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EU4Digital ICT Innovation Forum 2024

Eastern Partnership clusters' capacity building to support digital innovation

Location: Online/On-site
When: 9 October 2024, 9:00 – 14:00 (Brussels time)
Equivalent to:
10:00 – 15:00 (Moldova, Ukraine)
11:00 – 16:00 (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)
Language: English

Concept: EU4Digital ICT Innovation governance forum is an annual high-level meeting of the leaders of ICT Innovation and startup ecosystem from the Eastern partnership region. The Forum brings together key policy makers, leading cluster organisations, international donors and national experts to discuss critical aspects of the topic that is addressed in ICT innovation and startup ecosystem development in the region.

Goals: The ultimate goal of this event is to provide the venue for the key EU and Eastern partner policy-makers, leading cluster organisations, experts and international donors to discuss the challenges in the evolution of innovation clusters. It will also serve as an opportunity to share experiences and strategic plans on supporting innovation clusters within the digital economy, and building their capacity to foster innovation among start-ups and existing SMEs in Eastern partner countries, helping them harness the benefits of digitalisation.

Target audience:

- Cluster organisations;
- Donor organisations;
- Innovation and SME support agencies;
- Policymakers..

The **Forum is organised by EU4Digital in cooperation with the European Clusters Alliance (ECA)** will reach out to a wide audience of target groups. Additionally, Eastern partner clusters will participate in the 'Clusters Meet Regions' event, organised by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and the EU4Moldova Focal Regions programme in Moldova on 10-11 October 2024.



AGENDA

EEST

9:30 – 10:00 Registration and greeting coffee

10:00 – 10:15 **OPENING:** EU4Digital for Eastern Partnership region; event goals and agenda

Arturas Piliponis, EU4Digital Team Leader

Session 1, hybrid

10:15 – 10:30 **WELCOMING NOTE:** DG NEAR

Thibault Charlet, Programme Manager, Digital Transition and Economic Development, DG NEAR

10:30 – 10:45 **KEYNOTE SPEECH:** The role of clusters in a digital economy

Antonio Novo Guerrero, President at European Clusters Alliance

10:45 – 10:50 Q&A

Session 2, hybrid

10:50 – 11:40 **PANEL:** Key updates from the Eastern partner countries on innovation clusters policy and support

Moderator: Gabriela Macoveiu, Director of Communication, Innovation and External Cooperation, North-East Regional Development Agency

Speakers:

Bagrat Yengibaryan, Director at Enterprise Incubator Foundation, Armenia

Dominique Piotet, Director of Azerbaijan Innovation Centre at Innovation and Digital Development Agency, Azerbaijan

Irakli Gabriadze, Deputy Director at Enterprise Georgia, Georgia

Catalina Plinschi, State Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalisation of the Republic of Moldova, Moldova

Andrii Teliupa, Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine, Ukraine

11:40 – 11:50 **CASE:** North-East Regional Development Agency' cluster support in the Regional ERDF Program in Romania

Gabriela Macoveiu, Director of Communication, Innovation and External Cooperation, North-East Regional Development Agency

11:50 – 12:10 **DATA:** Eastern partner cluster organisations' capacity to support innovation and digitalisation: results of EU4Digital analysis

Anna Pabol, EU4Digital ICT Innovation Lead

12:10 – 12:15 Q&A



12:15 – 12:50

ROUNDTABLE: Donors' updates and plans for the support of innovation clusters development and capacity building of the cluster support organisations in the Eastern partner countries

Moderator: *Jan Demidovits-Mekelainen, Program Officer for Regional Development, Tourism and Statistics of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova*

Speakers:

Ralf Lowack, *Head of Component, international cooperation programme "ReACT4UA", GIZ GmbH*

Zinaida Adam, *Programme Officer, UNDP Moldova*

Olesya Zaluska, *Chief of Party, USAID Competitive Economy Program (CEP)*

Stella Jemna, *Country Representative for Moldova, Ukraine-Moldova American Enterprise Fund (UMAEP)*

Charles Mathiaux, *Deputy Project Leader, EU4Innovation East*

12:50 – 13:00

Common discussion on key priorities and cooperation opportunities in the future

Led by: *Anna Pobol, EU4Digital ICT Innovation Lead*

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch

Session 3, taking place onsite

14:00 – 14:45

DISCUSSION (streamed online): Development (evolution) trends and support needs of innovation clusters in a digital economy

Moderator: *Bianca Muntean, Transilvania IT Cluster Manager; Coordinator The European Digital Innovation Hub in Transilvania; Executive Director of ARIES Transilvania*

Special guest speakers from EaP clusters

14:45 – 14:50

Closure of the online part of the event

14:50 – 15:00

Coffee break

15:00 – 16:30

WORKSHOP (onsite only): Strategy building for cluster management organisations, organised together with UNDP Moldova and CLUSTERO

Led by: *Gerd Meier zu Köcker, Managing Director, RegioClusterAgentur for Innovation and Transformation in Baden-Württemberg; Founder, ESCA*

16:30 – 17:00

Networking and cluster products presentation



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SPEAKERS



Mr Thibault Charlet

**Programme Manager, Digital Transition and Economic Development,
Unit C1, DG NEAR, European Commission**

Thibault Charlet has been working as a Programme Manager in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) for 5 years. He is currently responsible for managing the EU programmes supporting the digital transformation and local economic development in the Eastern Partnership region (Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan). Thibault has a background in international cooperation, economics and public policies. He graduated with Masters' degrees from Sciences Po Paris and New York University.



