

DELIVERABLE 5.3

Report on Networking Activities



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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared within the framework of Work Package 5 (WP5) of the Horizon Europe-funded GEMSTONE Project, entitled "Attractiveness, Competitiveness, and Visibility." Specifically, it addresses Task 5.3, "Networking Activities," which aims to strengthen the position of the coordinator – Acibadem Mehmet Ali Aydinlar University (ACU) – as a visible, competitive, and attractive research actor at national, regional, and international levels.

Networking under GEMSTONE has been conceived as a strategic instrument to establish new scientific collaborations, reinforce existing partnerships, and promote ACU's research profile within the European Research Area (ERA) with a specific focus on neuroscience. Activities implemented under Task 5.3 focus on engagement with academic institutions, research networks, funding bodies, industry actors, and research management communities, with the overarching objective of increasing ACU's participation in collaborative research initiatives and competitive funding programmes, particularly Horizon Europe.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the networking activities conducted throughout the project implementation period, highlights their objectives and outcomes, and assesses their contribution to GEMSTONE's overall mission of capacity building, knowledge transfer, and long-term sustainability.

1.1. Objectives of Networking Activities

The networking activities implemented under Task 5.3 were guided by the following objectives:

- To enhance ACU's visibility and reputation in neuroscience, gene engineering, and related biomedical research fields
- To position ACU as a reliable and attractive partner for European and international research collaborations
- To facilitate participation in Horizon Europe and other international, bilateral, and multilateral funding programmes
- To foster dialogue and collaboration with leading research groups, networks, and infrastructures
- To promote GEMSTONE's scientific innovations, capacity-building achievements, and best practices
- To support the development of joint project proposals, policy outputs, and long-term institutional partnerships

2. OVERVIEW OF NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

2.1. Strategic Scouting and Brokerage Activities

At the early stage of the project, an analysis of Cluster Health opportunities was conducted to assess the relevance of participation in the Health Brokerage Event held in January 2023. In March 2023, the GEMSTONE team at ACU registered a profile to participate in the Horizon Europe Health and WIDERA brokerage events, ensuring early visibility of the project within relevant European matchmaking platforms.

Although none of the identified open topics aligned sufficiently with ACU's research profile and the GEMSTONE mission, this exercise served as a strategic learning experience. The coordinator concluded that future participation would be considered for brokerage and matchmaking events featuring topics more closely aligned with GEMSTONE research interests such as neuroscience, gene engineering, and translational health research priorities.

Additionally, several contacts were established through the EU Funding & Tenders Portal throughout the project duration. These included teleconferences with international research groups, such as a Spanish translational biomedical research centre (FRCB-IDIBAPS) interested in WIDERA funding opportunities, an Austrian research and innovation enterprise (SYNYO) interested in a Teaming application, and a Dutch design bureau (8D Games) interested in collaboration in Horizon Europe projects (**Image 1**). While no immediate collaboration materialised due to funding call constraints, these contacts were documented and retained for future opportunities.

