The Policy Mission Fellowship

An Open European Dialogue Initiative

MISSION REPORT

The Securitisation of Europe's Economic Power

Six policy prototypes to enhance Europe's economic security developed by cross-country, cross-party teams of parliamentarians.

18 November 2026

Authors
Davide Albeggiani, Rebecca Farulli, Iris Giguet, Isotta Ricci Bitti, Chiara Rosselli, Marie-Thérèse Schreiber

Copy Editor
Nicolas Bouchet

© **2026 Open European Dialogue**

"One of the most enriching and unique experiences that I've had as a politician."

– 2026 Policy Mission Fellow

Table of Contents

Foreword 5
By Chiara Rosselli

Origins: Why A Mission on the Securitisation of Europe's Economic Power 9
By James Ashley Morrison and Isotta Ricci Bitti

Innovation Powerhouse Europe: The Case for Sovereign Frontier Compute 13
A deep-tech strategy for European AI infrastructure sovereignty
Prototype developed by Federica Onori, Luisa Sanz, Dr. Sebastian Schäfer, Armand Zorn

The 'Fifth Freedom' 28
Investing in human capital and education to build 'Europeans par excellence'
Prototype developed by Eva Biaudet, Nacho Martín Blanco, Matas Maldeikis, Nikola Mažar

Secure, Clean and Affordable Energy: Powering Europe's Economic Future 34
Three interconnected ideas to achieve energy sovereignty, a resilient grid and safeguard the continent's economic security
Prototypes developed by Yoko Alender, Meyrem Almaci, Ioannis A. Kefalogiannis, Fitore Pacolli, Katrin Uhlig, Mihael Zmajlović

Security Starts at Home: Reframing Civic Resilience in Belgium 46
A roadmap for integrating civic resilience into Belgium's security architecture
Prototype developed by Liesa Scholzen

Sweden: The Case for a National Innovation Push 55
Why a parliamentary committee is the missing piece in the innovation economy
Prototype developed by Johan Büser, Margareta Cederfelt

From Spending to Capability: A Shared Acquisition Platform for Europe 63
A policy prototype for faster, interoperable European defence capability
Prototype developed by Claudiu Năsui, Andris Šuvajevs, Fred Thomas, Mart Võrklaev, Oleksandra Ustinova

Conclusion: What the Mission Has Built 72
By Isotta Ricci Bitti

Methodological Spotlight: Inside the Policy Mission Fellowship 74

Annex 1: The 2026 Fellows 78

Further Reading Recommendations 84

Foreword

By Chiara Rosselli

For over a decade, the Open European Dialogue has sought to create spaces for a different kind, and a different quality, of political conversation: bringing policymakers together across borders and parties, in one room, and asking them to disagree productively.

Over the past year, it has been an honour to watch that work evolve into the Policy Mission Fellowship, and to see what becomes possible when the conditions for constructive engagement are deliberately designed. What we observed were encouraging signs of something our political sector urgently needs: the rebuilding of its collective intelligence.

The pages that follow tell the story one would expect of a programme like ours. Initiatives that convene policymakers are usually judged by what they produce: recommendations adopted, proposals tabled, reports published. Those measures matter. The prototypes in this report, and above all the way they were developed, are, undoubtedly, a source of great pride for our organisation. They reflect the fellowship's essential work: creating the conditions in which principled disagreement can be converted into shared proposals on issues that demand broad-based collaboration, whether across party lines or across borders.

The team behind the European Capability Hub illustrates this work particularly well. Bringing together parliamentarians from five countries, including a member of Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada, and spanning the spectrum from liberal conservatives to progressives, it took on a question at the heart of Europe's security and economic competitiveness: how to ensure that the Union's historic increase in defence spending produces deployable, interoperable capability, rather than more equipment without a proportionate gain in security. Approached largely within national systems, this question has led to fragmented procurement, an industrial base that struggles to scale, and acquisition timelines that lag behind the technologies now shaping the battlefield. The team's members shared neither a common diagnosis of the problem nor an initial view of its remedy. Drawing in part on Ukraine's experience of faster, feedback-driven acquisition, they nonetheless developed a prototype specific enough to be presented to the highest levels of EU leadership, and one that has since shaped how its members make the case for change in their national parliaments.

Yet some of the most telling evidence of what the first Policy Mission Fellowship achieved appears in no policy document. It concerns political leadership, and what it means to lead in a Europe where differences run deep and the incentives to entrench them keep growing.

What moved me most was watching politicians act in ways that prevailing accounts of contemporary politics would not lead us to expect. Elected representatives are commonly portrayed as bound by partisan competition, the pursuit of electoral victory and the demands of permanent visibility, with little room for open inquiry, let alone for changing their minds or working with others. What we observed tells a different story. One fellow fundamentally reconsidered a long-held position after working closely with a colleague who saw the question differently. Another chose to step down from office to make room for new voices, concluding that they were no longer the right person for the work. A third spoke out against their party's line on a highly contentious question, citing the fellowship as the reason. Many reflected on how the programme had changed their understanding of their role as representatives, and began to challenge and work to change long-standing habits accordingly. Still others worked until three in the morning, going well beyond what the programme asked of them to research the evidence and test every angle of their prototype. It is these moments, more than any single policy proposal, that make me proudest of this programme.

I believe European democracies face not only a crisis of trust or of leadership, but a crisis of collective intelligence: a declining capacity to think, deliberate and decide together.

← Contents

Given the right conditions, elected representatives are, can, and should be society's most influential knowledge brokers. Their role sits at the crossroads of citizens' lived experience, expert evidence, competing values and the exercise of their political decision-making power. Understood as such, politicians occupy a unique societal function, being called to understand and hold complexity, translate it into policy ideas and proposals, and negotiate between competing truths, channelling disagreement into a sense of direction, shaping public debate, and building the coalitions required to implement durable, long-term solutions.

Our task, as actors who seek to support democracy, I believe, should therefore be less oriented towards the search for extraordinary individuals who can overcome a dysfunctional democratic system, but to help design a better democratic system, one that enables ordinary people to fulfil what is an extraordinary role.

Taken together, the prototypes, the shifts in behaviour and the sheer determination we observed over the five months of the programme suggest to me that the deliberative capacity on which our democratic resilience and renewal depends on, can be cultivated. Doing so at scale though requires more representatives willing to do substantive work across party lines, and a democratic ecosystem prepared to invest in the infrastructure that makes such work possible. Building that infrastructure has been the purpose of the Open European Dialogue, and it is the reason APROPOS - Advancing Process in Politics exists.

The Policy Mission Fellowship builds on the work of the past decade, but it raises the stakes. We undertook this work alongside the same partners who have supported a decade of investment in better political dialogue in Europe, and who showed real courage in taking this next step with us: CIDOB - the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the King Baudouin Foundation, ELIAMEP - the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, the Istituto Affari Internazionali, and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, now joined in academic partnership by the London School of Economics and Political Science. What unites us is a new level of ambition: to take the trust and the methods the Open European Dialogue has developed over ten years and put them to work on the hardest, most time-pressured decisions European parliaments now face.

This pilot programme is only the beginning. I am grateful to everyone who made it possible, and above all to the APROPOS team for their extraordinary commitment and hard work: Davide Albeggiani, Rebecca Farulli, Iris Giguet, Hailey Marleau, Isotta Ricci Bitti, Marie-Thérèse Schreiber.

Chiara Rosselli is the Head of the Open European Dialogue and the Co-founder and Executive Director of APROPOS-Advancing Process in Politics.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks, above all, go to the 25 fellows who made the first policy mission possible: Effie Achtsioglou, Yoko Alender, Meyrem Almaci, Eva Biaudet, Johan Büser, Margareta Cederfelt, Ioannis A. Kefalogiannis, Matas Maldeikis, Nacho Martín Blanco, Nikola Mažar, Claudiu-Iulius-Gavril Năsui, Federica Onori, Fitore Pacolli, Veronika Remišová, Luisa Sanz Martínez, Dr Sebastian Schäfer, Liesa Scholzen, Andris Šuvajevs, Cristina Tajani, Fred Thomas, Katrin Uhlig, Oleksandra Ustinova, Mart Võrklaev, Mihael Zmajlović and Armand Zorn. Thank you for trusting this first policy mission and each other.

We are equally indebted to the experts who gave their time, knowledge and candour to sharpen the fellows' thinking throughout the programme: Sam Alvis, Chris Aylett, Pierre-Alexandre Balland, Christian Bason, Katja Bego, Thorsten Benner, Eleonora Bertoni, Javier Borràs Arumí, Goran Buldioski, Víctor Burguete Vidal, Thanos Chatziioannou, Marie-Laure de Bergh, Victor De Decker, Alexander Evans, Nicole Grajewski, Daniel Gros, Peter Hefele, Eleanor Hevey, Martin Hullin, Abby Innes, Margot Joris, Adnan Qadir Khan, Katharina Klotz, Mark Leonard, Mariana Mazzucato, Matthew McLaughlan Merelo, Marion Messmer, James Morrison, Catherine Mulligan, Kevin Parker, Grégoire Roos, Mikael Román, Thomas Schwab, Nicholas Scott, Tiaji Sio, Alice Stollmeyer, Jessica Toale, António Valentim, Christopher Vandome, Gesine Weber, Mikael Wigell and Rowan Wilkinson.

This inaugural edition of the Policy Mission Fellowship was made possible by ten years of trust and collaboration among the partners of the Open European Dialogue: APROPOS - Advancing Process in Politics, IAI - Istituto Affari Internazionali, CIDOB - Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, ELIAMEP - the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the King Baudouin Foundation and the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Within these institutions, our particular thanks go to Agnes Kolodziej at the Robert Bosch Stiftung, Héctor Sánchez Margalef at the CIDOB - Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, and Spyros Blavoukos at ELIAMEP - the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy for their close partnership throughout the programme.

We are especially grateful to the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), which joined as our academic partner for this first edition of the Policy Mission Fellowship and welcomed our fellows so warmly that, for a time, they felt like students again. Within LSE, we thank James Ashley Morrison, whose generosity and engagement made that experience possible.