Mr Antonio Novo Guerrero

President at European Clusters Alliance

Antonio Novo leads as the President of the European Cluster Alliance, uniting more than 900 clusters to champion collaborative innovation and industrial growth across Europe. Antonio's strategic insights contribute to shaping the future of European industry, serving as curator for the EU Industrial Forum's Task Force 2 and participating in expert groups on Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), Interregional Innovation Investments (I3), Industry 5.0, and the High-Level Working Group on European Digital Innovation Hubs (eDIHs). His leadership and advisory roles underscore his commitment to advancing digital transformation and innovation across the continent.



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Ms Gabriela Macoveiu

**Director of Communication, Innovation and External Cooperation at
North-East Regional Development Agency, Romania**

Ms Gabriela Macoveiu has been with the North-East Regional Development Agency since 1999, working as a project expert, innovation and communication manager, and trainer. In this role, she is responsible for RDA processes design and implementation, participation in EU funded projects and coordination of multidisciplinary teams in the area of innovation, interregional cooperation and communication. Gabriela's contribution is visible in more than 70 EU projects successfully implemented, over 300 small scale investment projects evaluated and 150 RDA experts (from Romania, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Bosnia Herzegovina) trained in regional development. Proactivity is her signature when it comes to the development of the first RIS3 in Romania, the establishment of the first cluster structure in the region, the EDIH and the RDA Brussel Representation Office.



Mr Bagrat Yengibaryan

Director at Enterprise Incubator Foundation, Armenia

Dr. Bagrat Yengibaryan is a seasoned leader with over 25 years of executive management experience in private sector development, business incubation, acceleration, startups, and investment attraction. He has been the Director of the Enterprise Incubator Foundation (EIF) since 2002, where he oversees business development, marketing, promotion, startup creation, and management. Under his leadership, the EIF helps companies enhance their professional and business skills and fosters learning partnerships between industry, universities, and research institutions. As Director of EIF, Dr. Yengibaryan is a co-founder and advisory board member of Granatus Venture Fund, Armenia's first venture capital fund. He is also a co-founder and board member of the Engineering city, Microsoft Innovation Center in Armenia and the Center for Innovative Solutions and Technologies, as well as a board member of the Union of Employers of Information and Communication Technologies.

In addition to his roles in Armenia, Dr. Yengibaryan has served as an international innovation expert, providing consultancy to governments in countries such as Moldova, Ukraine, Montenegro and several in Latin America. Dr. Yengibaryan holds an MBA from the American University of Armenia and a Ph.D. in Mathematics from the Armenian National Academy of Sciences. He has authored 21 research papers published in local and international journals.



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Mr Dominique Piotet

**Director of Azerbaijan Innovation Centre at Innovation and Digital
Development Agency, Azerbaijan**

Dominique is a French-American entrepreneur, investor, and ecosystem builder. He has managed and co-owned several acceleration hubs, such as PARISOMA, the oldest co-working place in San Francisco. He founded and managed the digital strategy company RebellionLab, with offices in San Francisco, Las Vegas, New York, Paris, and Shanghai, which helped Fortune 500 companies to understand and invest in large tech ecosystems. RebellionLab was successfully sold to Fabernovel in France. Dominique was a partner of Fabernovel when it was sold to EY in 2022. He is also co-founder and co-owner of Sierra Nevada Hospitality Group, a group of boutique hotels in the Sierra Nevada foothills in California (USA). Dominique is a graduate of Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris and holds a Master's in Contemporary History and a Master's in Economics. He is a Knight of the French Order of Merit.



Mr Irakli Gabriadze

Deputy Director at Enterprise Georgia, Georgia

Dr. Irakli Gabriadze is deputy director at Enterprise Georgia since 2020. At the agency his portfolio includes different SME supporting mechanisms, including interest rate co-financing, credit guaranty scheme and micro grants program. His background includes working in the banking sector as well as for various state organizations. Irakli holds PhD in development Economics from Tbilisi State University. He is PhD in economics from Tbilisi State University.



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Ms Catalina Plinschi

State Secretary at the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalisation, Moldova

Catalina Plinschi is the State Secretary for digitalisation at the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalisation in Moldova. Prior to that, Catalina was an advisor to Deputy Prime Minister at the Ministry of Economic Development and Digitalisation. Her background includes working at Startup Moldova, where she was coordinating projects aimed at strengthening and developing the Moldovan tech startups community and its internationalization, as well as at the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau and UNICEF.