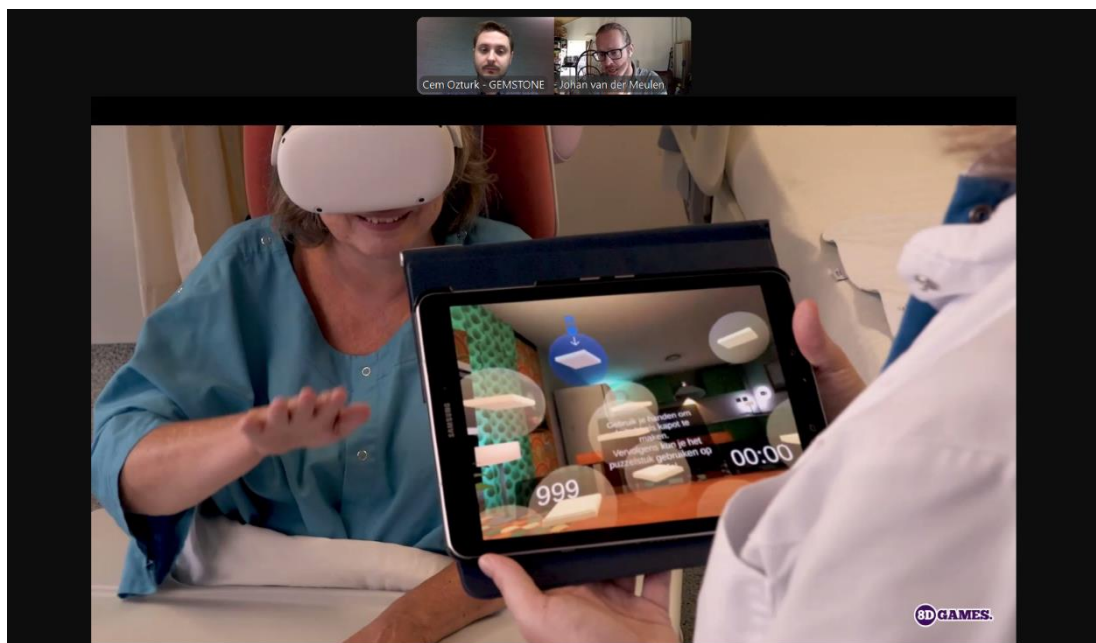


Image 1: Online networking meeting with 8D Games.

2.2. Professional Networks and Informal Brokerage

In addition to formal events and structured networking activities, the GEMSTONE Project significantly benefited from the strategic use of informal and professional networks, particularly through the active involvement of Serena Cogoni, Local Principal Investigator from ICONS. Leveraging her extensive professional network within the European neuroscience research community constituted a key mechanism for identifying collaboration opportunities and strengthening GEMSTONE's scientific outreach.

Throughout the project duration, Serena Cogoni regularly shared information on relevant networking opportunities, calls, and partnership initiatives with GEMSTONE members, supporting proactive engagement with the broader research community. She also presented the ACU's GEMSTONE research group and scientific interests to selected contacts within her professional network who could be potential collaborators or partners to facilitate the expansion of GEMSTONE's collaborative landscape.

2.3. Cross-Project and Thematic Collaborations

In March 2023, GEMSTONE established a collaboration with another Twinning initiative, GenderEX Project, coordinated by Kadir Has University (**Image 2**). This collaboration focused on cross-cutting Horizon Europe priorities, particularly gender equality in research. Through a jointly organised discussion series, both projects exchanged experiences and perspectives on integrating gender equality considerations into research design and institutional practices. The collaboration strengthened GEMSTONE's engagement with Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) principles and contributed to broader awareness of gender dimensions in neuroscience research.



Image 2: Collaboration with GenderEX Project.

2.4. COST Actions and Research Networks

GEMSTONE researchers actively participated in international scientific conferences and COST Actions. Notably, participation in the IMMUPARKNET Annual Conference (COST Action 21117) in Belgrade in April 2024 enabled GEMSTONE researchers to present project activities, exchange knowledge with Parkinson's disease experts, and establish new collaborative links (**Image 3**).



Image 3: IMMUPARKNET Annual Conference (COST 21117), Belgrade.

GEMSTONE representation continued within IMMUPARKNET meetings held in Sevilla, Spain, further expanding cooperation opportunities. Appointment of Prof. Yasemin Gürsoy Özdemir of Koç University as the IMMUPARKNET contact person in Turkey strengthened national coordination and outreach.

Prof. Beki Kan's participation in COST Action 18133, "European Research Network on Signal Transduction," further expanded GEMSTONE's engagement with European signalling and neurobiology research communities.

2.5. Targeted Networking Meetings and Consortium Building

ACU organised and hosted several targeted networking meetings aimed at fostering concrete research collaborations. A key example was the joint collaboration meeting with IMMUPARKNET, Koç University Research Centre for Translational Medicine (KUTTAM), and GEMSTONE, held in July 2024 (**Image 4**). This meeting brought together distinguished researchers from multiple institutions to identify joint research avenues in Parkinson's disease. As a result, new collaboration ideas were generated, and participants agreed on the value of maintaining regular meetings to sustain momentum.



