to complete the survey despite several reminders. The following sections provide more information about the responses received, combined to some comments received by email and details received through phone interviews to know more about their achievements. In addition to the 13 responses the ECCP team interviewed 5 participants: Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster, Cluster Sofia Knowledge City, Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia, Inteligentna Energija and si-Cluster (Corallia) to gain additional insight into the event impacts.



2. Overview of the 42 EU Clusters Delegation

N°	Cluster	Field(s) of activity	Country
1	Bioenergy and Environment Cluster of Western Macedonia	Sustainable energy, mobility	Greece
2	ARIA Normandie	Automotive	France
3	Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster	Automotive	Romania
4	CHORUS	Mobility, smart city	Greece
5	Hellenic Mobile Cluster	Mobility	Greece
6	gi-Cluster (Corallia)	Creative industries	Greece
7	Transylvania Energy Cluster	Smart cities, mobility, circular economy	Romania
8	Silesian Aviation Cluster	Automotive	Poland
9	South West Hungarian Cluster	Automotive	Hungary
10	Agrofood Murcia	Agrotech	Spain
11	iTech Transylvania Cluster	Mobility	Romania
12	Cluster Smart Cities de la Region de Murcia	Smart cities	Spain
13	INTELIGENTNA ENERGIJA	Sustainable energy, mobility	Croatia
14	Green Energy Innovative Biomass Cluster	Sustainable energy, mobility	Romania
15	MLC ITS Euskadi	Mobility, smart city	Spain
16	si-cluster (Corallia)	Aerospace, automotive	Greece
17	Construction Cluster of Slovenia	Smart city, circular economy	Slovenia
18	Užupis Creative Cluster	Creative Industries	Lithuania
19	CATS	Creative Industries	France
20	AEC Agricultural Equipment Cluster	Agrotech	Croatia
21	Serbian Automotive Cluster	Automotive	Serbia
22	ROSENC	Sustainable energy, mobility	Romania
23	Cluster Energia Valencia	Sustainable energy, mobility	Spain
24	OMNIPACK First Hungarian Cluster of Packaging Technology	Circular economy	Hungary
25	Future Position X	Smart city	Sweden
26	Cap digital	Cultural and creative industries	France
27	Cambridge Clean Tech	Sustainable energy, mobility	UK
28	Cluster Sofia Knowledge City	Creative and cultural industries	Bulgaria
29	IT Brasov	Smart city, mobility, circular economy	Romania
30	ECOPANONIA	Circular economy, agrotech, smart city	Serbia
31	CASTRA	Space and engineering, automotive	Bulgaria



33	Klaster Facts Serbia	Creative and cultural industries	Serbia
34	Rovest Cluster	Business services	Romania
35	Marine Cluster	Mobility, smart city, circular economy	Bulgaria
36	TTA Textile Cluster	Cultural and creative industries	The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
37	Agropro Oltenia Cluster	Agrotech	Romania
38	Wine Cluster Montenegro	Agrotech	Montenegro
39	Agrinet	Agrotech	Albania
40	Cluster agro start up Serbia	Agrotech	Serbia
41	Activator Cluster	Cultural and creative industries	Serbia
42	Urban Planning cluster	Smart city	Serbia