We are also grateful to the user testers, including Kaja Kallas, Alison Hunter, Tom Howes and Jaroslaw Kutylowski, whose candid, practical feedback grounded the fellows' prototypes in practice.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared and curated by Open European Dialogue based on outcomes of a collaborative process involving 25 Members of Parliament from 16 countries and 24 parties. The prototypes and ideas presented reflect the work and discussions of the participating MPs, and do not represent the position of the Open European Dialogue and its partners. The report itself – including its analysis, framing, and narrative structure – has been written and edited by Open European Dialogue and does not constitute a verbatim record of participants' statements. Final responsibility for the content, fact-checking and accuracy of the prototypes lies with the members of the respective prototype teams.

Participants were given the opportunity to review this report prior to publication. All participating Members of Parliament confirmed, prior to publication, that this report fairly represents the prototype their team developed. This confirmation does not imply endorsement of every characterisation, conclusion, or emphasis contained herein, nor does it represent a formal position of any individual Member of Parliament, political group, or national parliament.

Part of the Policy Mission Fellowship's educational purpose is to activate bottom-up, national contributions to European policymaking, bringing parliamentarians' direct experience of their own political contexts to bear on a shared European challenge. This is not, for most participating MPs, their primary field of technical expertise, and the prototypes in this report should be read accordingly: as the product of political judgement and cross-country dialogue rather than legal or legislative drafting. Further research into EU legislative procedure, competence, and feasibility would be required before any of these ideas could be transformed into implementable policy proposals.

Origins: Why a Mission on the Securitisation of Europe's Economic Power

By James Ashley Morrison and Isotta Ricci Bitti

This decade began in the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic. In those dark moments, few would have predicted that, even after defeating the virus, Europe's challenges would multiply. The last five years have seen growing geopolitical tensions, deepening complex economic interdependence, and increasing ecological fragility. The threats and realities of a radical change in the orientation of the United States have combined with the resurgence of Russia and the steady rise of China. Meanwhile, the long-standing tensions across the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere have escalated into mounting violence. Global economic integration has continued apace - even as trade war, asymmetric leverage, and neo-mercantilism weaponise interdependence. Whereas these economic tensions are sometimes overstated, the political and economic challenges of achieving sustainability are typically understated. This year, like others before, parts of Europe have been literally on fire; and yet efforts to address climate change fall short. Every indication is that the 'polycrisis' is poised to become perennial.[1]

At the same time, Europe has never had more opportunities to lead the world forward. The shift away from an ossified, East-West bipolar order creates more space to build diverse arrays of coalitions across European countries and between Europe and the world. Rapid technological innovation, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), has the potential to increase labour productivity, shifting workers toward more creative, engaging, and meaningful work. By combining these endeavours to launch new international leadership initiatives around technological development, Europe can become even more central to the burgeoning green energy revolution.

The Policy Mission Fellowship was launched to kick-start initiatives that will embrace these challenges and seize these opportunities. The term 'mission' is apt in several ways. It is a 'Mission' in the traditional sense: as an endeavour by individuals to fulfil a higher purpose, call, or duty. 'Mission' similarly describes the collection of those individuals and the sites in which they do their work. But the fellowship also embraces the more modern concept of a 'mission', as associated with the Apollo space missions of the 1960s and 1970s. In this sense, it too is a proverbial 'moonshot'–in all its boldness and ambition.

The inaugural edition of the Policy Mission Fellowship brought together 25 members of parliament from 16 European countries. They came from across the political spectrum and brought a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. The fellows formed six teams, each of which chose its own path into the challenge, whether through procurement, energy, talent, technology, or public narrative. Those starting points shaped the prototypes they developed. This is how the fellowship works. Instead of asking politicians to agree on one solution, it supports several teams working in parallel, each moving faster and further than they could alone, all towards one shared mission.

The theme of this first edition was 'The Securitisation of Europe's Economic Power', which asks how Europe can keep its economic power secure. Geopolitical tensions, energy dependence, the loss of talent, and weakening social cohesion are different kinds of challenges; but each of them now affects the security of Europe's economic power. The opportunities show what Europe stands to gain by getting this right. There is more here than meets the eye. The term 'securitisation' comes from the field of International Relations, and it comes with a specific meaning. It is the process by which issue areas are elevated from the realm of day-to-day politics and reconceptualised as existential security questions.[2]

---

[1] Juncker, Jean-Claude. ‚Speech at the Annual General Meeting of the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises.' Athens, June 21, 2016. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_16_2293

[2] Wæver, Ole. ‚Securitization and Desecuritization.' In On Security, edited by Ronnie D. Lipschutz, 46-87. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

← Contents

For instance, energy crises, international academic exchange programmes, and social cohesion were traditionally relegated to the economic, education, and social policy areas, respectively. These days, however, each is part of broader existential questions for Europe's future. Continuing energy crises and energy dependence leave Europe hostage to the whims of unfriendly, and sometimes overtly hostile, powers.

The rising barriers to, and costs of, international education threaten to undermine the ability of Europeans to cultivate the rich experiences and shared feeling that have deepened and strengthened cross-national, cross-class familial bonds across Europe. At the same time, growing social incohesion weakens the bonds within and between Europe's panoply of diverse groups. These newly securitised issue areas combine with overt security questions, such as those of military capabilities and resourcing, to form the broader theme of the first edition of the Policy Mission Fellowship.

From One Mission to Many Prototypes

Each of the chapters that follow presents one prototype developed under the policy mission. Before turning to them, it is worth expounding the concept of "policy prototypes". At the Berlin Policy Lab in May 2026, Nick Scott of ShiftFlow worked with the fellows to adapt the generic concept of "prototypes" to fit the world of policy. A prototype is a question made visible, and a policy prototype is thus the visualisation of policy questions, concerns, and ambitions.

A mission of this scale necessarily spans economic, technological, and geopolitical domains. Thus, the prototypes developed extend beyond the single service or single form that prototyping typically addresses. The fellows tested propositions about procurement, chip supply chains, energy markets, and educational infrastructure. In these domains, the 'person' a policy eventually touches may be a supplier, a regulator, a research institution or a taxpayer. Each prototype in this report specifies one such proposition precisely and concretely enough to be tested and improved.

The six teams formed around the fellows' own interests. Fellows joined the topics they cared about most, and the groups took shape from there. As a result, the teams reflect their members' diversity and heterogeneity. Most of the teams brought together parliamentarians from across national, political, and cultural divides. They were bound principally by their shared commitment to making progress on specific challenges. Often, members disagreed on the causes of the problems and the best ways to address them. Working through those differences was part of the process, and the final prototypes reflect compromise and collaborative spirit.

The parliamentarians truly were free to follow their own interests. In one case, a team dove deeply into a challenge specific to a single national context. In another, one parliamentarian developed their own prototype. Even these efforts, however, benefitted from active dialogue between these smaller teams and their larger groups. This variety of approaches reflects the range of the fellows' priorities and the different ways economic security plays out across Europe.

'**Innovation Powerhouse Europe: The Case for Sovereign Frontier Compute'** proposes to launch a European Compute & AI Sovereignty Initiative (ECoAISI) to establish the EU as an independent AI power by 2040, dramatically reducing its reliance on renting US and Chinese compute capacity. It aims to mobilise €800 billion to €1.23 trillion in public-private funding across a "sovereignty stack" of frontier compute capacity, chip design and manufacturing, and talent retention, managed under DARPA-style mission governance. Launched in first instance by a coalition of willing member states and built first on Europe's existing strengths, notably ASML and its leading research institutes, the initiative targets three to five sovereign compute zones and a reduction in dependence on non-EU providers to below 35% by 2040. It places particular emphasis on siting and investing in energy-efficient compute where grid, energy and water conditions are most suitable, and on talent retention, including through the exploration of worker-owned deep-tech cooperatives as an innovative European ownership model.

‘**The Fifth Freedom’** builds on nearly five decades of the Erasmus programme’s success - more than 12 million Europeans have taken part in it - to propose a substantial expansion of its funding and ambition. It does this, in part, by enshrining the freedom to learn, research, and share knowledge across borders as a robust ‘fifth freedom’ of the EU Single Market.

‘Secure, Clean, and Affordable Energy’ responds to a stark fact: Europe sends €1 billion abroad every day to import energy, much of it to actors with no particular interest in European stability. The three prototypes developed under this initiative seek to strengthen Europe’s energy security and, in turn, its economic resilience. The first proposes a narrative strategy to position energy independence not merely as an environmental imperative, but as a cornerstone of European security and economic competitiveness, to increase political and financial momentum. The second advocates for a targeted and emboldened EU Energy Resilience Fund to finance grid modernisation, energy storage and cross-border interconnections. The third promotes a toolbox for decentralised energy production and consumption, ranging from household emergency energy kits to microgrids and energy communities, to strengthen resilience and safeguard economic activity during crises.

‘Security Starts at Home: Reframing Civic Resilience in Belgium’ asks why social cohesion so rarely features in how Europe thinks about security, and what it would take to change that. As governments invest heavily in defence and crisis preparedness, cohesion is too often treated as a social cost competing for the same budget. The prototype argues the opposite: trust, belonging, and civic participation are part of what makes a society secure. Indeed, a country divided from within is easier to destabilise from outside. This is not a call for more spending but for a different vision of security, one that gives cohesion the prominence it has lost. Belgium, with its linguistic and institutional complexity, serves as the testing ground. It starts small in the parliament of the German-speaking Community and builds the case from there.

'Sweden: The Case for a National Innovation Push' applies the mission’s logic to a single national case. Sweden ranks among Europe’s strongest innovation performers, yet it struggles to turn research into commercial value, and no standing body sets a direction for innovation policy that lasts across changes of government. The prototype proposes a cross-party innovation committee in the Riksdag, its mandate set by the Board of the Parliament and supported by an independent advisory group from business, universities, and trade unions. The committee would give parties a shared space to work on Sweden’s innovation challenges and set a common direction over the long term. It was developed by two parliamentarians from opposite sides of the chamber, reflecting the commitment from both government and opposition that the committee needs in order to work.

‘From Spending to Capability: A Shared Acquisition Platform for Europe’ proposes a shared acquisition platform for defence technologies whose operational value changes faster than conventional procurement cycles allow, in particular drones and counter-drone systems. Europe is committing serious funding to defence without yet settling how it will be bought. The European Capability Hub pools demand around capabilities identified as strategic at European level and procures them in short, feedback-informed, recurring cycles. Predictable demand gives suppliers a basis for investing in production capacity, supporting a European industrial base with productive SMEs, and gives governments the interoperability and technological currency that fragmented national procurement makes difficult.