Image 4: Joint Collaboration Meeting (IMMUPARKNET, KUTTAM, GEMSTONE).

Similarly, a national-level networking meeting held in January 2025 between ACU, Medipol University, and the University of Health Sciences resulted in the successful submission and approval of a TÜSEB Group B R&D project, demonstrating the tangible impact of GEMSTONE-enabled networking.

2.6. Engagement with Research Management and Innovation Communities

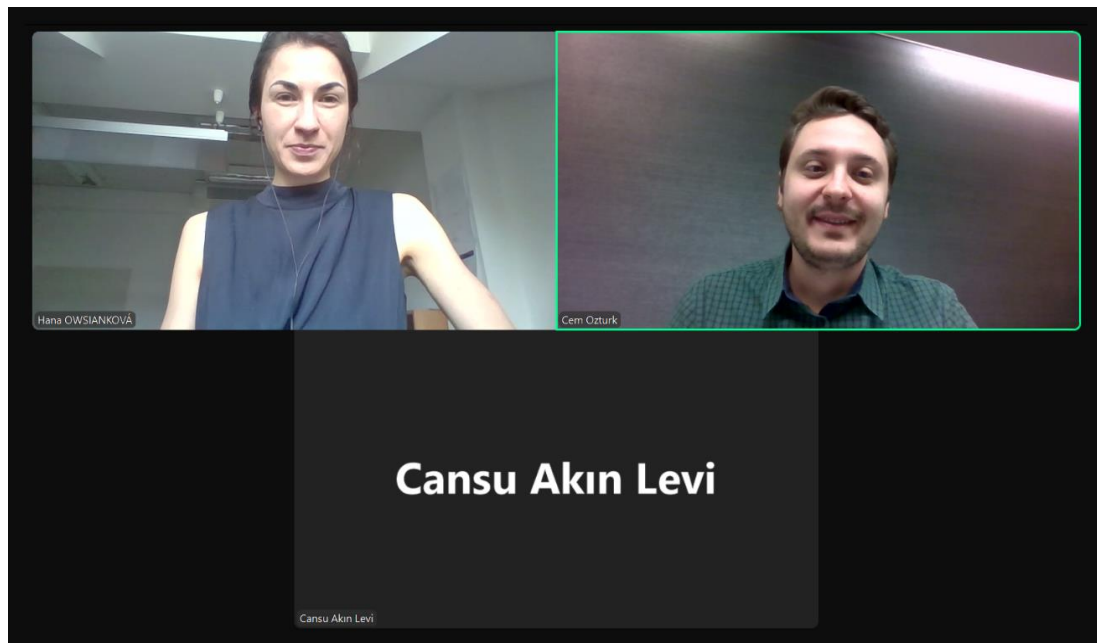


Image 5: Online networking meeting with Palacký University Olomouc.

GEMSTONE representatives participated in the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) conference held in Odense, Denmark, in April 2024. ACU's Technology Transfer Office and GEMSTONE WP4 leadership presented capacity-building activities through poster sessions, strengthening ACU's visibility among European research management professionals and facilitating new institutional connections.

Further engagement with the research management community took place through online meetings with Palacký University Olomouc (Czech Republic), which led to collaboration on joint policy outputs related to Twinning calls, published in November 2025 (**Image 5**).

2.7. International High-Level Networking and Strategic Visits

Several high-impact international networking activities were conducted throughout the project. These included:

- A scientific visit of Dr. Annika Lüttjohann from the University of Münster to ACU, facilitating in-depth research exchange and stimulating new experimental ideas, reinforcing methodological and conceptual collaboration between institutions (**Image 6**)
- An online networking meeting with Saints Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, focusing on ethical frameworks, laboratory animal research, and joint Horizon Europe participation (**Image 7**)
- A strategic networking visit by the GEMSTONE Primary Principal Investigator to London, UK, involving meetings with leading researchers from UCL and NHS institutions, resulting in concrete plans for joint Horizon Europe applications and invited speakers for GEMSTONE dissemination events (**Image 8**)
- High-level meeting with Dr. Murat Baštepe of Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital during his scientific visit to ACU, opening pathways for translational and molecular neuroscience collaborations (**Image 9**)



Image 6: Scientific visit of Dr. Annika Lüttjohann.



