

Mr Michael Damianos
Minister of Energy, Commerce and Industry
Chair of the EU Competitiveness Council

Sent by email

18 February 2026

Subject: Eurochambres input for the 26 February Competitiveness Council policy debate

Dear Minister Damianos,

The informal EU leaders' retreat in Alden Biesen reaffirmed the need to move from intention to action and to turn around the lack of urgency from the EU and national governments perceived by millions of entrepreneurs across Europe. As highlighted in the Eurochambres [contribution](#) to the informal retreat, the cost of non-Europe has been well-documented and quantified over the years, but the cost of a non-competitive Europe is a more apt benchmark.

In this spirit, competitiveness ministers' policy debates must steer the EU agenda more pragmatically and bring concrete measures to enhance the coordination across member states. Allow me therefore to provide input on the agenda for your 26 February meeting from the perspective of the European network of chambers of commerce and industry.

European Competitiveness Fund (ECF)

Eurochambres welcomes the European Commission proposal for a European Competitiveness Fund (ECF). The initiative must mark a turning point in aligning the EU budget with the Union's strategic objective of reinforcing Europe's industrial base, economic resilience, and global competitiveness. To maximise its impact, the ECF must be:

- technology-open and sector-inclusive;
- simple and accessible for SMEs, and administratively coherent;
- strategically governed with stakeholder involvement;
- focused on excellence and measurable competitiveness outcomes.

Eurochambres calls on national governments to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to the future EU for Business Network (EU4Business) and to essential horizontal policies such as the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), as well as the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) and the European Digital Innovation Hubs (eDIHs). Without a sufficient and clearly defined financial envelope, the initiative risks undermining the very instruments it seeks to connect and simplify.

Council conclusions on the 2030 Consumer Agenda

Eurochambres notes that EU consumers benefit from one of the most comprehensive consumer protection frameworks worldwide, which is overall fit for purpose, and does not require structural changes. Regarding the forthcoming European Product Act, member states will need to strengthen the capacity of their market surveillance authorities, tackle rogue traders, and enforce existing rules consistently across the EU to maintain fair competition for compliant businesses. The Digital Fairness Act should focus on addressing real gaps in the existing consumer law framework for digital markets, avoid duplicating rules already contained in instruments such as

the UCPD, DSA, or GDPR, and take a proportionate, evidence-based approach to new obligations.

Consumer protection should remain focused on promoting informed decision-making and shared responsibility between consumers, businesses, and national authorities, while avoiding overly paternalistic approaches that dilute each parties' accountability.

2026 Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report (ASMCR)

The single market remains the most powerful engine for competitiveness and prosperity in Europe.

Against this backdrop, the latest ASMCR and its list of key performance indicators show a clear deterioration, especially when it comes to market integration in goods. Furthermore, the highly anticipated Annual Single Market and Enforcement Agenda 2026 was reduced to a boxed reference in the report, with questionable mentions e.g. late payments, despite this not having been considered as an issue in the 2025 Single Market Strategy.

While the Commission continues its technical work to disaggregate the most significant barriers, member states must now step up their engagement, provide concrete evidence on how these barriers materialise, and commit to targeted remedial action. The Benelux countries, often acting as a testing ground for deeper integration on the basis of Article 350 of the TFEU, provide a useful example of how closer cooperation can address cross-border challenges.

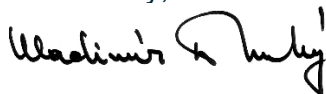
Follow-up to the Industrial Action Plans for Europe's steel, automotive and chemical industries within the Clean Industrial Deal

Persistently high energy prices, the lack of a global level playing field, and growing trade uncertainty undermine investment and increase the risk of carbon leakage. Without swift and targeted measures, Europe risks losing critical industries and jobs, as highlighted in the Eurochambres Chief Economists Group June 2025 study on the relationship between electricity prices and employment across European countries.

Eurochambres supports the industrial action plans adopted in 2025 and considers recent measures such as the updated EU ETS indirect cost compensation mechanism and the Temporary Decarbonisation Fund to be steps in the right direction. However, pausing the phase-out of free allowances under the EU ETS remains essential to safeguard the competitiveness of Europe's industrial base, alongside stronger efforts to bring down energy prices.

Beyond your 26 February meeting, chambers will be looking for follow up on the process started during the Alden Biesen leaders' meeting at the formal European Council in March. This, then, in turn, should be consistently reflected in the agenda and discussions of subsequent Competitiveness Councils. Only in this way will the political momentum needed for an ambitious, effective EU competitiveness agenda be gained and maintained.

Yours sincerely,



Vladimír Dlouhý
Eurochambres President