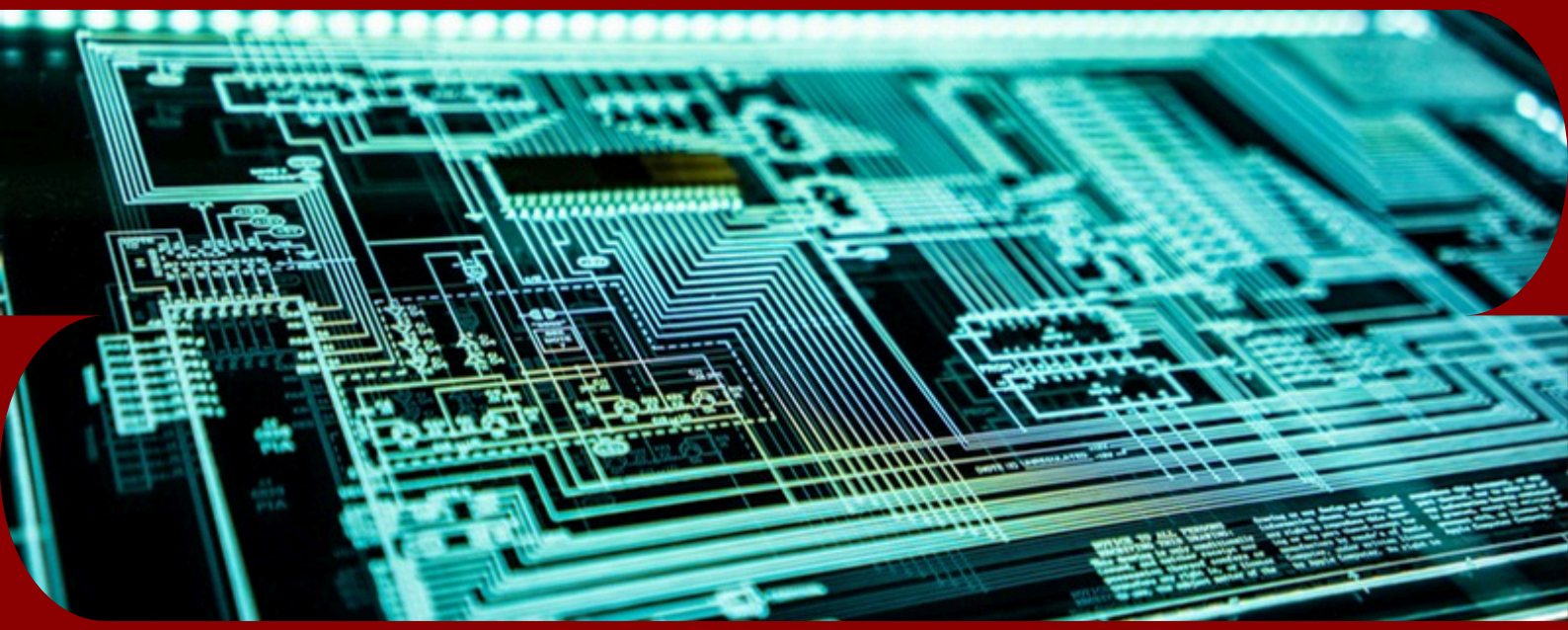
The challenges that will shape Europe’s next decade, from chip shortages to energy systems to economic security, are too big for any one country to solve. Yet, Europe’s foundational democratic norms and institutions (wisely) ensure that the politicians who can do the most to address these challenges are elected at home, answer to voters at home, and spend most of their time engaged in domestic debates.

What happens when national parliamentarians are given the chance to build bridges across borders, parties, and ideologies? The Policy Mission Fellowship creates the space for leading politicians, from across Europe, to think, argue, and build together. These parliamentarians' six policy prototypes were powered by their ambition to strengthen Europe's economic security. Every prototype plays a unique part toward that end. None could have been developed from a single national dialogue.

Those prototypes are worth reading for their own sake. But they also reflect a deep, and broad, ambition to cooperate for the sake of safeguarding, advancing, and celebrating Europe. Given that Europe's greatest challenges and opportunities will increasingly reach across borders, the mission remains to follow the example of these politicians—all of whom are doing the same.

James Ashley Morrison is an Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is also the Deputy Head of Department (Education).

Isotta Ricci Bitti is the Deputy Head of the Open European Dialogue and the Co-founder and Managing Director of APROPOS-Advancing Process in Politics.



Innovation Powerhouse Europe: The Case for Sovereign Frontier Compute

Prototype developed by

Federica Onori *(Action, Italy)*
Luisa Sanz *(Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Spain)*
Sebastian Schäfer *(Alliane90/The Greens, Germany)*
Armand Zorn *(Social Democratic Party of Germany, Germany)*

Coordinator

Chiara Rosselli

Analysis and editing by

Open European Dialogue

← Contents

Innovation Powerhouse Europe: The Case for Sovereign Frontier Compute

A deep-tech strategy for European AI sovereignty

A series of interconnected problem areas are weakening the European Union's competitive positioning and contributing to the risks in the securitisation of its economic power. One prototyping team of parliamentarians focused on the challenge of developing the EU as a global innovation powerhouse by 2040. The critical problems that the team addressed are as follows.

Growing securitisation of economic relations. In this development, technological and economic dependency can be used for coercion,including by ostensible allies, leaving the EU exposed to the will of external actors.

High-tech investment misallocation. The EU lags in private high-tech research and development (R&D), and the problem is one of investment distribution as much as one of volume: what firms invest goes disproportionately to mid-tech incumbents, in the automotive sector above all, rather than to the frontier sectors where strategic and financial returns concentrate.

Lack of sovereign control of data and digital infrastructure. Without this, the EU cannot credibly claim to be able to govern its own economy or safeguard its democratic institutions.

Fragmented coordination and spending on shared strategic objectives. The need for collective investment is widely acknowledged, yet solutions are repeatedly obstructed by competing national interests, so that the EU still invests as separate countries rather than as one actor, even in the critical sectors where concerted action matters most.

The 'valley of death' or Europe's failure to scale. While the EU's start-up ecosystem has rapidly expanded, firms falter at the medium-to-large stage. This is the point at which lack of growth capital as well as of labour and corporate flexibility significantly impacts the ability of start-ups to scale into major players.

The systematic externalisation of skilled human capital. The EU produces world-class talent but fails to retain it, as researchers and founders move to deeper capital markets and more ambitious ecosystems abroad.

Driven by considerations concerning how to secure the EU's economic and competitive position in an increasingly contested global order, the team approached these questions not as matters of competitiveness alone but also as questions of security.

There is a broader concern with the EU's diminishing global relevance and a need to articulate a vision for its future geopolitical standing that would be, and feel, relevant and purposeful. This recognises the importance not only of maintaining a competitive edge as a global economic power, but also of attending to the psychological dimensions bound up with securing the EU's position over the coming century.

The EU must be perceived by citizens as an entity of communal value, animated by a communal ethos capable of counterbalancing the more corrosive individualist tendencies of contemporary society. There is also a need to articulate a positive vision able to reactivate a sense of collective pride and to displace the prevailing self-perception of the EU as a laggard in innovation and in decline relative to rising powers. In the absence of such a forward-looking vision, the stagnation of the European project carries serious risks of fragilisation.

From this follows a call to restore the EU's capacity to shape economic policy rather than to keep intervening to repair a failing system through short-term interventions. 'Don't emulate, create', in the words of one team member - a formulation that captures the team's conviction that the EU is positioned to articulate its own conception of a global economic power.

The EU's fragmentation is not an accident but a feature of its original design. The post-war European project was built for a different order - and to act as a subject rather than an actor, with soft power as the compromise and strong strategic leadership never the blueprint. The institutional architecture that followed was shaped accordingly. The consequences of this are still visible today: decisions on funding and procurement remain siloed among member states, so that the EU, in effect, continues to buy as separate countries. The design has outlasted the world it was built for, and the EU is now asked to act as a strategic power through institutions constructed to prevent it from becoming one.

A further set of fragilities contributes to an acute sense of multiple and compounding vulnerabilities forming around the EU, and to a recognition of the need to establish autonomy in critical domains. The examples most frequently cited - exposure in global supply chains and reliance on the dollar as a reserve currency - point to the case for policies that strengthen resilience to external shocks and mitigate their consequences for citizens' living conditions.

Closely related is a shared concern with market fragmentation. Whatever element of completion of the single market that is within reach should be treated as a low-hanging fruit with significant compounding effects for the EU's global standing, and as a direct instrument for the securitisation of its economic power. Bound up with this are concerns regarding over-regulation and the divergent administrative burdens and national legal regimes that impair the functioning of the EU as a harmonised market.

The question is not merely about a dichotomy between regulation and deregulation but also whether the EU has the capacity for long-term strategic thought. Here the mission drew on a formulation attributed to France's President Emmanuel Macron that captures the present predicament in relation to artificial intelligence (AI) - 'We can never regulate something we don't invent' - and that points to the broader imperative of establishing EU ownership of critical technologies.

Overall, the EU now operates within a regime of increased fragmentation of the world economy, and may have to face a new era of strategic capitalism, in which power is increasingly understood as the capacity to control flows of capital, data and technology, and in which strategic sectors must be assessed not only for their economic output but also for the lock-in effects that can translate technological dominance in a given sector into durable geopolitical leverage. Within such a regime, the capacity to generate and retain frontier technological capability ceases to be a purely economic objective and becomes a critical condition for autonomy.

The team judged two questions to be most pressing:

- How can the EU achieve the largest capitalisation of companies in innovative, high-technology sectors?
- How can the EU achieve a higher ratio of private R&D expenditure to GDP?

The EU does not lack the raw materials to lead in innovation: it produces world-class research and scientific excellence, possesses highly skilled talent and enjoys a large and stable Single Market - the last a particularly valuable asset in an increasingly volatile global environment. A critical weakness, though, lies in how these assets are organised and deployed, particularly in the way innovation is funded. For example, public R&D is scattered and inefficiently allocated across too many sectors, and fragmented further among national programmes that overlap and pull toward divergent priorities - and, most consequentially, in the structure of private investment.

