
EUROPEAN AGENDA

AFTER YEARS OF RESISTANCE, LEADERS FINALLY SAY EU SHOULD GO AT DIFFERENT SPEEDS

Summit in Belgian castle sees governments acknowledge Europe urgently needs to change the way it functions if it's not going to be left behind.

The EU has always prided itself on its members all moving forward as one. That era is over.

At a gathering in eastern Belgium on Thursday, the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and others backed plans — that they'll flesh out as early as the European Council next month — to peel off and sign up to initiatives in smaller groups. Governments spoke of being gripped by a sense of urgency because Europe's competitive edge is slipping away as many of its ideas get bogged down in indecision and discord.

"We need to act fast," said French President Emmanuel Macron, who appeared to put his recent disagreements with his German counterpart behind him as they both urged the EU to pursue policies that will spark economic growth.

With the bloc buffeted by multiple geopolitical crises, it's starting to realize that it can't come to grips with them if it only acts when all 27 member countries agree. From defense to energy to investment, the European Commission, which makes the rules, and national governments, which are supposed to implement them, are finding themselves hamstrung. Meanwhile, businesses talk of being strangled by red tape and high energy costs.

Donald Trump's threats to seize Greenland and his wavering on helping Ukraine fend off Russia, combined with China's strategy of flooding Europe with artificially cheap goods, have provided an impetus to the EU's most senior decision-makers to finally get moving.

Thursday's summit of EU leaders — only 15 kilometers from the Dutch city of Maastricht, where one of the most significant treaties underpinning the bloc was signed in 1992 — occasioned some "strategic brainstorming" on how to "promote our prosperity, create high quality jobs and ensure affordability," European Council President António Costa said. "Today's discussion brought a new energy and shared sense of urgency around that objective," he said.

SOURCE: POLITICOPRO 13/02/2026

URSULA VON DER LEYEN CALLS FOR 'RADICAL MEASURES' TO CURB THE OVER-TRANSPOSITION OF EUROPEAN RULES

Simplification 'omnibus' measures are not enough to ease the administrative burden on European businesses, said the Commission President in two speeches delivered on 11 February: the first to the European Parliament and the second to the industry summit in Antwerp. Ursula von der Leyen called for action at Member State level: "There is too much over-regulation, i.e. additional layers of national legislation, which only serve to create new barriers within our single market. 'If we really want to simplify things, we need to take radical measures'. The time has come to clean up our regulations at all levels," she insisted. In her [letter](#) of 9 February to the heads of state, the head of the executive already promised a 'targeted initiative".

SOURCE: CONTEXTE 11/02/2026

IN ANTWERP, INDUSTRY GIANTS TAKE CONTROL OF THE EUROPEAN AGENDA

Six hundred business leaders, five heads of state and government, all the heavyweights of the European Commission: in three years, the Antwerp industrial summit has grown considerably. An

event organised by the powerful chemical industry lobby – Cefic – which takes on the appearance of a mini-European summit but which, behind the scenes, sometimes causes some discomfort. Every time, the same rain, the same grey skies, the same Flemish destination. For three years now, Antwerp has seen hundreds of business leaders descend on the city in February to attend the 'European Industry Summit' under the Gothic arches of the Stock Exchange dome. This major event has been organised since 2024 by one of Europe's most important lobbies, Cefic. On 11 February 2026, more than 600 industrialists (Euromines, Eurofer, Plastics Europe, France Chimie, Engie, Ineos, BASF, Euratex, etc.) gathered at the Antwerp Stock Exchange. Several distinguished guests were also in attendance. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and leading commissioners made the trip to discuss industrial competitiveness. Stéphane Séjourné, Teresa Ribera and Wopke Hoekstra all came to support the industry.

New for 2026: heads of state and government also took their place on the panels. French President Emmanuel Macron, Germany's Friedrich Merz, Belgium's Bart De Wever, the Netherlands' Dick Schoof and Austria's Christian Stocker were among the last-minute guests.

One summit can hide another

'Antwerp is becoming, de facto, an extraordinary European Council,' says Alberto Alemanno, professor of law at HEC Paris and founder of the think tank The Good Lobby. [Read more](#)

SOURCE: CONTEXTE 11/02/2026

'I DON'T ALWAYS AGREE WITH THE METHODS': MACRON'S BUY EUROPEAN PUSH HITS SWEDISH RESISTANCE

Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson is looking forward to meeting his fellow leaders at a castle in the Belgian countryside on Thursday but not even these relaxed surroundings can quell the EU's simmering divisions.

The chief agitator this time is French President Emmanuel Macron, who is pushing for a new "Buy European" drive — which would seek to favor the EU's own companies in areas of strategic importance such as defense, steel and electric vehicles. Macron has triggered concern among some of his counterparts, including Kristersson, who leads a proudly free-trading nation and is deeply suspicious of states intervening in markets.

"Well, him and I, we quite often friendly-argue with each other on these matters," Kristersson said of his relations with Macron, during an interview with POLITICO. "I don't always agree with the methods." The European Commission is expected soon to unveil proposals for how a "European preference" could operate to help boost the bloc's production in strategic industries. Macron appeared increasingly isolated this week, with Germany knocking back his proposal for more joint EU debt to fund strategic investments, and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warning of "a fine line to walk" on the concept of a "European preference."

Even so, the crisis in transatlantic relations — inflamed by U.S. President Donald Trump's threats to impose tariffs on allies in his quest to acquire Greenland — has made it more urgent for EU leaders to strengthen the bloc's economic might, Kristersson said.

