

Athens, 7 November 2024

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AI-IGNITE 2024 Grand Final – AI integration in South East Europe

The AI-IGNITE 2024 Grand Final, held by EIT Manufacturing South East and AI-MATTERS TEF Greek Satellite, drew its winners! [EIT Manufacturing](#) is supported by the [European Institute of Innovation and Technology \(EIT\)](#), a body of the European Union. The event was held on 17 October 2024 in Athens, Greece awarding all 9 finalists that presented their innovative ideas and solutions.

The AI-IGNITE 2024 Grand Final, an event **organized by EIT Manufacturing South East and AI-MATTERS TEF Greek Satellite**, brought together a dynamic mix of industry leaders, government officials, tech innovators and Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) on 17 October 2024, at the Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation in Athens, Greece.

AI-MATTERS is a European-funded project under the "Digital Europe" programme, coordinated by the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA). AI-MATTERS is a network of seven nodes and one satellite established across eight European countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, France, Germany, the Czech Republic and Greece. Each of the countries has Testing and Experimentation Facilities (TEF) to facilitate testing of AI solutions under realistic environments to accelerate their uptake in the manufacturing sector. The Greek satellite has been established at the Laboratory of Manufacturing and Automation, University of Patras campus, and focuses on testing and experimentation of AI-enhanced digitalization & industrial automation, advanced manufacturing processes, Augmented and Virtual Reality for manufacturing, as well as sensing technologies for quality control and robot perception.

The synergy effect of the unique collaboration between the two event organizers is the **AI-IGNITE Competition**, where SMEs from the South East European ecosystem were invited to submit their proposals and compete for the best solutions using AI and Robotics.

The collaboration between EIT Manufacturing South East and AI-MATTERS TEF Greek Satellite marks a unique partnership focused on accelerating AI-driven innovation within the manufacturing sector. The main aim is to actively support AI adoption in Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) countries in South East Europe. This collaboration was exemplified by the AI-IGNITE 2024 Call and Grand Final, which boosts AI integration in regions requiring further support. Through this partnership businesses in these countries gain access to infrastructure within designated spaces of the AI-MATTERS TEF Greek Satellite, enabling them to develop, test and scale their AI manufacturing technologies. This effort supports AI technological uptake, bridging gaps and strengthening the role of AI in manufacturing across South East Europe.

After the applications' evaluation and during the **AI-IGNITE 2024 Grand Final**, 9 finalists were invited to present their solutions "live on stage". Out of the contestants, the 5 Champions that were selected from the Jury were awarded the prestigious AI-IGNITE 2024 awards – 2 from EIT Manufacturing South East and the third from AI-MATTERS: i) A monetary prize of 10,000.00 Euro, ii) An Access 2 Market growth package up for 3 months to boost visibility and internationalization and iii) An access ticket to the infrastructure and expertise of the AI-MATTERS TEF Greek Satellite to design, engineer, deploy and evaluate their AI solutions – an in-kind support worth up to 40,000 Euro per beneficiary.

Important to mention is the strategic support from EIT Manufacturing South East's network partners of EIT Manufacturing South East: the **Hellenic Development Bank (HDB)** and the **National Bank of Greece**

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(NBG) that offered awards for the winners. HDB offered a series of “Strategic Business Planning” sessions focusing on Marketing, Business Planning and Investment and NBG awarded a direct wildcard entry to Phase 2 of the “NBG Business Seeds – 15th Innovation and Technology Competition” with further mentoring and development opportunities.

During the Opening Ceremony, **Dr Niki Kousi**, Managing Director EIT Manufacturing South East and **Dr Mara Chachamidou**, Member of the Advisory Board of EIT Manufacturing South East, shared EIT Manufacturing South East’s vision for Europe and the South East region, while **Dr Kosmas Alexopoulos**, AI-MATTERS TEF Greek Satellite, shared information about AI-MATTER TEF Greek Satellite plan and the scope of supporting SMEs who have a vision with AI. During the keynote speeches by **Dr Vivian Sophou**, Senior Manager Business Development and Innovation EIT Manufacturing South East, and **Mrs Zoi Arkouli**, Research Engineer at the Laboratory for Manufacturing Systems and Automation (LMS) both presented some extended developments and important checkpoints of EIT Manufacturing South East and AI-MATTERS accordingly. **Mr Panagiotis Papageorgiou**, Director of Innovation Division Hellenic Development Bank, also shared his view about the vision of HDB towards the Greek economy and the financial and non-financial tools aiming to boost AI-uptake in the national and regional level.

After the keynote speeches of the first part, the event proceeded into the pitching session. Nine (9) finalists from Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Türkiye were selected to present their innovative solutions to a panel of Judges and industry experts. Competing for the awards and for an opportunity to revolutionize the manufacturing sector, the finalists showcased AI-driven solutions set to shape the future of industry across Europe. The finalists that competed in the event during the pitching session were **Emphasis Digiworld, Simtera, Enforge PC, Links Robotics, Calpak SA, Irida Labs, Trygons SA, Wisersense and Lentis Technologies**. All teams showed passion and determination in showing their technologies in topics of AI powered Digital Twin, Predictive Manufacturing and Maintenance, Real time sensor based RMX quality measurement, AI powered visual monitoring systems, Machine Vision, Spot welding and Visual odometry and landmarks localization.

Followed by the pitching session, the prestigious Jury Committee of **Dr Spyros Arsenis**, Head of Business Innovation and Development – NBG, **Dr Mara Chachamidou**, Management Executive Unit B1 – Ministry of Development, **Dr Jenny Leivadarou**, Business Advisor, Teaching Factory Competence Center, **Dr Konstantinos Smyrniotakis**, Sustainability & European Funding Senior Manager – Sidenor Group and **Mr Ionut Tata**, CEO at Iceberg+, evaluated the startups, shared their expertise and insightful remarks, while their constructive feedback shaped the outcome and award session of the competition.

Key stakeholders from national government agencies, large corporations and SMEs along with distinguished participants, attended the Grand Final, underlining the significance of AI's role in South East Europe’s manufacturing landscape. Their collective engagement demonstrated a united commitment to fostering AI innovation and encouraging the growth of next-generation manufacturing solutions.

“The AI-IGNITE 2024 Grand Final has once again showcased the incredible potential of AI to transform the manufacturing industry. The innovative solutions presented by our finalists demonstrate not only the power of technology but also the importance of collaboration across sectors to drive real change”, said **Dr Niki Kousi**, EIT Manufacturing South East Managing Director.

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About EIT and EIT Manufacturing

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is Europe's largest innovation ecosystem bringing together over 3400 partners from top business, research and education organisations across Europe in 200+ innovation hubs. The EIT is an EU body and an integral part of Horizon Europe, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Through dynamic panEuropean partnerships, called Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) the EIT Community offers a wide range of innovation and entrepreneurship activities, strengthening Europe's ability to innovate and powering solutions to pressing global challenges while nurturing entrepreneurial talent to create sustainable growth and skilled jobs in Europe.

EIT Manufacturing is one of the nine innovation communities supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), a body of the European Union. EIT Manufacturing's main goal is to bring European stakeholders focused on manufacturing together in innovation ecosystems that add unique value to European products, processes and services and inspire the creation of globally competitive and sustainable manufacturing. EIT Manufacturing brings together more than 175 partners (universities, research institutes and companies). EIT Manufacturing — Making Innovation Happen!

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