The EU is caught in a 'mid-technology trap.' The gap in R&D relative to the United States is found overwhelmingly in the private sector. Private R&D spending is strongly correlated with the presence of large firms in high-innovation sectors - firms the EU largely lacks. In their absence, private capital remains concentrated in the mid-technology industries that dominate the EU economy, above all in the automotive sector, rather than in the disruptive, high-risk fields where the largest economic returns are found. This is a principal driver of the divergence in economic performance between the EU and the United States.

The consequences are serious not only for economic returns and for command of the technologies widely regarded as critical to the future, but also for talent. The EU produces world-class research but possesses neither the large high-innovation firms nor the dense clusters of universities, companies and investors that would allow it to retain talent and convert it into scale and commercial advantage.

Innovation is no longer evenly distributed across sectors. It is concentrated in, and increasingly flows from, AI, on which the productivity of every other sector now greatly depends. Increasingly, to lead in innovation is therefore to lead in AI. A broad innovation ambition is necessary to address a specific constraint at the heart of the EU's AI development: that advances in AI are inseparable from access to large-scale computational power.

From this constraint follows a structural choice. The EU can continue to rent its strategic computational capacity from the United States and China, or it can build the sovereign capability to design, train and govern advanced models on its own terms. Dependence on external platforms for the systems that will define economic power, defence capability and geopolitical stability in the next decades is an unacceptable vulnerability - one that, as recent geopolitical ruptures have shown, adversaries and even ostensible allies can use for coercion. The decisive requirement is therefore not to aim at industrial resilience in mature-node chips, but to direct EU resources to achieving autonomous frontier compute: the capacity to train and deploy advanced models within the EU, under EU jurisdiction, and free from the permission, throttling or intermediation of others. The prototype developed by the team designed to resolve this. Rather than a policy option or incentive structure, it embodies a sovereignty doctrine.

Policy Prototype: ECoAISI - The European Compute & AI Sovereignty Initiative

The prototype presented here is a cross-border, cross-party policy prototype for European technological sovereignty by 2040, addressing the challenges presented above.

Access the designed version of the policy prototype here.

Europe must build sovereign AI computing capabilities to reach tech sovereignty by 2040

Europe confronts a structural choice in the unfolding artificial intelligence (AI) revolution: it can continue to rent its strategic computational capacity from China and the United States or it can build the sovereign capability to design, train and govern advanced models on its own terms.

The Frontier Project is conceived on the basis of treating as non-negotiable Europe's need to build the sovereign capability to design, train and govern advanced models on its own terms. Remaining dependent on Chinese and US platforms is a vulnerability Europe cannot responsibly accept, particularly not within the context of an increasingly adversarial geopolitical context. Overcoming this dependency critically hinges on its capacity to train and deploy frontier AI models within Europe.
The Frontier Project is designed not to concern itself with mature-node chips for automotive use but to advance bold investment in the pursuit of autonomous frontier compute as a strategic imperative and sovereign infrastructure.
Europe has the talent and scientific excellence to do this but it lacks the funding environment and long-term vision to retain these, and it continues to lose its most valuable resource - highly skilled human capital - to foreign actors.

The European Compute & AI Sovereignty Initiative (ECoAISI) is not an incentive mechanism; it is a sovereignty doctrine. In an era of hybrid warfare, when the security of citizens, enterprises and public institutions is inseparable from technological resilience, Europe must own its critical technological infrastructure and eliminate structural dependencies. As Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the recurring tensions over the Strait of Hormuz have demonstrated, different actors can and will instrumentalise these dependencies as vectors of coercion. Sovereignty has a cost. Dependence has a far greater one.

Activating the Sovereignty Stack

The Frontier Project will secure the European Union's autonomous frontier-compute capability by activating public-private funding partnerships across the sovereignty stack, built on three layers - chip design, chip manufacturing and talent - and sustained by two cross-cutting foundations - sovereign demand and unified mission governance in the style of the United States' Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), with a target mobilisation of €800 billion to €1.23 trillion by 2040.

The Sovereignty Stack

Frontier Compute Capacity

Sovereign training clusters, data centres, energy-integrated compute - capacity to train frontier models under European jurisdiction

Chip Design & Development

Architechture, IP/ EDA tools and advanced packaging

Chips Manufacturing Infrastructure

Sovereign jobs, photonics

Talent Retention

Deep-tech cooperatives, corporate-university institutes

Sovereign Demand

Cross-cutting foundation

DARPA-Style Mission Governance

Cross-cutting foundation

The joint funding and deep-tech acceleration programme will be governed along the following principles.

1. Frontier compute as the explicit core of the mission.

Sovereignty in AI is, before anything else, sovereignty in compute, measured in training capacity; that is, the capacity to train frontier models within the EU, not generic hyperscale capacity - compute that cannot train a frontier model is not sovereign compute. ECoAISI is therefore directed exclusively at where private incentive is currently lagging: the frontier training infrastructure that the market will not finance at the required scale or speed, not least because of the very long return horizon this entails.

For reasons of strategic independence, security and a global competitive position, infrastructure of this calibre cannot be left to the market alone. The justification is not only that the EU under-invests in private research and development relative to the United States but that the composition of its investment is skewed: its high-tech investment is disproportionately absorbed by mid-tech incumbents, in the automotive sector above all, rather than reaching the frontier layers where strategic and financial returns concentrate.

ECoAISI accordingly commits to meeting quantified sovereign-compute targets: a defined training capacity expressed in exaFLOPs; a specified number and scale of frontier-class training clusters; guaranteed preferential access for public, research and enterprise actors; and a secured supply of AI accelerators, produced domestically or held in assured redundancy.

2. Embed disciplined, strict, mission-oriented management across all tiers, modelled on DARPA-style governance.

Programme managers of the highest technical calibre must be empowered with real autonomy to allocate funds, high risk tolerance, milestone-based staged financing, sunset clauses and the authority to terminate projects that do not technically perform or miss anchor-demand milestones. The experience of DARPA shows that innovation outcomes depend less on the volume of funding than on how funding is directed and managed. On a budget equivalent to barely 0.01% of the United States' GDP, DARPA funded the early research behind the internet, stealth technology and speech recognition. What distinguished it was not the scale of its spending but the way it selected and managed projects.

ECoAISI adapts this approach to the EU's institutional conditions and, for the large-scale shared compute that no member state can efficiently provide on its own, suggests combining the DARPA model with a model similar to the pooled scientific infrastructure of the European Council for Nuclear Research.

3. Secure sovereign demand first and reform strategic procurement to enable it.

EU institutions, defence bodies and public administrations must act as anchor customers and first sovereign trainers: the initial committed buyers whose guaranteed offtake gives EU suppliers the revenue certainty to raise capital and reach scale, and whose workloads become the first real-world training demand for sovereign systems. Demand of this kind must be made concrete through instruments such as pre-commercial procurement and advance purchase commitments, under which public bodies buy against performance rather than promises. This in turn requires the EU and its member states to amend procurement and state-aid laws to permit the greater flexibility that critical, existential investments demand and the high-risk, high-strategic-value bets sovereignty depends on.

4. A public-private investment infrastructure.

ECoAISI targets a public commitment of between €800 billion and €1.23 trillion by 2040: €720 billion to €1.08 trillion of investment across the three layers of the stack - frontier compute, chip design and manufacturing, and talent - complemented by €80-150 billion of committed public procurement. Mobilising sums of this magnitude will require explicit private capital crowd-in measures, including first-loss tranches and guarantees to absorb early-stage risk, European Investment Bank-backed loans, public equity stakes and advance purchase commitments.
Co-financing ratios are estimated at 1:3 for compute investments, 1:4 for semiconductor investments and 1:2 for talent retention and deep-tech. To make the financing realistic at this scale, the fund-based architecture should be complemented by direct member-state financing on the Next Generation EU model - a recovery-fund-style instrument of common borrowing - rather than relying on pooled EU funds and crowded-in private capital alone.

A commitment of this magnitude raises the question not only of affordability but of absorption - whether the EU can disburse this extent of funding efficiently over 15 years, which requires financing design fixes to minimise fragmentation and friction, such as a single gateway and rulebook, routed through the new European Competitiveness Fund, to remove institutional fragmentation; capital released in milestone-gated tranches with sunset clauses and termination authority so that funds are released only as capability is demonstrated; and real-time commit-contract-pay tracking to close the oversight gap identified by the European Court of Auditors in earlier programmes.

5. Embed talent-retention incentives from the outset as key strategic infrastructure.

To succeed, the Frontier Project requires that the EU address human capital and talent retention aggressively: it must stop training the world's best engineers only to lose them to economic rivals, and instead channel its world-class research into European companies and support joint corporate-university institutes, thereby creating European jobs and strengthening European-owned technology. Talent-retention strategies must be integrated into ECoAISI from its inception and resourced accordingly. Because such measures are difficult to implement, slow to mature and yield returns only over an extended horizon, they are prone to under-investment.

A large-scale pooled instrument on the Next Generation EU model offers is appropriate for such funding. The funding should support three levers:

- Training researchers to become founders and company leaders, drawing on entrepreneur-pairing programmes such as DARPA's Embedded Entrepreneur Initiative, which links experienced entrepreneurs with publicly funded research teams.

- Recognising and addressing competitive compensation as a crucial lever for retention; for example, exempting strategically critical roles from the pay ceilings that constrain publicly funded bodies.

- A reserved share of funding and privileged access for worker-owned deep-tech firms, where researchers hold a stake in what they build, as modelled by i+Med S. Coop., the science-based deep-tech venture in Spain. Beyond retaining talent and shielding intellectual property from acquisition and relocation outside the EU, this third lever has a wider significance: the cooperative model offers a template to develop a new and distinctly European form of enterprise, and an opportunity for the EU to test innovative models of ownership at the technological frontier. While the first two levers correct known disadvantages, the third is a bet that the EU could lead not only in technology but in the societal arrangements that govern it.

6. Energy-efficient AI as a designed pillar.

Hyperscale data centres and fabrication plants depend on electricity, water, grid access, land and permits. These are core constraints on the feasibility of the entire compute layer, not secondary considerations. The Frontier Project will thus include an energy plan based on renewable power-purchase agreements, sites adjacent to firm low-carbon generation, waste-heat recovery and efficient cooling requirements. The scale of the energy challenge connected to AI is now well documented: the International Energy Agency projects that global data-centre electricity demand will more than double by 2030 to roughly 945 TWh, with AI as the principal driver. An energy requirement of this scale and the related costs, if properly handled, strengthen rather than weaken the case for ECoAISI.