Table 1 List of clusters Delegation

3. Cooperation activities initiated or established at the matchmaking event

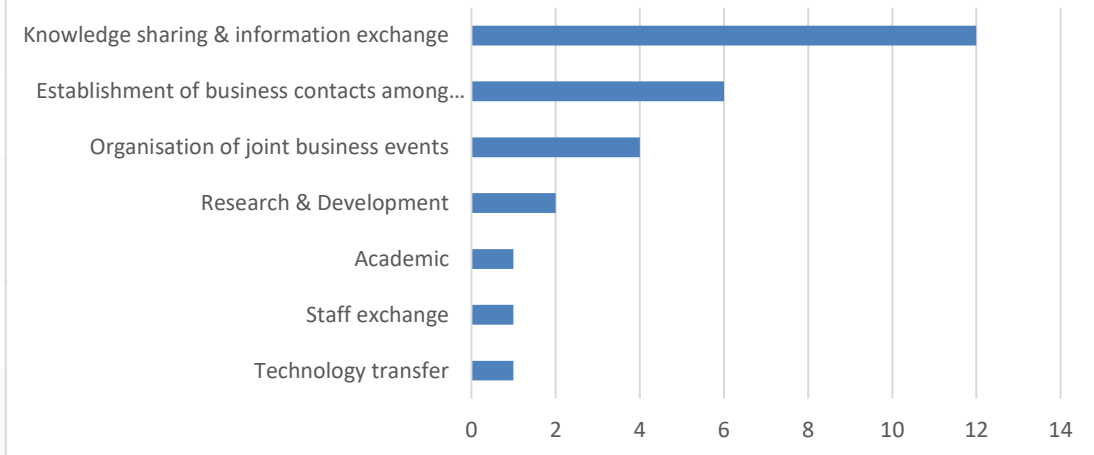
The Thessaloniki Matchmaking Event allowed the EU Clusters Delegation to initiate cooperation activities with Balkan-Med region clusters. On average, 2 cooperation activities per cluster have been initiated or established at the matchmaking event, with a maximum of 5 for the Serbian Automotive Cluster - AC Serbia operating in the field of the Automotive industry, and a minimum of 1 for Inteligentna Energija, operating in the field of Energy industry, for Cap Digital, operating in Cultural and Creative Industries, and for AgriNet, operating in the field of Agriculture. In total, 30 cooperation activities have been progressed by the 13 EU Clusters Delegation and Balkan-Med Region Clusters who responded to the survey.

The cooperation activities initiated or established by the EU Clusters Delegation and Balkan-Med Region Clusters are mostly concentrated in the five following fields (by order of importance):

1. Knowledge sharing & information exchange
2. Establishment of business contacts among members
3. Organisation of joint business events
4. Research & Development
5. Technology transfer/Academic/Staff exchange

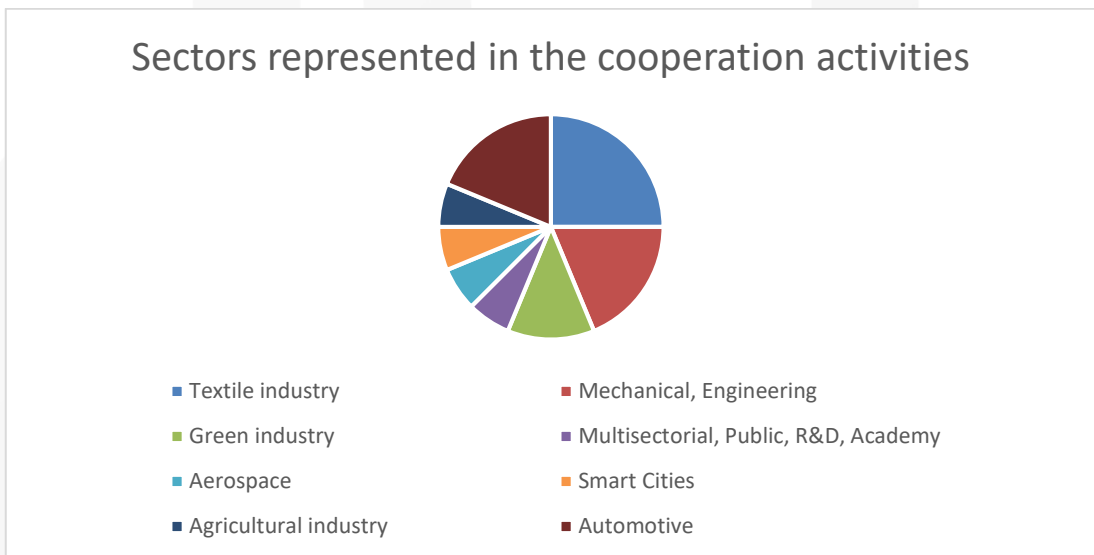


Type of cooperation initiated or established



Out of the 16 cooperation activities detailed by the cluster delegation, 4 have a focus on the textile industry, and 3 on automotive industry and Mechanical Engineering. The graph below shows the sectors represented in the cooperation activities as reported by the respondents.

