

FLANDERS MAKE BUILDS BRAND NEW TOP TECHNOLOGY CENTRE IN KORTRIJK

Kortrijk, 9 July 2021 - Flemish Minister of Economy and Innovation Hilde Crevits today symbolically laid the first stone of a third centre for top technological research in Kortrijk. In the new building, the latest industry 4.0 technologies and production methods will be tested from next autumn onwards. Companies will discover how they can optimally invest in their own production environment for the future in an accessible way. Companies from all sectors of industry can get inspiration for the necessary digitisation of their production processes. This is important for sustainable production, for workable work for employees and for the prosperity of our country.

Manufacturing companies can no longer avoid it: their customers increasingly expect customised products, delivered quickly and preferably without extra costs. Those who succeed in anticipating this are immediately one step ahead of the competition. Flanders Make helps companies to make the necessary switch to smart, digital factories for the future, in which employees continue to play a key role. Thanks to new technologies, work is becoming more exciting and easier for many employees.

"With this co-creation centre in Kortrijk, Flanders Make is once again reinforcing its leading role in the transformation to a competitive, innovation-driven and sustainable industry in Flanders. Companies that develop production systems, machines, subsystems or process software are given the opportunity here to test out the latest production technologies and processes in real conditions. This way, they can continue to invest in highly competitive factories in their own region. This places Flanders among the top regions in Europe in terms of industry 4.0 research infrastructure," says Urbain Vandeurzen, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Flanders Make.

Companies can already go to the current location of Flanders Make in Kortrijk for advice and tests for their industry 4.0 production. The existing test infrastructure will be transferred to the new site next year.

"Here, we will have the space to expand further and thus give companies a taste of the state of the art in sustainable production. The focus here is on digital twins, smart robotisation and automation. The operator will continue to play a central role and will be given the necessary support to guarantee workable work. Machine builders and their suppliers can get straight down to work. And we can also perfectly translate all innovations to many other sectors," says Dirk Torfs, CEO of Flanders Make.

Project developers Kristof Vanfleteren, CEO ION and Dominique Valcke, CEO Stadsbader state: *"For us, R&D has always been an important pillar, because we see the importance of it*

in the long term. This project is also an absolute reference for us in terms of technology and architecture. We are therefore proud that we can help realise this project."

11 million extra for Flanders Make

Flemish Minister of Economy and Innovation Hilde Crevits: "The arrival of this brand new centre for Flanders Make in Kortrijk is of great importance. The new establishment will be a showpiece. Together with many partners, our companies are taking the lead in innovation, research and development and sustainability. In the meantime, the corona crisis is leading to important choices and innovations. Half of the West Flemish companies have chosen to make new products and a third are looking for new sales markets. Flanders Make is ready to assist more than 11,000 companies and hundreds of thousands of employees in the renewal processes. Today I can also announce that we are giving 11 million euros extra support to Flanders Make. The funds are intended for a new project to further strengthen digitisation and automation in our manufacturing companies."

With these 11 million extra resources, 6 industrial innovation leaders (Van de Wiele, Picanol, Atlas Copco, CNH, Crops, Sabca together with a consortium of technology developers and suppliers from Flanders and Europe) can further renew our manufacturing industry and make it more sustainable. The business world itself is also contributing EUR 53 million.

This investment will boost the digitalisation of the Flemish and European industry. This will lead to an increase in the competitiveness of our manufacturing companies from very diverse sectors (mechanical engineering, agro-food, automotive, pharmaceutical, chemical, electronic components, etc.). At least as important is that the often small technology suppliers who are closely involved in the development of a number of pilot lines, can further develop their technology and competence, so that they too can strengthen their market position. In addition to increasing the competitiveness of our manufacturing industry, this project will also contribute greatly to the European Green Deal. Finally, the project aims to strengthen the digital human talent and to establish a digital culture in companies.

Flemish companies are holding up well

The resilience of businesses in Flanders was high during the corona crisis. Turnover did drop by a fifth, but employment dropped by only 2 percent. Half of the companies opted for new business models. A great many companies have responded quickly to new customers and markets and have adapted their work organisation. Three quarters of the companies indicate that they are paying more attention to digitisation of products and speeding up processes. Half of the companies say they will maintain their investment rhythm and budget during the covid year. Attention is paid to new technologies and to further training and retraining. Flanders Make is ready as a partner to guide the necessary changes and innovations.

The new establishment in Kortrijk will be ready in September 2022. Flanders Make owns the land and will rent the building for 27 years via a long lease from the project company Stadion (Stadsbader and Ion) that is responsible for the construction. With a surface area of 6000 m², this will immediately become the largest co-creation centre of Flanders Make, which also has branches in Leuven, Lommel and Sint-Truiden, and core laboratories at all Flemish universities.

ABOUT FLANDERS MAKE

Flanders Make focuses on industry-driven technological research and innovation with and for large companies and SMEs in the Flemish manufacturing industry. The focus is on open innovation through excellent research into mechatronics, methods for developing products and technology for manufacturing them. In concrete terms, this contributes to product and process innovation in the vehicle industry, machine building and production environments. The research results are applicable to various companies in the broad manufacturing industry, which often face similar technological challenges. Together, they can innovate better and faster. Flanders Make is also strongly committed to international innovation cooperation and participation in European research projects.

Flanders Make is active throughout Flanders, with co-creation centres in Lommel, Leuven and Kortrijk, the Flemish drone federation in Sint-Truiden and core labs at the 5 Flemish universities: KU Leuven, University of Antwerp, University of Ghent, University of Hasselt and Vrije Universiteit Brussel. www.flandersmake.be