By creating a specific mission-line on energy-efficient AI, governed by DARPA-style performance-per-watt milestones and the authority to terminate inefficient projects, The Frontier Project can turn a constraint into a competitive advantage - connecting directly to ongoing energy-sovereignty efforts and climate-tech priorities. To that end, compute campuses must be located through assessments of grid, energy and water technical suitability rather than the political balance among EU member states, ensuring a stronger protection against fragmentation, political capture and allocation risks.

7. Pursue sequenced sovereignty.

Rather than attempting to internalise every link of the semiconductor chain at once, ECoAISI pursues sovereignty in three sequenced phases, avoiding dissipation of capital and credibility. The first phase aims to secure the layers that confer autonomous frontier-model capability and where European leadership already exists: sovereign compute, chip design, advanced packaging and lithography, where the companies ASML and IMEC give the EU genuine leverage. The second phase aims to build redundant capacity where dependence is currently acceptable but creates strategic vulnerability. The third phase aims to work towards closing the remaining critical gaps over a longer-term horizon. Each phase is gated by DARPA-style milestones so that capital is made available only as capability is demonstrated. Phase three takes into account that complete independence might not be realistic, economically efficient or necessary - no major power, even the United States, is fully independent across the stack.

What matters is not owning every link but holding decisive leverage in those that confer real strategic power while relying on secure interdependence with a diversified set of values-aligned partners in the rest.

8. Defence-focused and dual-use innovation.

A significant share of funding should be dedicated to defence and dual-use technologies to bolster foundational capability for strategic autonomy, cybersecurity resilience and the protection of citizens, enterprises and public services from foreign threats, and also because defence spending directed towards frontier technology yields a dual return that conventional platforms do not: it buys security while building economic and industrial strength. Redirecting even a modest portion of conventional defence expenditure toward sovereign AI and dual-use capability is among the highest-return moves available. Defence is also the domain in which the concept of government as an early, committed customer demonstrably works - as the case of Palantir and SpaceX illustrate - giving firms the demand certainty needed to raise capital and reach scale. However, this anchoring effect is strongest in defence precisely because the sector's procurement cycles tolerate long development horizons, and it should not be assumed to be applicable wholesale to faster-moving civilian sectors, where government demand is a weaker driver. In evaluating and modelling the success of DARPA-style mission governance, it is important to consider the role of defence-driven public anchor demand.

9. A replicable blueprint and validated institutional model for strategic technology acceleration.

Beyond its immediate output, the Frontier Project develops a further strategic asset for the EU: a validated model of institutional architecture for deploying public capital toward frontier capability. Once proven on AI chips, frontier compute and semiconductor infrastructure, the model would become a template that the EU can redeploy wherever the market under-provides strategic capability. A later phase should accordingly extend the mechanism to quantum computing - piloting the model on a second frontier while the first is consolidated - with a milestone-gated tranche reserved to kick-start a coordinated effort in high-risk, high-reward quantum development by 2030, to be spun out as a dedicated programme on proven foundations. Applied this way, ECoAISI positions Europe to establish leadership in an emerging field rather than to recover ground already ceded to competitors.

10. A coalition-of-the-willing approach.

ECoAISI is designed to be launched with a first coalition of committed member states undertaking an initial five-year phase that can subsequently grow into an EU-level coordinated effort. This avoids making progress contingent on unanimity among member states, allowing those prepared to move first to establish the mechanism and demonstrate its results before broader participation is sought.

Target Outcomes and Guardrails



The Frontier Project will not subsidise infrastructure without secured anchor demand, duplicate the roles of Chips JU or EuroHPC, or allow funding to become a national-allocation exercise that produces sub-scale projects. Its unique contribution is to develop frontier-compute autonomy and the critical layers around it. It will also distinguish between mature automotive chips and advanced AI chips, recognising that they address fundamentally different technological needs. Finally, the project will avoid committing the bulk of its funding before technological trajectories are clearer, applying staged, milestone-gated financing throughout.

The Frontier Project in Action

Phase 1 (2026-2027) | Make it about sovereignty and win the room.

The Frontier Project begins not as a subsidy but as a question of sovereignty: Who should control the technology that will run the EU's hospitals, defence and economy? While the EU negotiates its next long-term budget, the case is made openly to citizens and political leaders across party lines so that the consensus is in place before money is allocated. Consultations are held with allies - national agencies such as the Spanish Agency for the Supervision of Artificial Intelligence - to ensure early ownership. Framed this way, the project earns the broad, cross-party backing it needs to survive changes of government and last all the way to 2040.

Phase 2 (2026-2028) | Launch coalition and establish states as first customers.

A coalition of willing countries launches an initial five-year phase with national funds, using the European framework for joint strategic projects. Crucially, demand comes first: public administrations, hospitals and defence bodies commit to being the first customers through pre-commercial procurement. With a buyer guaranteed from Day One, the biggest risk disappears and private investors gain the confidence to invest alongside public funds. The effort can then be folded into the EU budget, as negotiations allow, and the European Competitiveness Fund.

Phase 3 (2028-2033)

Build where the EU already leads, with clean energy by design.

Rather than chasing prestige factories, the EU builds where it already holds a decisive edge: the machines that make the chips (ASML), advanced packaging and leading research institutes. A small number of sites are chosen to maximise technical capacity: power, water and grid access, not allocated through political distribution. Each site is planned around its own clean energy supply from the start. These are the first building blocks of sovereignty: facilities, grids and thousands of skilled jobs.

Keep talent by letting it own what it builds.

In parallel, the EU supports the creation of worker-owned deep-tech cooperatives, working hand in hand with universities, to design chips with excellent computing power while remaining energy-efficient. To make this work in practice, worker ownership is paired with patient public and private capital, so that engineers share in what they create while firms can still raise capital to grow. Because the people who build the technology also own a stake in it, the best minds gain a real reason to stay and build in the EU and know-how stays anchored in local communities.

Phase 4 (2032-2037) | Build AI with European values and regain training sovereignty.

Companies, universities and the defence community jointly develop sovereign AI models with European principles built in from the start: human oversight, accountability and safety, in line with the EU's AI rulebook. Training sovereignty is achieved in stages: first by guaranteeing that EU actors can train on compute held under EU jurisdiction, then by shifting that training onto efficient, European-designed accelerators as they mature. The circle sequentially closes all critical vulnerabilities in the EU's frontier compute infrastructure pipeline. European idiosyncrasy and values become a source of competitive advantage. An AI that is neither American nor Chinese but built around the EU's principles of trust, rights and accountability, is something that the world will increasingly want and that only the EU can supply.

Phase 5 (2032-2037) | By 2024, the EU is an independent AI power, set to lead in future technologies.

With the foundations tried and tested, the EU moves towards securing the final layers of its technological sovereignty - those most demanding yet still viable - and stands as an independent AI and computing power, competing not by imitating others but on its own terms and values, no longer simply renting its strategic capabilities. European idiosyncrasy becomes Europe's competitive edge. The same disciplined machinery then begins to scale toward the next frontier, quantum, not only securing full technological sovereignty, but positioning the EU to lead on cutting-edge technologies and redistributing its gains to citizens. The continent owns its future rather than having to borrow it.

How This Solution Adresses the Problem

Developed around a single, focused objective, the policy prototype speaks directly to the problems this mission set out to address.

It addresses sovereignty as a non-negotiable and a singular focus. The prototype is a targeted yet profoundly ambitious deep-technological sovereignty programme. Rather than addressing innovation through a broad-spectrum approach, it concentrates on a single foundational domain - sovereign frontier compute - as the capability on which the EU's autonomy, security and economic innovation will increasingly depend. It proceeds from the premise that the EU's capacity to design, train and govern advanced models on its own terms must be treated as a non-negotiable objective, and not as one market-acceleration or incentive objective among many competing economic-policy options. The prototype is articulated as a sovereignty doctrine: a framework for directing the EU's long-term political and economic strategy, warranting the same order of commitment and investment from member states as, say, conventional defence.

It addresses the EU's critical high-technology R&D gap to create the conditions for a significant and sustainable long-term return on investment for the EU's economy and citizens. By directing public capital to the frontier layer of technology development that private investment is currently neglecting, the prototype targets the specific misallocation underlying the EU's mid-technology trap - given the diffusion of AI across all sectors, even a partial correction would carry a substantial multiplier for productivity.

It secures EU ownership over critical infrastructure, converting dependency and lack of vision for the economic future into sovereign control of critical security and economic assets. Control of critical computational infrastructure is the precondition not only for governing AI - for setting the terms of its use rather than accepting those of others - but also for capturing its economic returns: by building capability rather than renting it, the EU would position itself as a producer, and not merely a consumer, in the domains where the highest strategic and financial value will concentrate.

Its scale and ambition are commensurate with the structural weaknesses that keep the EU in a reactive posture. Conceived as an intervention capable of shaping the future rather than as a marginal corrective, the prototype is an instrument through which the EU could articulate a model of its own - replicating neither the US one nor the Chinese one, but asserting its voice; not a middle ground between the two, but a legitimate alternative

It corrects the defeatist narratives that are constraining the EU's innovation ecosystem. Proceeding from the premise that the EU is capable of leadership rather than condemned to follow, the prototype enacts a forward-looking and bold vision for reframing the EU from innovation laggard to shaper of its own technological trajectory. This reframing is not merely rhetorical: entrepreneurs and investors consulted during the prototyping stressed that the persistent narrative of EU decline actively depresses risk appetite and deters capital, and that the EU must instead reward risk-taking and celebrate high-technology breakthroughs and entrepreneurship as tangible preconditions of a thriving ecosystem.

It positions the to shape the rules rather than merely observe them. A technology cannot be governed by those who do not possess it: having a capability is the precondition for determining the terms of its use. If the wishes to see a future for AI built in line with its own values, it must first command the means to build it.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are informed by the prototyping phase and by user testing conducted with senior stakeholders, among them the CEO of a leading European AI company, the Executive Director of a national AI agency, a Research Director and Fellow at a prominent European economics research centre, and a C-level executive responsible for large-scale public procurement projects.