Sectors represented in the cooperation activities

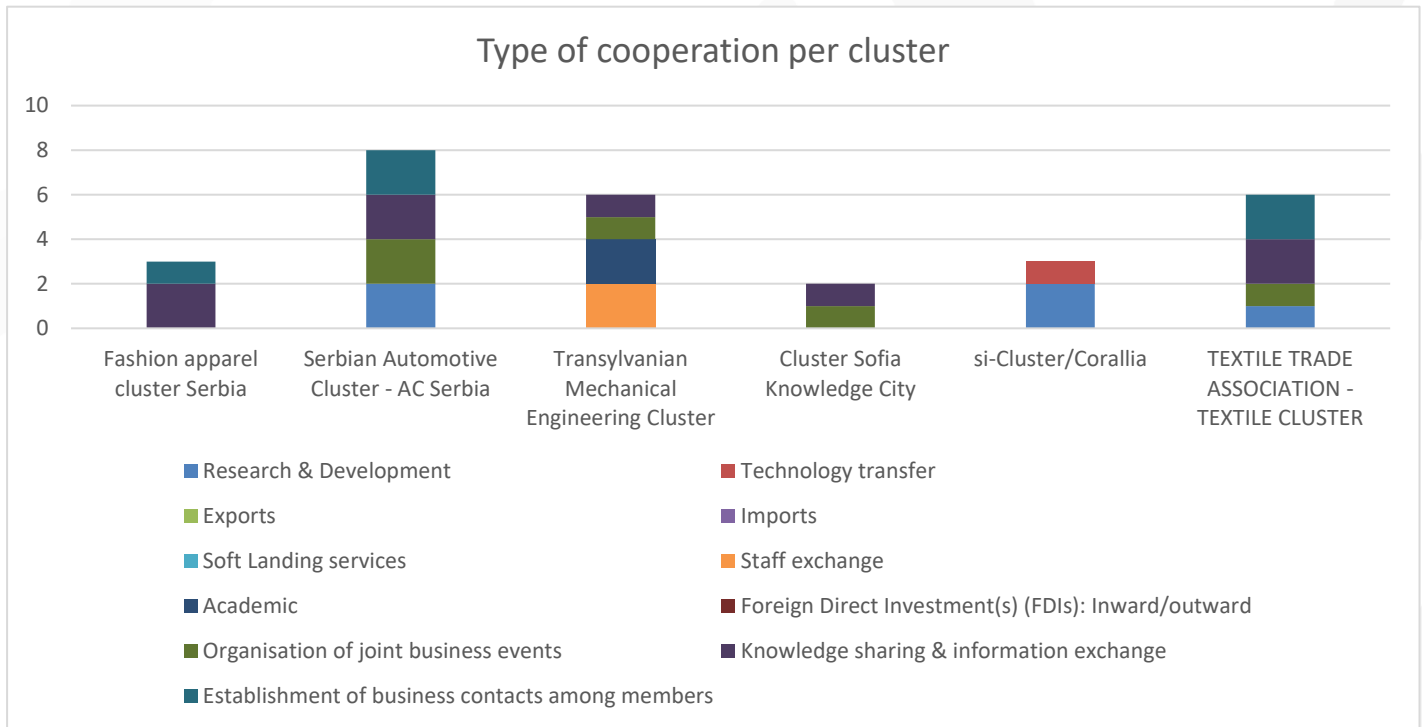


3.1 Cooperation objectives, activities undertaken and next steps

The cooperation activities between the European Union and the Balkan-Med region in the field of clusters are already well-developed. The European Clusters and the Balkan-Med Region Clusters are looking forward to intensify their relationships according to the market development opportunities. Some of the cluster participants



have identified a real market potential for specific collaboration activities presented in the chart below:



Some clusters have already implemented or planned some concrete follow up actions, such as:

- si-Cluster Corallia were able to build strong relationships with two clusters thanks to this event:
 - CASTRA Cluster, a Bulgarian cluster specialised in the aerospace industry, has become one of si-Cluster privileged partners thanks to this event. Indeed, after meeting up in Thessaloniki, they have worked on a common proposal together. Unfortunately, they could not submit it due to the lack of time. Nevertheless, the two clusters are willing to work together as they are planning to submit a proposal in a forthcoming call. No formal agreement has been signed between the two clusters, but they are enjoying a solid relation.
 - Valencian Energy Cluster (Spain), a cluster specialised in the energy industry, and si-Cluster have initiated an important collaboration in Thessaloniki. Indeed, after meeting up during the matchmaking event, they worked together for an INNOSUP proposal. Unfortunately, the project did not go through. Nevertheless, si-Cluster representatives



expressed their strong satisfaction to have met Valencian Energy Cluster because they were looking for a Spanish partner specialized in the energy industry. Moreover, Valencian Energy Cluster also constitutes a good contact point to reach the South American market (especially Colombia and Chile), which is targeted by SPACE2IDGO to which the si-Cluster belongs.

- Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia has planned to establish a partnership with Fashion and Textile Cluster (Romania) and Fashion Textile Cluster (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) on EU projects, to share knowledge and to learn from EU fashion and textile sector or from relevant experts about modelling, fashion design, recycling etc...
- Inteligentna Energija has planned to sign contracts with Construction Cluster of Slovenia. They have the ambition to set up an INNOSUP project and, for the moment, they are waiting to see if they are eligible.
- Cluster Sofia Knowledge City has planned staff exchanges with Cluster House / Balkan cluster (Serbia). Visits and joint participation in events are also planned. This partnership with the Cluster House is concluded yet, but Cluster Sofia Knowledge City have already planned a visit to Nis (Serbia) for the middle of June. Some concrete initiatives are expected soon after the visit that will follow the framework contract signed between them.
- Agrinet plans to develop information exchange with AEC Agricultural Equipment Cluster (Croatia). Their goal is to learn from each other about agricultural equipment and opportunities for export-import. Agrinet plans to visit AEC facilities to identify new equipment, prices, quality and channels for their future marketing activities.
- Textile Trade Association - Textile Cluster (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) has planned to organise visits in Romania and Macedonia, in collaboration with Romanian Textile Concept, and B2B events, in collaboration with Norwegian Fashion cluster.

3.2 Involvement of SMEs in the cooperation activities

Among the 13 European clusters that responded to the survey, Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia, Inteligentna Energija, Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster, Cap Digital, si-Cluster Corallia, AgriNet Albania, Textile Trade Association have developed cooperation activities with direct benefits for their SMEs members.

- 2 SMEs benefited from the cooperation activity led by the Textile Trade Association – Textile Cluster. Astibo Fashion Group Global Logistic, a SME member of Textile Trade

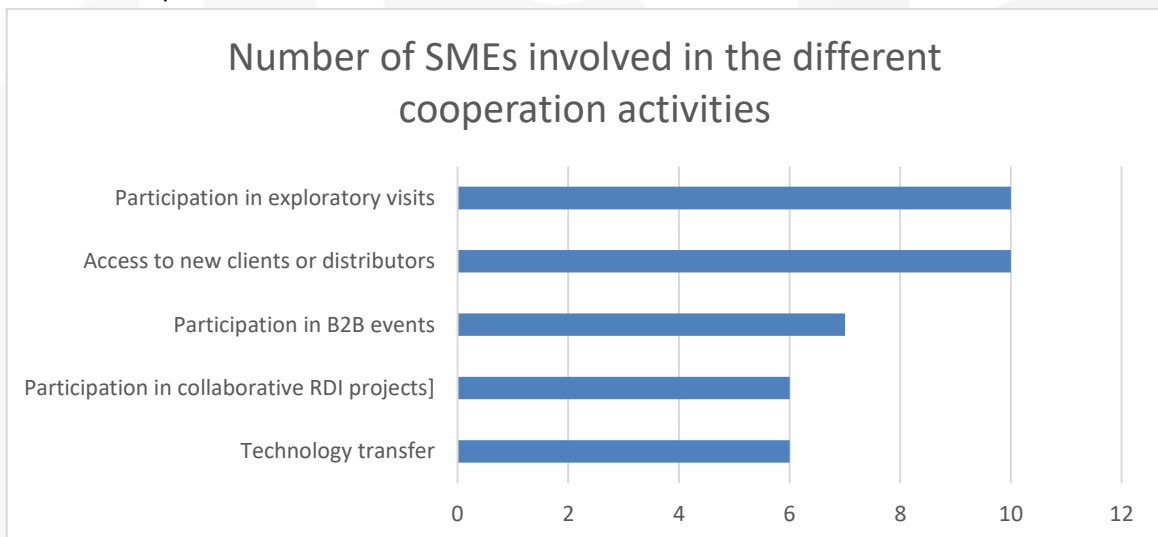


Association had therefore the opportunity to initiate cooperation with Norwegian companies.