Image 7: Online networking meeting with Ss. Cyril and Methodius University.

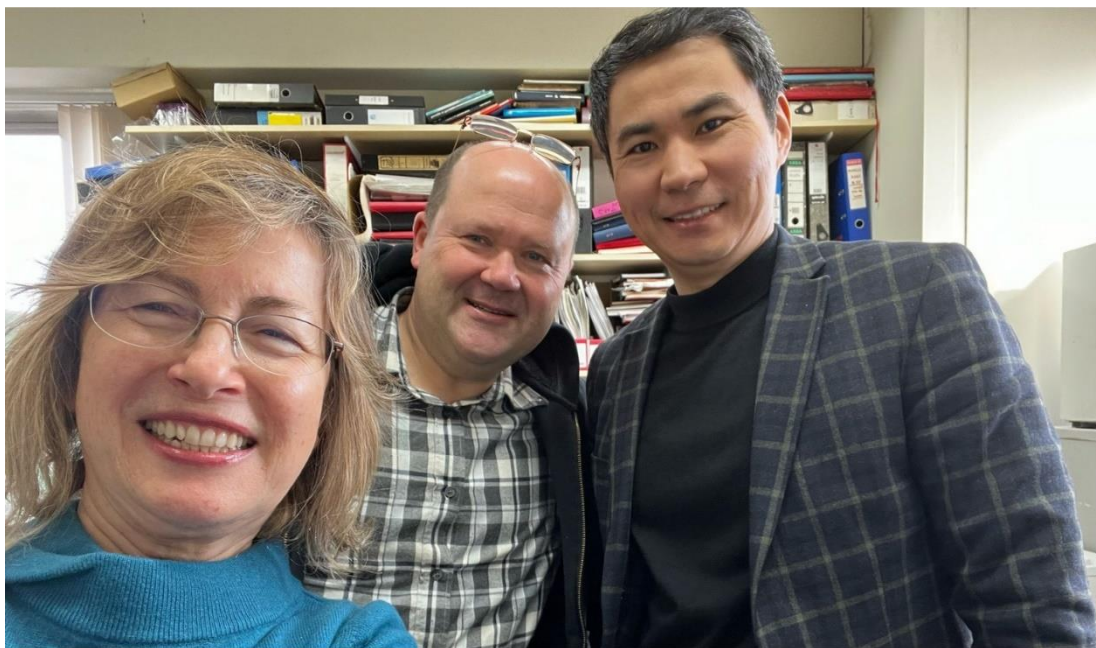


Image 8: Strategic networking visit to London.

2.8. Networking through Dissemination Events and Flagship Conferences

The GEMSTONE chemogenetic dissemination event held in June 2025 served as a major networking platform, enabling structured meetings and informal exchanges with international speakers and institutional leaders (**Image 10**). These interactions laid the groundwork for future joint research initiatives, workshops, and policy-oriented events.



Image 9: Scientific visit of Dr. Murat Baştepe.

Participation in major international conferences such as ECCN 2025 in London and the Building Bridges 2025 Conference in Dresden further reinforced GEMSTONE’s networking strategy. These events facilitated matchmaking, best practice exchange among Widening countries, and the identification of partners for joint policy briefs (EarthBridge Project, Czechia) and future proposals (**Image 11**).