General Recommendations

1. Europe needs a narrative shift and an ambitious Tech agenda.

Entrepreneurs consulted warned that Europe's narrative of decline deters founders. Ambitious messaging, incentives and public discourse rewarding risk-taking over penalising failure, and greater public recognition of technology pioneers should be central to the agenda.

2. Build a culture of private investment in European technology.

Europe's ample household savings sit largely in low-risk deposits while its venture market remains thin. Citizens and companies should be made more aware of opportunities to invest directly in European technology, supported by reformed pension and savings schemes and state-sponsored technology funds.

3. Further examine labour frameworks and the role of labour flexibility in enabling scale.

Labour-market rigidities and barriers to cross-border remote work constitute part of Europe's scale-up challenge. Flexicurity models and targeted arrangements for high-growth, high-technology firms merit further examination.

Prototype-Specific Recommendations

1. Pursue complementary EU reforms that reinforce Project Frontier.

ECoAISI's impact depends on wider ecosystem reform: refocusing Horizon Europe on competitiveness gains, building on existing reform proposals, strengthening EIC scale-up capital to bridge the valley of death, and completing the single market.

2. Reform procurement and state-aid rules to enable public anchor demand.

Procurement and competition law, including state-aid provisions, restricts public bodies from buying from young firms or from products still in development, as stakeholders interviewed noted is the case in Spain. This constrains the programme's demand-first approach. Targeted EU and national reforms to increase procurement flexibility warrant further research.

3. Keep working to clearly establish the evidential case for public intervention in frontier compute.

Public financing at this scale requires an explicit demonstration of market failure under state-aid rules. Further research should examine whether the national-security rationale long used to justify defence investment can extend to sovereign compute, and set out a rigorous, evidence-based case for discussion.

4. Stress-test the assumed private leverage ratios.

The programme's leverage ratios (1:4, 1:3, 1:6) presuppose investor confidence that Europe's thin venture market does not yet provide. Further work should stress-test them against realistic capital depth, long investment horizons and downside scenarios.

5. Invest in further research and mapping to demonstrate differentiation from existing European instruments.

Further work should set out how the programme's objectives and approach differ from existing instruments, such as EuroHPC, the AI Gigafactories and the Chips Act, establishing a clear case for complementarity rather than duplication.

6. Engage key institutional allies early to build shared ownership.

The programme's rollout should involve national AI agencies, such as Spain's AESIA, alongside research centres and industry from the outset, so that potential allies are recognised as co-owners and active contributors to the initiative.

Background Materials

Background Preparatory Document for ECoAISI - The European Compute & AI Sovereignty Initiative

Best-Practice Research for 'ECoAISI - The European Compute & AI Sovereignty Initiative', Luisa Sanz

Research Package compiled by Javier Borràs Arumí (Investigator and Editor, CIDOB)

Bibliography

AKD. (2024). Virtual workforce, real consequences: Understanding the social security and tax implications of cross-border teleworking. https://www.akd.eu/insights/virtual-workforce-real-consequences-understanding-the-social-security-and-tax-implications-of-cross-border-teleworking

Asociación Española de Banca, CECA, & Unión Nacional de Cooperativas de Crédito. (2026, February). Las asociaciones bancarias AEB, CECA y Unacc celebran el inicio de la interconexión de Bizum con 13 países europeos [Press release]. https://aebanca.es/actualidad/notas-de-prensa/las-asociaciones-bancarias-aeb-ceca-y-unacc-celebran-el-inicio-de-la-interconexion-de-bizum-con-13-paises-europeos/

AUVASA. (n.d.). Flota de vehículos. https://www.auvasa.es/empresa/flota-de-vehiculos/

Ayuntamiento de Valladolid. (n.d.-a). AUVASA realiza pruebas con un autobús propulsado por hidrógeno. https://www.valladolid.es/es/actualidad/noticias/auvasa-realiza-pruebas-autobus-propulsado-hidrogeno

Ayuntamiento de Valladolid. (n.d.-b). Valladolid estrena nuevo servicio de bicicletas públicas. https://www.valladolid.es/es/actualidad/noticias/valladolid-estrena-nuevo-servicio-bicicletas-publicas-mil-b

Azoulay, P., Fuchs, E., Goldstein, A. P., & Kearney, M. (2019). Funding breakthrough research: Promises and challenges of the "ARPA model". Innovation Policy and the Economy, 19, 69-96. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/699933

Banking.Vision. (2026, March). Wero 2025/2026: The European payment engine is picking up speed. https://banking.vision/en/development-wero-2025-2026/

Bastianin, A., Castelnovo, P., Florio, M., & Giunta, A. (2019). Technological learning and innovation gestation lags at the frontier of science: From CERN procurement to patents [Preprint]. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/pdf/1905.09552

Bizum. (2026). Bizum en 2025: 3,4 millones de bizums diarios e inicio de la interconexión con otras soluciones europeas. https://bizum.com/es/notas/bizum-en-2025-34-millones-de-bizums-diarios-e-inicio-de-la-interconexion-con-otras-soluciones-europeas

Bonvillian, W. B. (2018). DARPA and its ARPA-E and IARPA clones. Industrial and Corporate Change, 27(5), 897-914. https://academic.oup.com/icc/article-abstract/27/5/897/5096003

Bruenig, M. (2013, May 15). Mondragon cooperatives use capital accounts. https://mattbruenig.com/2013/05/15/mondragon-cooperatives-use-capital-accounts/

CDTI Innovación. (n.d.). Innvierte. https://www.cdti.es/innvierte
Centre for Future Generations. (n.d.). Building CERN for AI. https://cfg.eu/building-cern-for-ai/

CERN. (2026). 13 new projects at CERN funded by Europe in 2026. https://home.cern/news/news/knowledge-sharing/13-new-projects-cern-funded-europe-2026

Chips Joint Undertaking. (2024). About the Chips Joint Undertaking. European Union. https://www.chips-ju.europa.eu/

Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial Intelligence Research in Europe (CAIRNE). (2025). The CERN model: Ten key principles for big science "made in Europe". https://cairne.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/cern-model-10-principles.pdf

Datos.gob.es. (n.d.). Mapa de la compra pública de innovación (CPI) en España. https://datos.gob.es/es/catalogo/e05071301-mapa-de-la-compra-publica-de-innovacion-cpi-en-espana

Draghi, M. (2024). The future of European competitiveness: A competitiveness strategy for Europe. European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/draghi-report_en

España Digital 2026. (n.d.). [Compra pública de innovación: taxonomy page]. https://espanadigital.gob.es/taxonomy/term/495

European Business Magazine. (2026, March). Europe's $24 trillion break-up with Visa and Mastercard. https://europeanbusinessmagazine.com/europes-24-trillion-breakup-visa-mastercard/

European Commission. (2004). Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems. Official Journal of the European Union.

European Commission. (2025). The EU's long-term budget 2028-2034 and the European Competitiveness Fund. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en

European Court of Auditors. (2025). The EU Chips Act [Special report].
European Innovation Council. (n.d.). STEP Scale Up scheme. https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/step-scale_en

European Innovation Council. (2026a). EIC work programme 2026 and STEP Scale-up. European Commission. https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/eic-2026-work-programme_en

European Innovation Council. (2026b, April 27). Eight European startups set to receive scale-up funding from the EIC under the STEP Scale Up scheme [Press release]. https://eic.ec.europa.eu/news/eight-european-startups-set-receive-scale-funding-eic-under-step-scale-scheme-2026-04-27_en

European Investment Bank. (n.d.). InnovFin: EU finance for innovators. https://www.eib.org/en/products/mandates-partnerships/legacy/index.htm

European Investment Bank Group. (2026). El Grupo BEI invierte en España cifras récord en 2025 [Press release]. https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2026-048-el-grupo-bei-invierte-en-espana-cifras-record-en-2025

European Investment Fund. (2025a). €300 million allocated by Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities to promote new financing facility with EIF [Press release]. https://www.eif.org/press/all/eur300-million-allocated-by-spanish-ministry-of-science-innovation-and-universities-to-promote-new-financing-facility-with-eif

European Investment Fund. (2025b, April). European Investment Fund and Empresa Nacional de Innovación provide up to €40 million to back innovative small businesses and startups in Spain [Press release]. https://www.eif.org/press/all/european-investment-fund-and-empresa-nacional-de-innovacion-provide-up-to-eur40-million-to-back-innovative-small-businesses-and-startups-in-spain

European Payments Initiative. (n.d.). Wero. https://www.epicompany.eu/
EY. (2023). Framework agreement on social security for telework from another state. https://www.ey.com/en_bg/insights/tax/framework-agreement-on-social-security-for-telework-from-another

Federation of American Scientists. (2024). How to unlock the potential of the Advanced Research Projects Agency model. https://fas.org/publication/how-to-unlock-the-potential-of-the-advanced-research-projects-agency-model/

Finance Watch. (2024). The trillion-euro problem: How to meet Europe's investment needs. https://www.finance-watch.org/blog/the-trillion-euro-problem-how-to-meet-europes-investment-needs/

Gobierno de España. (n.d.). Conoce la Iniciativa Estratégica de Compra Pública de Innovación (IECPI) de INCIBE. Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia. https://planderecuperacion.gob.es/noticias/conoce-iniciativa-estrategica-compra-publica-innovacion-IECPI-incibe-prtr

Iberdrola España. (2023, March 27). Valladolid pone en marcha la pionera infraestructura de recarga de los nuevos autobuses eléctricos de AUVASA. https://www.iberdrolaespana.com/sala-comunicacion/noticias/detalle/230327-valladolid-pone-en-marcha-la-pionera-infraestructura-de-recarga-de-los-nuevos-autobuses-electricos-de-auvasa

i+Med. (n.d.). i+Med S. Coop. Retrieved June 2026, from https://imasmed.com/en/

Innobasque. (n.d.). i+Med S. Coop.: Fabrika de I+D biomédica, cooperativa de científicos conectada a las necesidades de la sociedad [Case study]. https://mapa.innobasque.eus/casos-practicos/imed-scoop_fabrika-de-id-biomedica-cooperativa-de-cientificos-conectada-a-las-necesidades-de-la-sociedad

Institute for Progress. (n.d.). The ARPA model: A reading list. https://ifp.org/the-arpa-model-a-reading-list/

