

# Stronger together

*Rüdiger Hintze-Schomburg, Katja Schöntag and Walter Birkhan introduce the goals of the European Aerospace Cluster Partnership...*

In order to successfully compete on a global level, it has become crucial for Europe to actively further its innovative potential and to collaborate among regions and industry clusters. Therefore, promoting 'World-Class Clusters' enjoys a high priority on the EC agenda.

The aerospace industry is currently experiencing profound changes. Worldwide competitive pressure continues to rise due to the entry of new players, such as India, Brazil, Russia, China, and Japan into the market. In order to serve the global market and sell the technologically highly specialised products, co-operation between companies as well as entire regions is essential.

Due to the highly fragmented nature of European industries, transnational co-operation is the key to achieving and sustaining a strong and highly competitive European position in the world aerospace markets. While there exist many bilateral agreements as well as groups of collaborating aerospace clusters already, co-operation needs to be taken to a higher level that includes the establishment of a common place for work, qualification and exchange for all players in the European aerospace industry.

With the establishment of the European Aerospace Cluster Partnership (EACP) in May 2009, a consequent step has been taken to provide a permanent platform for mutual exchange, policy learning, and co-operation to achieve world-class performance among European aerospace clusters.

## Concept and role of the EACP

The EACP is a partnership of European aerospace clusters based on a Letter of Intent. It has 24 founding members from 11 European countries; several new members are currently being admitted.

While various organisations already exist that encourage the joining of forces among European aerospace companies and/or researchers, the EACP operates on a cluster management level. A cluster comprises an entire regional network of companies, research institutions, and/or other public and private organisations that operate in the same industry. It is the cluster management's task to strengthen the internal linkages as well as facilitate the forming of relationships with outside players to help the cluster members excel.

The EACP, as a network of cluster managers, provides opportunities for them to learn from each other and

exchange information and knowledge on different aspects of cluster management. At the same time, it serves as a platform to gain a better understanding of the challenges and problems faced by aerospace clusters in Europe and to jointly find approaches to meeting these challenges.

## Goals and objectives

The overall goal of the EACP is to strengthen the European aerospace industry by fostering transnational relationships that allow for the sharing of knowledge and access to resources – be it formally through co-operation projects or informally through networking. By operating on the cluster management level, not only is one group of players, such as industry or researchers, being involved, but entire cluster structures, which helps build relationships on a more comprehensive basis.

On the way to achieving this goal, the EACP aims at sparking a dialogue between European aerospace cluster managers to facilitate the teaming up of players with similar interests. The joint development of initiatives and projects that promote an increased level of innovativeness, qualification, and competence leads to a win-win situation for all parties involved.

## Structure

In order to encourage transnational co-operation on a level that is initially beyond competition, the EACP provides the opportunity for each member to participate in one or several working groups that aim to achieve high-level performance by developing and realising various joint projects.

The working group 'Internationalisation' is concerned with how cluster managers can help the SME in their regions go international. Activities such as OEM-led global cluster initiatives, joint matchmaking events, benchmarking studies, and the development and extension of databases to facilitate the finding of potential partners for innovation research are being considered and planned.

The working group 'Skills & Qualification' deals with providing new transnational training opportunities for skilled workers in the aerospace industry. The implementation of exchange programmes among trainees as well as experienced workers leads to an increased intercultural awareness – a trait that facilitates co-operation and internationalisation efforts among the participating regions. A skill mapping will help identify complementary



competences and potential synergies and serve as a basis for the exchange of best practices.

The working group 'Funding' is concerned with helping cluster managers support their cluster partners in obtaining financing for individual and co-operation projects on a regional, national, and EU level. With the development of an overview of regional funding programmes, a streamlining of joint project applications can be achieved.

A fourth working group is currently being initiated, it aims at developing a mapping of research competences and resources among EACP members. This working group is primarily focused on basic research for aerospace-related applications and aims at bundling knowledge and research competences in specific fields for joint project applications.

Generally, the working group structure is intended to allow cluster managers to work together in smaller groups in a particular field of interest. Only those who have a special interest in the topics will join a working group to make sure that there is a high degree of intrinsic motivation and engagement among all participants.

### Impact

First and foremost, the EACP is all about exchange. The exchange between EACP partners can lead to cluster management learning, better transnational communication, and a common understanding of standards such as qualification levels. The exchange with third organisations and policy-makers can help increase the visibility and awareness of the aerospace industry and cluster challenges in general.

The EACP does not aim at 'clustering the clusters' or at becoming a lobbying instrument – it is a loose network of cluster managers who commit themselves to jointly

addressing common issues. The EACP does not finance any activities of its members; however, partners will jointly apply for funding with national and European organisations to finance their working group projects.

### Outlook

The EACP as a whole will be developed into a strong network of aerospace cluster managers. Annual or bi-annual meetings will be organised to ensure a continuous dialogue. Further, activities such as EACP-wide calls for papers about best practices in cluster management will contribute to an active knowledge exchange among all EACP members.

In the short run, the next steps will be to develop concrete co-operation projects and, where applicable, obtain financing for them. In the medium term, various permanent instruments will be developed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge among EACP partners. Long-run activities include the building of trust and strengthening of the European aerospace cluster network.

Overall, the EACP is already considered a success as it sparked a dialogue between a large number of European aerospace clusters in order to strengthen Europe's position in the world aerospace markets.



Rüdiger Hintze-Schomburg  
 Katja Schöntag  
 Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg  
 Ministry for Economic and Labour Affairs  
 Walter Birkhan  
 Hamburg Business Development  
 Corporation  
 European Aerospace Cluster Partnership  
[www.eacp-aero.eu](http://www.eacp-aero.eu)  
[info@eacp-aero.eu](mailto:info@eacp-aero.eu)