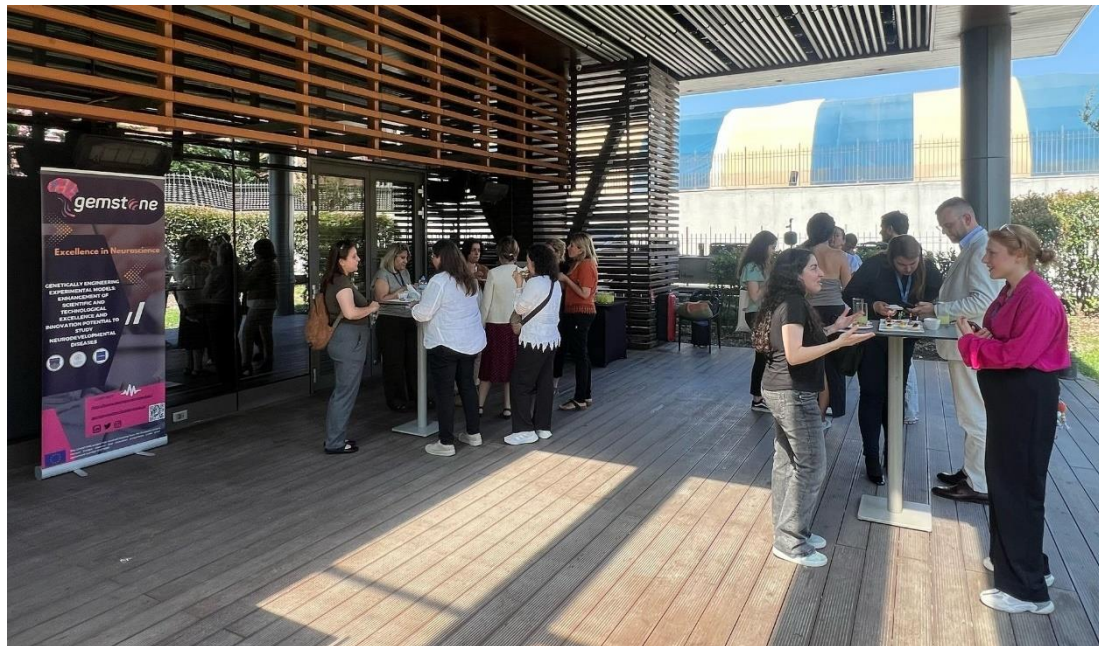


Image 10: Networking during GEMSTONE chemogenetic dissemination event.

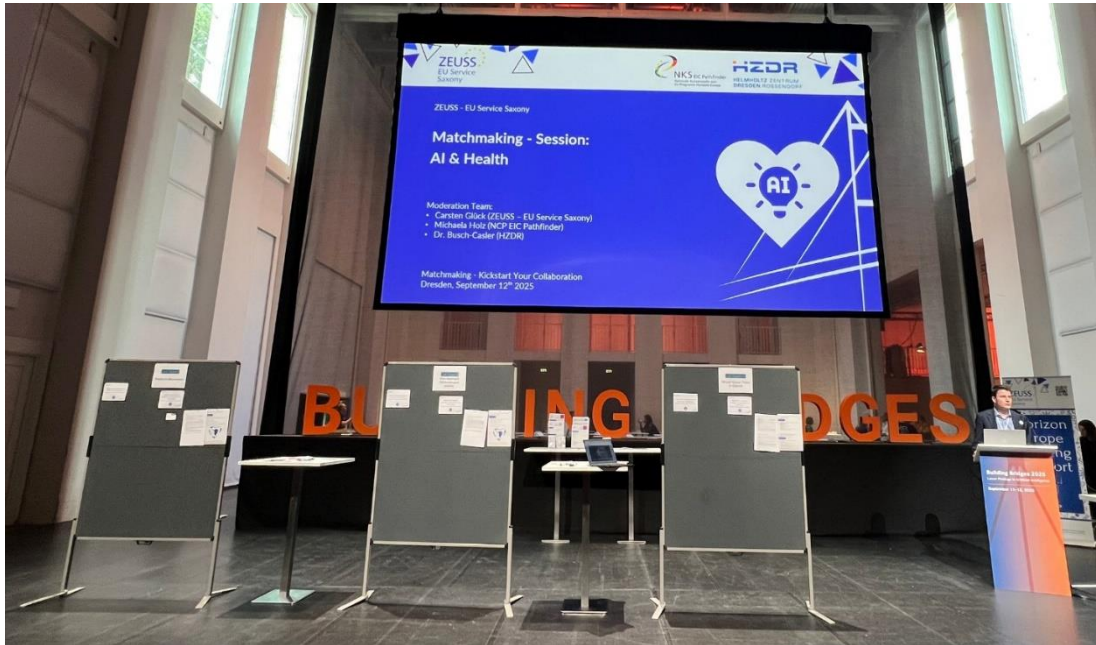


Image 11: Building Bridges 2025 Conference, Dresden.