Instituto Nacional de Ciberseguridad. (n.d.). Iniciativa Estratégica de Compra Pública Innovadora. https://www.incibe.es/industria-cpi

Irekia - Gobierno Vasco. (2025). El vicelehendakari Mikel Torres destaca el papel de i+Med como referente en transferencia de conocimiento en la industria biomédica. https://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/news/109656-vicelehendakari-mikel-torres-destaca-papel-med-como-referente-transferencia-conocimiento-industria-biomedica

KPMG. (2025). EU - Cross-border cooperation for social security rules (GMS Flash Alert 2025-071). https://kpmg.com/xx/en/our-insights/gms-flash-alert/flash-alert-2025-071.html

Mondragon Corporation. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved June 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mondragon_Corporation

Nationaal Contactpunt Flanders. (2025). Policy brief: Chips for Europe Initiative. https://ncpflanders.be/documents/policy-brief-chips-for-europe-initiative/download

National Center for Employee Ownership. (n.d.). Research on employee ownership. Retrieved June 2026, from https://www.nceo.org/

Noticias de Álava. (2026, March 30). La alavesa i+Med lidera el proyecto de hidrogeles inteligentes. https://www.noticiasdealava.eus/alava/2026/03/30/alavesa-lidera-proyecto-i-med-hidrogeles-10886608.html

Parke. (2025, March). i+Med inaugura sus nuevas instalaciones Gure Etxea, la casa de los científicos, en el campus Vitoria-Gasteiz. https://parke.eus/imed-inaugura-sus-nuevas-instalaciones-gure-etxea-la-casa-de-los-cientificos-en-el-campus-vitoria-gasteiz/

Remote Work Europe. (2024). Cross-border telework in the EU: How the 50% social security rule actually works. https://remoteworkeurope.eu/insights/cross-border-telework-50-percent-rule/

The Scenarionist. (2024). Beyond dilution: Venture debt and revenue sharing for deep tech ventures. https://www.thescenarionist.com/p/beyond-dilution-venture-debt-and

We need a CERN for AI. (2025). Minerva. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11024-024-09568-6



The ‘Fifth Freedom’

Prototype developed by

Eva Biaudet *(Swedish People's Party of Finland, Finland)*
Nacho Martín Blanco *(People's Party, Spain)*
Matas Maldeikis *(Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, Lithuania)*
Nikola Mažar *(Croatian Democratic Union, Croatia)*

Coordinator

James Ashley Morrison

Analysis and editing by

Open European Dialogue

← Contents

The ‘Fifth Freedom’

Investing in human capital and education to build ‘Europeans par excellence’

One prototyping team of parliamentarians identified investment in human capital and education as one of the core challenges to Europe’s long-term prosperity, economic competitiveness and, thus, economic security.

Education is one of the fundamental drivers of a modern economy and society. Today’s education systems across the European Union remain marked by persistent gaps, however: children who never access high-quality early-childhood education and care, lack of teachers, people falling out of education and training before they gain a foothold in the labour market, skills education that fail to keep pace with a rapidly shifting labour market, and ‘European’ education that too often remains the preserve of a mobile few rather than a shared experience for all.

All of this undermines individual life chances, constrains productivity and innovation, and weakens the EU’s ability to compete globally. Therefore, it must invest decisively in education systems that are excellent, inclusive, and genuinely European in character - producing, in the words of the team, ‘Europeans par excellence.’

Where the EU Stands

In general, the EU performs strongly in the global education landscape, particularly in terms of access to and attainment of higher education. In 2024, 44.1% of EU citizens aged 25-34 had completed tertiary education, compared to 39.6% in 2019, close to the EU target of 45% by 2030 (European Commission/Eurostat, 2025). When it comes to education systems, several member states are among the world’s best-performing. The likes of Estonia, Ireland, Finland, Poland, and the Czech Republic perform above the average across multiple areas in the OECD’s PISA assessments (OECD, 2023). The EU is also home to a large number of internationally recognised universities and research institutions that contribute significantly to the global production of knowledge. Overall, the EU is a major global performer in education, combining high levels of educational attainment with internationally leading school and higher-education systems. Nevertheless, there are challenges that put EU countries in danger of falling behind.

Reducing early leaving is a key priority. Early leaving from education and training is a persistent challenge across the EU, driven by socio-economic disadvantage, learning difficulties, limited access to support services, and weak student-teacher engagement. The EU average rate stood at 9.4% in 2024, just above the 2030 target of below 9% set out in the 2021 EU Council resolution on a strategic framework for cooperation in education and training. This disproportionately affects students from rural areas, with migrant backgrounds and with disabilities; and it undermines employability, social mobility, and long-term economic growth (European Commission, 2023).

Early childhood education and care participation lags behind targets. High-quality early childhood education and care is a foundational investment: it supports early cognitive and socio-emotional development, reduces inequalities from the outset, and enables parents’ participation in the labour market. In many member states, the school entry rates are below the EU targets of 45% for children aged under three and 96% for those aged three by 2030. The problems from access disparities are

compounded by quality concerns, workforce shortages, lack of access to upskilling opportunities and working conditions in education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2025).

Skills gaps and inequality persist, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as well as in digital and advanced skills. This is closely linked to socio-economic background, age, and education level. Disparities emerge early and grow over time, leading eventually to labour-market mismatches and constraining productivity and innovation. Persistent disparities in STEM fields, especially regarding women, limit Europe's capacity to compete in strategic sectors (OECD, 2024; Bertoni et al., 2025; European Commission, 2025a).

Teacher shortages are a structural constraint. These are particularly acute in STEM subjects, languages, and disadvantaged regions. They are exacerbated by the declining attractiveness of the profession, high workloads, and limited career progression - problems compounded by the growing share of teachers who are nearing retirement (European Commission, 2023; OECD, 2025a).

Education systems remain fragmented. Differences in curricula, qualifications, and governance limit the scalability of effective practices and constrain cross-border mobility and cooperation, weakening the EU's ability to function as a cohesive educational space (European Commission, 2022).

European identity is unevenly and often narrowly cultivated through education. Becoming 'Europeans par excellence' implies not only acquiring a high level of education, but also a shared sense of belonging. Education mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ are successful but access to them remains limited and socially selective. Meanwhile, civic and citizenship education varies widely across member states (European Commission, 2018).

Demographic change is reshaping the context for education investment. Declining fertility (the EU's total fertility rate stood at 1.38 live births per woman in 2023, below the replacement level of 2.1) and an ageing population (the share of people aged 80+ rose from 3.8% to 6.1% between 2004 and 2024, while the share of those aged under 15 fell from 16.2% to 14.6%) are raising pension and healthcare costs within national budgets, which put pressure on investment in other sectors, including education (Eurostat, 2025; European Commission, 2025c).

Against this backdrop, however, there are examples of what targeted, well-designed policy can achieve.

Early-warning systems such as France's SIECLE and Romania's MATE - the latter already reaching roughly 300,000 students across more than 2,000 schools - show how combining administrative and behavioural data can help schools intervene before students drop out. Unfortunately, such systems are unevenly developed across the EU (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023a).

Targeted STEM initiatives - such as the micro-credential teacher training in Estonia and Germany, the STEAM Alliance for female talent and ChicaSTEM in Spain, or the EU-funded HER TECH project on gender gaps in ICT - show how supply-side and demand-side barriers can be tackled together (European Commission, 2025).

The European School Network and the European Universities Initiative - consisting, at the time of writing, of 65 alliances spanning over 570 higher-education institutions across 35 countries, and involving roughly half of all students in Europe - demonstrate the potential of cross-border collaboration, which fosters European identity. Enrico Letta's Much More Than a Market report seeks to elevate this with its proposed 'fifth freedom' of the Single Market: the freedom to learn, research, innovate, and share knowledge across borders (Letta, 2024).

Since 1987, the Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes have had a positive impact on more than 12 million Europeans, and they are among the most visible and highly regarded EU policies. They touch nearly every facet of Europe's core challenges - skills, cohesion, resilience and security - and use the continent's diversity as a strength. Erasmus and Erasmus+ have strengthened the building of European identity through a combination of mobility, shared curricula, and civic participation. They have been vital in cultivating a sense of Europeanness across the continent's many and diverse communities, though challenges remain.

The above shows that the tools and best practices to build 'Europeans par excellence' already exist across the EU. But they remain too fragmented, too unevenly resourced, and too dependent on national political will to deliver at the scale and pace the moment requires to secure the EU's competitiveness in the future and contribute to its economic security.

Against this backdrop, the team identified two central questions as a starting point for the exploration of solutions:

- How can we foster a stronger sense of a European identity as well as sought-after skills and capabilities through education?
- How can we create better conditions for people to realise their family aspirations?

Building on Success: the EU's 'Fifth Freedom'

Following the lead of the Letta report, the team proposes building on the spirit of the Erasmus programmes through the establishment of a 'fifth freedom' within the Single Market. While the Single Market currently guarantees the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, Letta argues, the EU's increasingly knowledge-based economy requires a further dimension: free movement in research, innovation, data, skills, knowledge, and education.

This would require making it easier for students, researchers, universities, businesses, and innovators to collaborate, study, work, and share knowledge across EU borders, while lowering national and administrative barriers that can limit such cooperation. The proposal therefore goes beyond student mobility and seeks to create a more integrated knowledge ecosystem in which students and researchers can circulate more freely and contribute to innovation, economic growth, and competitiveness (Letta, 2024).

The proposal builds on the broader principle, enshrined in Article 14 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, that everyone has the right to education, including access to free compulsory education.

In this sense, the proposed 'fifth freedom' extends beyond the economic benefits of greater mobility and knowledge-sharing, reflecting a wider commitment to making education and knowledge accessible across social and national borders.

The team developed a three-phase roadmap as a prototype for how this proposal could be implemented.

Phase 1 | Promoting the 'Fifth Freedom'

Establish the political and legal foundation before scaling resources.

Advocate the idea and monitor political traction by tracking whether the 'fifth freedom' is placed on the EU Council's agenda, features in manifestos of national parties, and enters public discourse.

Given that education is a supporting EU competence, explore whether the proposal will be best pursued as a binding EU-wide instrument or through enhanced cooperation among willing member states first - in line with the EU's soft-convergence tradition.

Secure an EU-level agreement enshrining 'the freedom to learn, research, innovate, and share knowledge across borders' as a 'fifth freedom' of the Single Market - in addition to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people.

