One year and nearly a half after the kick-off of the EU4SportsClusters Alliance, we are pleased to outline all the actions developed within the framework of this European project. It is also a perfect chance to briefly announce the coming ones, which will be carried out up to the end of the year.

EU4SportsClusters Alliance is a project co-financed by the European Commission to implement and test a Joint Internationalization Strategy for the European Strategic Sport Clusters Partnership, developing new value chains and exploiting international opportunities for SMEs, especially those existing in third markets outside the EU.

The alliance is made up of five European partners (INDESCAT from Catalonia, Spain; Sports & Technology, The Netherlands; EPSI (European Platform for Sports Innovation), Belgium; Cluster Montagne, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France; and Flanders’ Bike Valley, Belgium).

With the aim of facilitating the internationalization of European SMEs from the sports field, the partnership has implemented a number of actions during 2016 and the first half of 2017, as part of its Joint Internationalization Strategy and the defined target value chains.

1. Trade Mission to China
2. EU Matchmaking Event to Iran
3. EU Matchmaking Event to Brussels
4. Guide on EU Funding for sports industry 2014-2020
5. Training Sessions on EU funding
6. Mission to the USA
7. Export groups
8. Learning study tours to other partnerships
9. Monitoring scoreboard
10. Reverse mission and final event

1. Trade Mission to China

After having gained knowledge on the 4 initial target markets identified in this project (USA, China, Japan and Iran) and after the feedback get from different national workshops with clusters companies, the alliance agreed to organize an action abroad in China and USA. In coincidence with the international fair ISPO Beijing, the partnership travel to Beijing in a trade mission organized from 13th to 16th February 2017. As part of these European sports clusters, 17 European companies and organizations from France, the Netherlands and Catalonia joined this trade mission with the aim of establishing business relationships with the Chinese sports industry in the mid-term.

The European delegation visited different public institutions in order to get a deep knowledge of the Chinese sports ecosystem, such as two different areas of the General Administration of Sport of China. During the mission, they visited the Sport Equipment Administrative Center and also the Winter Sport Center, the highest administration for winter sports in China, which also runs the Chinese Sporting Goods Federation. Besides this study tour, the European companies had the
chance to hold individual meetings with local organizations to explore future business relationships. Moreover, the project also provides them with a follow-up service from Beijing during 6 months as a support to monitor the leads achieved during the mission. More than 130 bilateral meetings were held, which allowed the participant organizations to sign 7 cooperation agreements and start businesses with 12 Chinese companies.

3. EU Matchmaking Event to Iran

INDESCAT, Cluster Montagne and EPSI along with other 11 European clusters joined the EU-IRAN Cluster Matchmaking Event organized in Tehran on 18-19th October 2016 by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. Being
Iran one of the project target markets, a presentation of the EU4SportsClusters Alliance project was carried out by Montse Centellas, export manager at INDESCAT, representing the whole consortium. Our participation in this event, intended to promote the relationship between business and European SMEs and to establish international cooperation with Iranian clusters, allowed us to get a deep knowledge on how to do business in Iran, analyse what this country is developing regarding the sports sector and identify its needs with the aim of exploring business opportunities for the European companies. The event provided us the chance to get relevant meetings, such as the Tourism Marketing and Promotion Bureau, the Tochal Ski Resort or the Iranian Mountain Federation.

3. EU Matchmaking Event to Brussels

On behalf of the consortium, EPSI and Flanders Bike Valley attended this event celebrated on 30th November 2016 in Brussels to pave the way of future collaborations with other European Clusters. During this event, EPSI and FBV hold 11 different B2B meetings where they exchanged some views on internationalization and best practices. As a result of these meetings, the French cluster Nova Child became member of EPSI.

Within the framework of this event, Alberto Bichi, the Executive Director of EPSI delivered a presentation on the EU4SportsClusters Alliance, where he analysed the strategy of the project with
the aim of sharing experiences on how cluster initiatives and organisations can foster the internationalisation of SMEs.

4. Guide on EU funding for sports industry 2014-2020

The Guide on EU funding developed within the framework of EU4SportsClusters Alliance project has been conceived as a practical tool for any European stakeholder interested in new and innovative projects with EU funding support. This guide intends to simplify and centralise all relevant information in one visual document on EU funding for sports organisations for the period 2014-2020, identifying the main EU funding programmes tackling topics such as active tourism, social inclusion, gender equality, combating doping or match-fixing, developing new dual careers services, etc.