Macron has a point that Europe must be more "self-reliant," Kristersson said, but trying to protect European supply chains and businesses from international competition will not necessarily help the competitiveness of the EU economy. [Read more](#)

SOURCE: POLITICOPRO 12/02/2026

VON DER LEYEN FLIPS THE BLAME FOR CRIPPLING EU ECONOMY BACK ONTO NATIONAL LEADERS

European Commission president insists EU capitals have no right to scapegoat Brussels for excessive red tape and single market failures.

ANTWERP, Belgium — European leaders can't just blame the red tape merchants in Brussels for the EU's economic weakness and must slash back their own national bureaucracies and protectionist rulebooks.

That's the message European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is delivering as she heads into Thursday's European Council retreat in the castle of Alden Biesen in the Belgian countryside for a meeting dedicated to reviving flagging EU competitiveness.

Fears about Europe's waning industrial power relative to the U.S. and China are reaching fever pitch, but the EU institutions in Brussels are at loggerheads with national capitals such as Berlin and Rome over who to blame for bureaucratic overkill.

Sensing Thursday's Council meeting could turn into an ambush, with European leaders ganging up to bash Brussels for overburdening industry with rules on everything from chemicals to cattle, von der Leyen hit back in two pre-Council speeches on Wednesday. [Read more](#)

SOURCE: POLITICOPRO 12/02/2026

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

CYPRUS PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Cyprus is heading into the Presidency as the last member of the Trio it formed with Poland and Denmark. This will be its second time at the helm of the Council since the country joined the Union. The Presidency will start as the mandate hits its legislative cruising speed, and 2026 will see a high volume of proposals needing to be discussed and progressed – with a growing impetus to deliver the next budget and the fast-paced simplification agenda.

The Presidency of Cyprus will not be without challenges as the Union is under pressure to deliver policy changes quickly to adapt to a more unpredictable world. This probably explains the focus set by the incoming Presidency on 'autonomy', a concept that has become central to the Union's policymaking as a mitigator of global upheavals.

Defence and security will be a strong focus of the Presidency programme, but competitiveness, enlargement, and social policy also loom large. The Presidency will also be expected to deliver progress on the MFF.

Another cross-sectoral dimension that is put forward by the island nation is maritime policy. It aims, for instance, to create a legacy on maritime issues by seeking the endorsement of a Lefkosia Declaration on Enhancing Seafarers' Education and Promoting Women's Inclusivity in the Shipping Industry.

The Cyprus Presidency reaffirmed its commitment to the simplification agenda in its priorities, in line with the October 2025 European Council Conclusions, notably seeking to initiate and conclude trilogues on Omnibus IV, V, and VI. It will also initiate work on the newly announced simplification packages regarding environment, digital, food and feed, and the automotive sector.

[Read more](#)

SOURCE: DEHAVILLAND 12/02/2026

CLIMATE POLICY

EUROPEAN CHEMICAL GIANTS PLOT TO WEAKEN EU'S FLAGSHIP CLIMATE POLICY

The ultra-polluting sector says the EU's carbon price is putting it out of business.

Europe's huge chemicals sector is campaigning to weaken the European Union's most important climate policy — and Brussels is listening.

At a meeting in Antwerp on Wednesday, industry chiefs will attempt to persuade European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and national leaders to water down the Emissions Trading System (ETS), a cap-and-trade strategy to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

They come with a well-rehearsed pitch: Their sector, one of the biggest in Europe, is in crisis. Factories are being squeezed by a perfect storm of high energy prices, intense competition from China, weak demand from downstream industries — and the world's most expensive carbon pricing scheme.

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Virtually no other jurisdiction in the world faces carbon costs as high as the EU, they argue: If current plans to strengthen the scheme go ahead, Europe's chemicals industry could be dead within a decade.

"Our competitors abroad don't face comparable ETS regimes," Markus Steilemann, CEO of German chemicals producer Covestro, told POLITICO, calling for "an urgent reform of the EU ETS to align climate ambition with competitive reality."

For environmental advocates, however, touching the ETS is akin to sacrilege. The 20-year-old scheme — which puts strict limits on the amount of planet-warming gases industry can emit, and covers nearly half of the bloc's emission — is the bedrock of EU climate policy, forcing industry to find cleaner energy sources.

Industries currently pay around €80 for every ton of carbon they emit, and by 2039 will no longer be allowed to emit any carbon at all.

SOURCE: POLITICOPRO 10/02/2026

FOREVER CHEMICALS TO COST EUROPE HALF A TRILLION EUROS BY 2050, EU SAYS

Even more ambitious clean-up goals would see the price tag soar.

BRUSSELS — Europe is on track to pay at least €440 billion to deal with the pollution and health impacts from toxic PFAS chemicals by the middle of the century, according to [a study](#) released Thursday by the European Commission.

The cost could soar to nearly €2 trillion under more ambitious clean-up goals, the analysis warns, describing the roughly half-trillion-euro estimate as a baseline for addressing PFAS pollution across the European Economic Area.

PFAS or "forever chemicals" — man-made chemicals used in a wide variety of industrial processes and consumer products — have been linked to a range of health problems, including cancer and fertility problems.

The EU is preparing to propose a ban on their use later this year, with exemptions for "critical sectors" — a position likely to draw pushback from industry and some political groups.

But even a full ban would leave Europe with costs of €330 billion by 2050, the report warned.

"Providing clarity on PFAS with bans for consumer uses is a top priority for both citizens and businesses," said EU environment chief Jessika Roswall. "That is why this is an absolute priority for me to work on this and engage with all relevant stakeholders. Consumers are concerned, and rightly so. This study underlines the urgency to act."

Bureau. "The EU must turn off the tap now through an ambitious EU restriction of PFAS present in consumer products and used in industrial processes."

SOURCE: POLITICOPRO 29/01/2026