Mr Andrii Teliupa

Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine, Ukraine

Andrii Teliupa is the Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine. He is responsible for the industrial policy and development of the real sector of Ukrainian economy. His background includes working in the National Bank of Ukraine, Ukrainian Railways as well as leading various state reforms projects. He has degree in International Economics and MBA degree from International Management Institute.



Ms Anna Pobol

EU4Digital ICT Innovation Lead

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anna Pobol is an expert in innovation policy and ecosystem development with a focus on digital innovations. She has extensive experience of empirical research of innovative business and ecosystem with focus on IT and industry; 10 years track record of lecturing at the universities her author courses on digital and innovation economy; 4 years of work at the scientific and technological association



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«Infopark» as the director for development of cooperation with the EU and EaP countries. Anna is an author of over 90 publications in the field of economy of science, innovative business and technologies, innovation policy including a monograph and book chapters (Oxford University, Edward Elgar, Springer).



Mr Jan Demidovits-Mekelainen

**Program Officer for Regional Development, Tourism and Statistics of
the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova**

Jan Demidovits-Mekelainen is a seasoned programme manager with a focus on regional development, tourism, statistics, public procurement, and Interreg. Currently serving as a programme manager at the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, Jan brings a wealth of experience to the role. With a passion for driving positive change and fostering sustainable development, Jan plays a pivotal role in supporting the EU's efforts in Moldova.



Mr Ralf Lowack

**Head of Component, international cooperation programme
“ReACT4UA“, GIZ GmbH**



Ms Zinaida Adam

Programme Officer at UNDP Moldova

Zinaida Adam is an Employment and Social Protection Programme Specialist at UNDP Moldova. She is specialized in employment, labour market and social protection policies, institutional development and public service improvement, as well as local economic development.



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Ms Olesya Zaluska

Chief of Party, USAID Competitive Economy Program (CEP)

Olesya has considerable experience in management positions in business development, investment, and strategy at international companies and governmental policy design. Having a law degree and being a Stanford Center for Professional Development graduate, Olesya is a digital transformation expert and women empowerment advocate. Throughout her career, Olesya worked in both business and public sectors, including leading roles at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine, State Agency for Investment and National Projects of Ukraine, PwC Ukraine, and GIZ.



Ms Stella Jemna

Country Representative for Moldova, Ukraine-Moldova American Enterprise Fund (UMAEF)

Stella Jemna is the Country Representative at the Ukraine Moldova American Enterprise Fund, a \$285 million regional fund with over 30 years of success in SME investments in Ukraine and Moldova. Previously, she served as Chief of Staff to Moldova’s Prime Minister, overseeing strategic initiatives and policy analysis. With 15+ years of experience, she has led regional and international projects across sectors, including community development, non-profits, and public administration.



Mr Charles Matthiaux

Deputy Project Leader at EU4Innovation East

A French civil servant, Charles Mathiaux has a 20+ years career with a specialisation in Public Research management, partnership and innovation, as well as in regional development and international cooperation. After two assignments in Romania and Ukraine, he is now based in Chisinau, Moldova where



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he serves as the deputy director of the EU and French funded project “EU4Innovation East”, implemented by Expertise France.



Ms Bianca Muntean

Transilvania IT Cluster Manager, Coordinator The European Digital Innovation Hub in Transilvania, Executive Director of ARIES Transilvania

Bianca Muntean, Honorary Consul of Estonia, is the co-founder and cluster manager of Transilvania IT, with over 25 years of experience in creating and developing innovation ecosystems. She is the coordinator and founder of The European Digital Innovation Hub in Transilvania, the first Digital Innovation Hub in Romania recognized as operational by the European Commission and selected within the European Digital Innovation Hubs Network. She is a member of several groups and advisory councils focused on innovation and digital transformation at the local, regional, national, and international levels. She received the title of EU Cluster Manager of the Year for 2019 from DG GROW, European Commission, and is involved in coordinating cross-sectoral collaborations across Europe. Bianca Muntean strongly believes that the power of collaboration can drive systemic changes in the economy and society.



Mr Gerd Meier zu Köcker

Managing Director, RegioClusterAgentur for Innovation and Transformation in Baden-Württemberg; Founder, ESCA

Gerd Meier zu Köcker has been involved in global cluster development since 2007 and has shaped the German and European cluster landscape since then. He has founded the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (2010) to pave the way for the European Cluster Excellence Approach, which became an internationally recognized standard for cluster excellence (2011). As Director of the European Cluster Observatory (2013 - 2016), he designed the EU Smart Guide to Cluster Policy (2016), the guideline for sustainable cluster development in the EU. Gerd led the German Cluster Excellence Initiative “Kompetenznetze Deutschland” or “go-Cluster” from 2007 - 2014, where he was responsible for supporting the 100 best German clusters and networks. He currently leads the ClusterAgentur Baden-Württemberg, which supports and advises more than 120 clusters and networks. In 2020, Gerd developed the Cluster Development Guide, the blue print for sustainable cluster development. Gerd is a teaching at Kehls University and University of St. Gallen (Switzerland)



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