All the programmes that are mentioned in this guide are accompanied by examples of already funded projects which usually will help future beneficiaries to gain inspiration when writing their own project. This guide is addressed to a wide number of players, such as public authorities (at local, regional and national level), to SMEs and Business Support Organisations, research centres, educational centres and universities or sporting bodies (national and international Olympic Committees, Federations, clubs, etc.).

The guide was electronically published both on the ECCP and the different websites of the project partners. Moreover, it was publically presented in different national and international sessions, such as the ones organized by every partner on EU funding.

5. Training Sessions on EU funding

Specific training sessions oriented to identify new sources of funding were conducted in all partnering countries in October and November 2016, involving more than 160 key stakeholders
(ESSCP members, SMEs, Trade Promotion Organizations, Regional Development Agencies, technological centres, business and sectorial associations, etc.).

Sessions put the focus on the identification of funding lines, criteria and mechanisms for participation, consortium building, proposal formulation and drafting. A theoretical part on EU funding programs (COSME, H2020, Erasmus+, etc.) was followed by other national programs in each country and end up in a more practical session oriented to draft successful proposals that involved the attendees’ collaboration.
6. Mission to the USA

In coincidence with the Interbike tradeshow that will take place in Las Vegas, the alliance is organizing a trade mission to the USA, particularly to Ogden (Utah) and Las Vegas (Nevada), which will be held from 16th to 23rd September 2017.

As in China, the mission will include a study tour, B2B meetings, the visit to Interbike, the most important tradeshow in the world on the bike sector, and a follow-up service. It is a great business chance for those companies from 6 different target segments: outdoor, bike, sports tourism, sports events, sports technology and ski.
45Km away from Salt Lake City, Ogden is a northern Utah’s regional centre with a high concentration of outdoor companies, from manufacturers, to distributors or companies that settled there due to the advantages that this area offers: low cost of business and living, high quality of life, and unparalleled access to the outdoors.

Key industry clusters are outdoor recreation, aerospace/advanced materials and composites, and information technology/software.

There are more than **200 companies related to the sports industry**, with **world-class brands** such as Amer, Black Diamond, Atomic, Mercury Wheels or Rossignol.

During May and June 2017, the European clusters have organized different regional workshops in order to enhance the participation of European companies in this mission aimed to **explore future business collaborations with American companies**.

### 6. Export groups

During the first year of the project and in line with our Joint International Strategy, the partnership has worked in defining **5 different value chains** from which **5 different joint internationalization groups** will be launched. Conceived at the mission to China, an **export group on the football** segment made of 4 Catalan and Dutch companies was launched. It is an excellent opportunity for those companies willing to go international sharing a promoter (cluster), an export manager, costs and common target markets. The launching of other 4 export groups is expected to be done during the coming months, being the mission to USA a perfect chance to engage the participation of European companies.
7. Learning study tours to other partnerships

The EU4SportsClusters Alliance is seeking collaborations with other partnerships to share experiences and learn from each other, improving own methodologies, particularly in those aspects related to internationalization support tools and monitoring of results. An inventory was done on the existing ESCPs in strand one and two, and selection was done on both the subject of the ESCPs related to the sports area and on the target countries for internationalisation. Based on both premises, a shortlist of ESCPs and contact partners of these was developed to be visited during 2017. A first meeting was made in June 2017 in Barcelona with Biocat, partner of bioXclusters plus, since this project also promotes the internationalization in markets such as China and USA.

8. Monitoring Scoreboard

In order to ensure the project progress, a monitoring scoreboard with verifiable indicators in terms of impact on SMEs and in the areas of economic growth and job creation has being designed, being updated every 6 months to get an overall picture of the correct project development.

9. Reverse Mission

Finally, a reverse mission is being organized, intended to be scheduled in coincidence with the EPSI annual event, an excellent opportunity to meet worldwide stakeholders focused on sport and innovation, in order to ensure good visibility for sports clusters members and its SMEs. The EPSI annual conference will take place in Brussels on 21st November 2017, one day before the EU4SportsClusters Alliance project final event. The program of both events is currently being developed and it will be shared among different key players of the sports industry and other cluster partnerships.