In April 2025, Prof. Filiz Onat represented ACU at The Synuclein Meeting 2025, hosted by the University of Cambridge. The meeting provided extensive opportunities for scientific exchange and networking, including focused thematic sessions and social events, thereby strengthening ACU's international visibility in cutting-edge neuroscience research.

Researchers from the GEMSTONE Project also participated in the 8th Epilepsy Symposium, in May 2025 in Muğla, Turkey, organised by the Turkish Society for the Fight Against Epilepsy. The event enabled high-level networking with leading clinicians and researchers, fostering new professional connections and potential collaborations aligned with GEMSTONE's objectives.

In July 2025, Prof. Filiz Onat attended the 16th EPNS Congress, held in Munich, Germany. In addition to her scientific contribution, Prof. Onat took part in a networking event at the Brainlab Headquarters, where researchers, clinicians, and industry leaders came together in an inspiring setting to discuss emerging trends and foster collaboration in paediatric neurology.

2.9. Regional and Balkan-Level Cooperation

GEMSTONE played a facilitative role in strengthening regional cooperation, particularly within Turkey and the Balkans. This included engagement with the Balkan University Association, collaboration with Trakya University, and the co-organisation of the "International Cooperation Project Calls Information Day" in October 2025 (**Image 12**). The event attracted over 120 participants, including rectors, research managers, and senior researchers, and showcased GEMSTONE's best practices in research management and international cooperation.



Image 12: International Cooperation Project Calls Information Day, Edirne.

3. OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The networking activities carried out under Task 5.3 have generated significant qualitative and quantitative outcomes, including:

- Establishment of new national and international research collaborations
- Successful joint funding applications and approved projects
- Strengthened participation in European research networks and COST Actions
- Increased visibility of ACU and GEMSTONE on European platforms
- Development of policy-oriented outputs and best practice dissemination
- Enhanced institutional capacity in research management and international cooperation

3.1. Summary of Networking Activities and Results

Table 1 below provides a concise overview of the main networking activities conducted under Task 5.3 and their key outcomes.

Table 1: Summary of networking activities and outcomes (Part 1/3).

No.	Period	Activity / event	Level	Main partners / stakeholders	Key outcomes and results
1	Jan 2023	Cluster Health brokerage opportunity analysis	EU	Horizon Europe Health Cluster	Strategic assessment completed; decision to focus on future events featuring topics better aligned with GEMSTONE mission
2	Mar 2023	Collaboration with GenderEX Project	EU / National	Kadir Has University (Turkey)	Joint discussion series on gender equality; exchange on RRI and gender dimension in neuroscience research
3	Jun 2023	Online networking meeting with FRCB-IDIBAPS	EU	FRCB-IDIBAPS (Spain)	Exploration of collaboration in WIDERA and EMBO funding opportunities in neuroscience
4	Feb 2024	Scientific visit of Dr. Annika Lüttjohann	EU	University of Münster (Germany)	Scientific exchange; inspiration for new chemogenetics experiments; strengthened bilateral collaboration
5	Apr 2024	IMMUPARKNET Annual Conference (COST 21117), Belgrade	EU	COST IMMUPARKNET network	Dissemination of GEMSTONE; new Parkinson's disease research contacts; expanded COST engagement
6	2024–2025	Participation in COST Actions (CA21117, CA18133)	EU	COST research networks	Integration into European research networks; increased visibility of GEMSTONE expertise
7	Jul 2024	Joint Collaboration Meeting (IMMUPARKNET, KUTTAM, GEMSTONE)	EU / National	University of Piemonte Orientale (Italy), University of Insubria (Italy), Koç University (Turkey)	Identification of joint PD research ideas; agreement on sustained collaborative meetings
8	Apr 2024	EARMA Conference, Odense	EU	EARMA community	Visibility among European research managers; new institutional contacts; dissemination of capacity-building practices
9	Jan 2025	Networking meeting with Medipol and Health Sciences universities	National	Medipol University, University of Health Sciences (Turkey)	Joint TÜSEB Group B project submitted and approved for funding

Table 1: Summary of networking activities and outcomes (Part 2/3).

