

VANGUARD INITIATIVE POLICY EXPERTS' WORKSHOP ON CLUSTER POLICY

20 OCTOBER 2014

FINAL STATEMENT

The Vanguard Initiative for New Growth through Smart Specialisation is a coalition of regions committed to supporting the European agenda for new growth and economic transformation through smart specialisation, clusters and the role of regions to provide ecosystems for innovation and industrial renaissance.

In a context of economic stagnation and poor investment, the new European Commission has acknowledged that Europe strongly needs an **innovation-driven investment boost for new growth**, involving all levels of governance and contributing to the renaissance of industry. The Industrial Policy Roadmap and a New Growth Initiative are being prepared to respond to these challenges. A key element of this agenda is the recognised need for a new European Cluster Strategy which provides **a more strategic and outcome-focused perspective on the role of EU Cluster initiatives**. In particular, this should encourage **greater cross-sectoral collaboration in EU clusters as well as a stronger trans-regional perspective to EU cluster development**. The Smart Specialisation agenda provides a clear route to achieving this and should be positioned as a key 'enabler' in the refreshed agenda for EU Cluster Policy.

Policy Experts from the Vanguard Initiative (VI) regions held a workshop before the European Cluster Conference 2014, on the 20th October, to discuss these issues and the role that clustering policies and smart specialisation strategies can play in the new European growth agenda. The objective of the workshop was to deliver an **early input on the design of the future European Cluster Strategy for Growth**.

We look forward to continuing the dialogue with Commission services in order to ensure clear positioning of the EU cluster agenda in the forthcoming EU Industrial Policy roadmap. As an output of the workshop, the VI Policy Experts agreed on the following elements as main points for developing the new EU cluster agenda :

1. A renewed EU Cluster policy is key for re-industrialisation and in supporting **EU growth, global competitiveness and answering societal challenges**. It is closely driven by the **smart specialisation agenda**. EU Cluster policy should therefore be positioned as part of the wider EU growth agenda and linked to the EU's Industrial Policy Roadmap. It should be a key aspect of the Europe 2020 strategy review.
2. Supporting the generation of world-class clusters linking regional cluster nodes will foster the emergence of **new EU, global and cross-sectoral innovative value chains**. A combination of bottom-up entrepreneurship and innovation dynamics in regional clusters with a European ambition for industrial renaissance is the most effective way of addressing global competitiveness and societal challenges.

3. We need a more **result-oriented approach to cluster policy**, stressing how clusters will mobilise resources and incentivise interaction within and across regions, **mobilising a critical mass of entrepreneurial and innovation potential**, bridging the gap to markets and fostering a more user- and demand driven approaches. Impact on business competitiveness, growth and economic transformation through internationalisation, investment and innovation at the EU level should be the main objectives.
4. Policy action should enable **developing and upscaling interregional and cross-cluster networks** to support capacity in developing and implementing **roadmaps for co-investment in European priority areas**.

New mechanisms are to be developed to achieving **large-scale public-private co-investments which will drive the EU's global competitiveness**, and setting-up **business-driven networks of demonstration and testing** that have an impact on new markets creation.

Possibilities offered by **financial instruments** for investment projects stemming from trans-regional cluster collaboration (such as setting-up pilots, modernising production processes and creating new production lines in European priority areas) should in particular be explored. **Dedicated calls for cluster organisations and cluster-friendly calls** could also be organized in European innovation programmes to allow European co-funding for the projects resulting from the roadmaps elaborated by Smart Specialisation Platforms.

5. Cluster platforms should be supported as strong leverage for fostering **SME's participation** in EU collaborative projects and internationalisation activities. Promoting new ways of involving business through bottom-up driven cluster networks and co-creation platforms should be at the heart of the new EU Cluster Policy. A better alignment between **EU top-down initiatives** (PPP, ETP, EIP,...) **with bottom-up processes** at the regional level should also be achieved in that perspective.
6. The pilot **Smart Specialisation Platform** on Advanced Manufacturing that is being explored in cooperation with the European Commission can be a model for a new approach to building European eco-systems embedding regional clusters in all European priority areas.
7. **A stronger focus on EU cluster policy across relevant EU policies would address the missing links** in support of cluster-based projects and bridging the gaps between cluster-specific actions and broader instruments. All relevant supporting tools and instruments should be activated in a coherent way in that perspective (e.g. Horizon 2020, COSME, ESIF, EIB/EIF, important projects of EU common interest).

As a conclusion, the Vanguard Initiative strongly supports the proposal of the Commission to develop a new European Cluster Strategy for Growth and welcomes the opportunity to work with Commission services to develop this agenda as an integral element of the Commission's strategic agenda for economic growth.