- 2 SMEs benefited from the cooperation activities led by AgriNet Albania.
- 1 SME benefited from the cooperation activities led of Inteligentna Energija.
- 1 SME benefited from the cooperation activity led by the Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster.
- 1 SME benefited from the cooperation activity led by Cap Digital.
- All its members (50 in total, 35 SMEs) benefited from the action of si-Cluster Corallia. Members of si-Cluster have been informed about new business opportunities that were identified during the event.
- All members of the Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia benefited from its cooperation activities. (21 private companies and 3 academic institutions). Its members will indeed participate to B2B Matchmaking events that the cluster is planning to organise in the near future.

Although the information provided by the cluster organisations is not fully complete, we can say at least 63 SMEs directly benefited from the Thessaloniki Matchmaking Event.

The following table shows the tendencies about the number of SMEs involved in the different cooperation activities.



The 63 SMEs that have benefited from the different cooperation activities as reported by the cluster organisation participants were mostly involved in exploratory visits and access to new clients or distributors. In some cases, SMEs are simultaneously involved in different types of cooperation activities.



4. Formal agreements achieved at the matchmaking event

The EU Clusters and the Balkan-Med Region Clusters that participated to the Thessaloniki Matchmaking event have formalised their cooperation activities through several formal agreements.

- The Macedonian Cluster Textile Trade Association has signed an agreement with the Norwegian Fashion cluster.
- Cluster Sofia Knowledge City has signed an agreement with Cluster House / Balkan cluster (Serbia).
- Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster, South West Hungarian Engineering Cluster, Serbian Automotive Cluster, and ARIA Normandy Cluster have signed an agreement to engage together in future cooperation activities, such as the building of joint proposals.
- Inteligentna Energija has signed an agreement with the Construction Cluster of Slovenia.
- Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia has planned to sign an agreement with Fashion Textile Cluster (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) as soon as it is translated into Macedonian.

The Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster, represented by Kinga Kristó, established a transnational industry focused cluster-to-cluster collaboration with the South West Hungarian Engineering Cluster, represented by Berta Szabó, the Serbian Automotive Cluster, represented by Igor Vijatov, and ARIA Normandy Cluster, represented by Vincent Civita.

The new cluster partnership agreed on the following: organising common events such as B2B, B2C and C2C meetings for clusters and cluster members, workshops and roundtable discussions regarded to industry 4.0.; cluster visits; supporting each other's event and seeking for COSME, H2020 and Interreg Danube projects (promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Danube Region). They are working on the establishment of a consortium of 8 clusters from different countries from Centre-East Europe and South-East Europe. This project's goal is to prepare SMEs from this part of Europe for industry 4.0. by assisting them in their research for European funding. The results of this project will be available in June.

4.1 Focus of the formal agreements

Four agreements have already been signed and one will be signed as soon as it is translated. These agreements mostly focus on knowledge, market information and experience sharing, but also on the joint participation in EU projects.



In detail,

- The Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia plans to submit joint proposals for EU projects along with the Fashion and textile cluster (Romania) and the Fashion Textile Cluster (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). The aim of their formal agreement is to cooperate, to share knowledge and to learn about EU fashion and textile sector. For the moment, the memorandum of understating is being translated in Macedonian. Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia plans to be more involved in EU projects in the near future. The cluster has the ambition to set up a project focused on textile engineering in collaboration with clusters from countries like Bosnia, Albania or Kosovo, because they share the same lacks in this domain, and from countries like Germany, Italy, Spain who have the expertise Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia needs.
- The agreement between the Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster, the South West Hungarian Engineering Cluster, the Serbian Automotive Cluster, and ARIA Normandy Cluster focuses on several elements:
 - First, the four clusters consider promotion of economic development and improvement of competitiveness of their regions' countries as a common goal of their actions.
 - Then, they plan to regularly and mutually share market information and experiences, which may help their economic development by widening each other's business opportunities and relationship networks, and by strengthening their extrinsic competitiveness.
 - The clusters will also strive to utilise joint promotion options and to create effective, entrepreneur economic environment and productive cooperation between Cluster members.
 - Finally, the clusters will strive to participate to relevant joint EU projects as a partner or lead partner.
- An agreement on mutual promotion was signed between Inteligentna Energija and the Construction Cluster of Slovenia concerns. Moreover, Inteligentna Energija joined the European Circular Construction Alliance (ECCA), an ESCP-4i gathering clusters specialised in construction, green building and environmental industry led by the Construction Cluster of Slovenia.
- An agreement has been signed between Cluster Sofia Knowledge City and Cluster House / Balkan cluster on diverse forms of joint actions such as exchange of information and good practices, joint exhibitions, joint participations in trainings, dissemination of information on products, technologies and members. A visit to Nis (Serbia) has already been planned for the middle of June. Soon after the visit, Cluster Sofia Knowledge City