10	Feb 2025	Online networking meeting with Ss. Cyril and Methodius University	International	Saints Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje (North Macedonia)	Identification of research synergies; follow-up plans for joint funding applications
11	Feb 2025	Strategic networking visit to London	International	UCL, NHS institutions (UK)	Agreement on joint Horizon Europe applications; invited speakers for GEMSTONE events
12	Mar 2025	Online networking meeting with Palacký University Olomouc	EU	Palacký University Olomouc (Czechia)	Collaboration on joint policy brief and factsheets on Twinning calls (published Nov 2025)
13	Mar 2025	Online networking meeting with 8D Games	Industry / EU	8D Games (Netherlands)	Exploration of collaboration in digital health, serious gaming, and neuroscience
14	Mar 2025	Online networking meeting with SYNNO	Industry / EU	SYNNO (Austria)	Exploration of collaboration in the upcoming Teaming call
15	Apr 2025	The Synuclein Meeting 2025	International	University of Cambridge (UK)	High-level scientific exchange and networking; strengthened visibility in neuroscience research
16	Apr 2025	High-level networking meeting with Trakya University	National	Trakya University (Turkey)	Plans for joint proposals and co-organised events; strengthened national collaboration
17	Apr 2025	Scientific visit of Dr. Murat Baštepe (Harvard Medical School–MGH)	International	Harvard Medical School–MGH (USA)	Identification of translational research opportunities; discussion of joint publications and grants
18	May 2025	8th Epilepsy Symposium	National	Turkish Society for the Fight Against Epilepsy (Turkey)	Networking with leading clinicians and researchers; dissemination of GEMSTONE-related research; initiation of new professional connections and potential collaborations
19	Jun 2025	Networking during GEMSTONE chemogenetic dissemination event	International	Lund University (Sweden), University of Szeged (Hungary), Bulgarian partners	New collaboration ideas; plans for joint workshops and researcher exchanges

Table 1: Summary of networking activities and outcomes (Part 3/3).

20	Jul 2025	16th EPNS Congress & Brainlab networking event	International	European Paediatric Neurology Society	Engagement with academic, clinical, and industry stakeholders; reinforced international collaboration and translational perspectives
21	Sep 2025	ECCN 2025 Congress, London	International	European clinical neurophysiology community	New epilepsy research contacts; invited speakers for ACU NeuroConnect
22	Sep 2025	Building Bridges 2025 Conference, Dresden	EU	WIDERA projects, EarthBridge Project (Czechia)	Partner identified for joint policy brief; matchmaking in AI and health research
23	Oct 2025	International Cooperation Project Calls Information Day, Edirne	Regional / National	TÜBİTAK (Turkey), Balkan universities	Large-scale regional networking; dissemination of GEMSTONE best practices; strengthened Balkan cooperation
24	Nov 2025	Networking during ACU NeuroConnect event	International	UCL (UK), University of Athens (Greece), University of Szeged (Hungary),	New collaboration ideas; plans for project proposals and researcher exchanges
25	Throughout project	EU Funding & Tenders Portal matchmaking	EU	Various European research groups	Profiles screened; contacts retained for future funding opportunities

4. CONCLUSION

Task 5.3 has played a central role in achieving the objectives of WP5 by systematically enhancing ACU's attractiveness, competitiveness, and visibility within the European and international research landscape. Through a diverse portfolio of networking activities – ranging from strategic brokerage analysis and thematic collaborations to high-level scientific visits and large-scale regional events – GEMSTONE has successfully positioned ACU as an emerging hub for excellence in neuroscience and biomedical research.

Following the completion of the GEMSTONE Project, the partnerships and networks established under Task 5.3 provide a strong foundation for long-term collaboration, sustained participation in Horizon Europe, and the lasting legacy of the project's capacity-building achievements.