expects some concrete initiatives that will follow the framework contract signed between the two organisations.

- Textile Trade Association has signed an agreement with Norwegian Fashion cluster about networking and joint participation in EU projects.

5. Benefits for SMEs

The participation of the European and Balkan-Med region clusters delegation to the Thessaloniki Matchmaking Event created benefits for their SMEs, by encouraging further cooperation activities. The survey identified two types of benefits targeting SMEs:

- SMEs mostly benefited of:
 - An access to new clients or distributors
 - An access to B2B events
- SMEs also benefited of:
 - Technology transfers
 - Participation in collaborative RDI projects
 - Participation in exploratory visits.

In detail,

- Astibo Fashion Group and Global Logistik, two SME members of the Textile Trade Association, got the opportunity to participate to two B2B matchmaking events. They also got access to new clients. Indeed, they could visit one of their potential new clients. It facilitated the start of a new cooperation activity that will increase their exports in new markets.
- Kristo SRL, a SME member of the Transylvanian Mechanical Engineering Cluster, gained more visibility as they benefited from a discount at the See Automotive Conference Connect&Supply 2018 event, thanks to the Serbian Automotive Cluster.
- Hleb, SME member of Inteligentna Energija, also gained more visibility from the Thessaloniki Matchmaking Event. Furthermore, this event will allow this SME to increase its exports, especially to Great Britain and Denmark. All members of the Fashion Apparel Cluster Serbia are going to benefit of the establishment of a cooperation activity with the Fashion and Textile Cluster (Romania) and the Fashion Textile Cluster (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). All members of the si-Cluster also benefited from this event. They have indeed gained useful information about new business opportunities that were identified during the event.



- The Bioenergy and Environmental Cluster of Western Macedonia and AEC Agricultural Equipment Croatia, as well as 2 SME members of AgriNet, gained new information regarding the products and possibility for new clients during the B2B meeting they attended.

6. Conclusions

Generally, participants reported that the Thessaloniki Matchmaking Event offered a great opportunity to meet and interact with other cluster organisations. Participants found that the event was offering concrete opportunities and proposed the perfect environment to make new contacts and network. It also, allowed best practices sharing in relation to the submission and management of future projects. All these meetings needed some time to fructify. This time allowed the clusters to refine and polish the collaboration opportunities they had established in Thessaloniki. Some 6 months after the event, the results are now tangible and speak for themselves.

Four formal agreement have been signed and another one is expected to be signed very soon. These agreements mostly focus on knowledge, market information and experience sharing, but also on the joint participation in EU projects. Indeed, clusters collaborations on INNOSUP and Interreg Danube projects are most likely to happen in the near future. Moreover, at least 63 SMEs benefited from the Thessaloniki Matchmaking event. SMEs participated (or will participate) to exploratory visits to get access to new clients and distributors. SMEs also had the opportunity to join to B2B events.

Such events seem highly valuable for cluster development and the improvement of cluster activities and services. According to Natasha Sivevska from the Textile Trade Association, this event will lead to increased internationalisation for her cluster and will improve its members competitiveness. Moreover, Natasha Sivevska considers that it is of great importance to perpetuate the organisation of such events more often because it allows clusters to share their challenges and experience among other EU clusters to become more active and more recognisable.

The achievements realised thanks to this Matchmaking Event represent a real springboard for cluster organisations and their SMEs as this event allowed them to build solid and lasting collaboration between EU organisations and Balkan-Med region organisations. This type of cooperation activity is considered essential for the EU to set up stable and longstanding relations with extra-European countries or regions.