Phase 2 | Increasing Financial Resources

Turn political recognition into budgetary commitment.

Increase financial resources for Erasmus+ and related mobility and knowledge-exchange programmes in the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

Track the weight of Erasmus+ in the EU budget as the critical weathervane of progress. It currently has a budget of €26.2 billion, within an EU budget of €1,270 billion, for 2021-2027.

Phase 3 | Extending the 'Fifth Freedom' Across the Life Course

Move beyond higher education to embed the 'fifth freedom' from primary school on.

Expand the credit and exchange framework currently centred on higher education to primary and secondary school education, and potentially to the working population aged 30+ as well.

Integrate civic and democratic-citizenship competences - for example through the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture - systematically into curricula, rather than through isolated initiatives.

Widen participation in mobility beyond the socially and academically mobile, so that shared European educational experiences become the norm rather than the exception across all member states.

Enshrining a 'fifth freedom' in the Single Market, backing it with a strengthened MFF settlement, and extending its reach into primary and secondary education will complete a strategy that moves from political recognition to financing to a lived and inclusive experience of European learning - for citizens of every age and every member state.

Bibliography

Bertoni, E., Cosgrove, J., Cachia, R. (2025). Digital skills gaps - a closer look at the Digital Skills Index (DSI 2.0). European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Ispra, JRC140617. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC140617

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, CHE Consult and ICF Consulting (2018). Erasmus+ higher education impact study - Final report. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/162060

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022). Progressing toward the European Education Area. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/445824

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2023). Education and training monitor 2023 - Comparative report. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/810689

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2025). Education and training monitor 2025 - Comparative report. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/2221794

European Commission (2025a). European Political Strategy Centre, The future of European competitiveness. Part A, A competitiveness strategy for Europe. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2872/9356120

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2025c). Investing in education 2025. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/3311714

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2023a). Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe - 2023: Early leaving from education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/06916

European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice (2025). Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe - 2025. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/66224

Eurostat (2025). Demography of Europe - 2025 edition (interactive publication). Statistical Office of the European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2025#about-publication

Eurostat (2025). SDG 4: Quality education. European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250904-1?utm_

Letta, E. (2024). Much more than a market - Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens. Report to the European Council. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

OECD (2023), PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en

OECD (2024). Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?: Survey of Adult Skills 2023. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en

OECD (2025a). Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en



Secure, Clean and Affordable Energy: Powering Europe's Economic Future

Prototypes developed by

Yoko Alender *(Estonian Reform Party, Estonia)*
Meyrem Almaci *(Green, Belgium)*
Ioannis A. Kefalogiannis *(New Democracy, Greece)*
Fitore Pacolli *(Self-Determination Movement, Kosovo)*
Katrin Uhlig *(Alliance90/The Greens, Germany)*
Mihael Zmajlovic *(Social Democratic Party of Croatia, Croatia)*

Coordinator

Marie-Thérèse Schreiber

Analysis and editing by

Open European Dialogue

← Contents

Secure, Clean and Affordable Energy: Powering Europe's Economic Future

Three interconnected ideas to achieve energy sovereignty, a resilient grid and safeguard the continent's economic security

A team of six parliamentarians identified the transition of Europe's energy system as one of the core challenges to its economic security.

Energy is a fundamental input of any modern economy, and Europe's system remains too exposed: it is dependent on fossil fuels, vulnerable to supply disruption, susceptible to economic coercion and increasingly costly for households and businesses alike. These vulnerabilities undermine industrial competitiveness, weaken economic resilience and limit strategic autonomy. Therefore, Europe must accelerate the transition to an energy system that is low-carbon and powered predominantly by renewable energy that is disaster-resilient and capable of delivering reliable, affordable electricity to all.

In addition to safeguarding economic security in the short-to-medium term, the transition also carries a long-term imperative: without decisive action to curb emissions, climate change will continue to drive more frequent and severe droughts, floods, heatwaves and storms. These disrupt economic activity and place direct physical stress on the energy system, from heat-strained grids to flooded substations and drought-limited hydropower. A resilient, low-carbon energy system is therefore not just a response to today's risks but also a safeguard against the climate risks of tomorrow, for the economy and the power system that underpins it.

Where Europe Stands Today

There has been progress toward a clean, secure and affordable energy system, yet it continues to be unequal by the scale of the challenge, with critical hurdles still to be overcome.

The European Union has made considerable progress in its transition towards renewable energy, particularly in the electricity sector. In 2025, renewable sources accounted for 49.9% of gross electricity consumption, compared with 47.5% in 2024. Renewables have also gained importance in the wider energy system: their share of gross final energy consumption reached 26.2% in 2025, compared with only 9.6% in 2004 (Eurostat, 2026c). Mostly due to the installation of heat pumps and the use of biomass, renewable energy accounted for 27.4% of energy used for heating and cooling, demonstrating that the transition is gradually extending beyond electricity generation (Eurostat 2026c, Eurostat, 2026d).

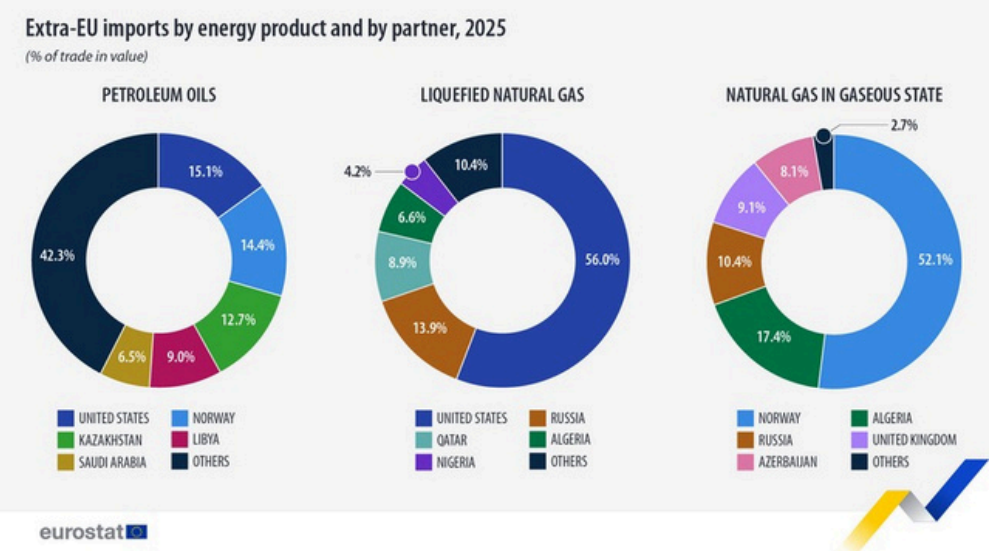
Nevertheless, these figures also reveal an important limitation. The transition of the electricity system has progressed considerably faster than the transformation of the energy system as a whole. Electricity still represents only a relatively small part of the energy consumed by households, industry and transport, while substantial amounts of energy continue to be used directly in the form of fossil fuels. As a result, renewable energy accounted for only around one quarter of the EU's total final energy consumption in 2025, despite already providing almost half of its electricity. The decarbonisation of the wider economy therefore depends not only on expanding renewable generation, but also on electrifying sectors that continue to rely heavily on fossil fuels.

Fossil fuels remain a central component of the EU's energy system. In 2024, they accounted for around 69% of the energy available in the EU, compared with approximately 20% from renewable sources and the remaining 12% from nuclear sources (Eurostat, 2026a).

This continued dependence is particularly significant because the EU relies heavily on imported energy. In 2024, 57% of its energy needs were met through imports, with fossil fuels accounting for the overwhelming majority of these (Eurostat, 2026a).

The scale of this dependence is also reflected in the value of energy imports. In 2025, the EU imported €336.7 billion in energy products (Eurostat, 2026b). While the EU has substantially reduced its dependence on Russian energy since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it continues to rely on external suppliers. Norway, the United States, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Algeria and, to a lesser extent, Russia, were among its largest suppliers of fossil energy in 2025.

The overall picture is therefore one of substantial but vastly incomplete transformation, and one could argue that the EU continues to buy its own economic insecurity at a cost of nearly €1 billion per day - through dependence on foreign powers that do not or might not always act in its best interest, and due to the fact that the use of fossil fuels accelerates climate change that damages the economy.



In addition, the progress in decreasing the EU's dependence on fossil-fuel imports and accelerating renewable-energy production sits on an increasingly strained foundation.

The transition to a renewable-powered electricity system and consequently the electrification of industries that still run on fossil fuel are dependent not only on expanding generation capacity but also on ensuring that the electric power produced can be efficiently transmitted, stored and delivered across communities and borders.

Europe's electricity grids were largely designed around power generation in centralised, fossil-fuelled plants, and are proving insufficiently equipped to accommodate rapidly growing volumes of geographically dispersed renewable-energy production and consumption. Consequently, grid infrastructure needs to be updated to smart grids and connected to energy storage to balance supply and demand across hourly, daily and seasonal timescales. The European Investment Bank's 2026 Investment Report warns of a €24 billion annual shortfall for the grid upgrades needed to electrify transport and heavy industry, and flags growing storage deficits and grid congestion as emerging risks to system reliability (European Investment Bank, 2026).

This vulnerability is not hypothetical. On 28 April 2025, the electricity systems of mainland Spain and Portugal collapsed within roughly 90 seconds, the most severe incident in the European power system in over twenty years. ENTSO-E's expert panel found no single cause but a combination of interacting factors, chief among them insufficient voltage control: most renewable installations operated in fixed power factor mode and could not respond to voltage changes, and available reactive power capacity went unused. Rising voltages triggered a cascade of generator disconnections until the system collapsed. The panel's key lesson is that all generators, including wind and solar, must actively support voltage stability rather than merely feed power into the grid (ENTSO-E, 2026).

In addition to the investment shortfall for grid upgrades, Europe faces a projected public funding gap of around €30 billion for the cross-border interconnections it will need by 2040. These are the transmission lines that link national electricity systems and allow surplus power, generated when weather conditions are favourable, to flow to regions where demand is higher (Geneletti & Cremona, 2025).

On top of the financing gap, there is no single authority responsible for operating and planning Europe's electricity grid as one interconnected system. Instead, decisions are still made country by country, which creates inefficiencies and blind spots (Heussaff & Zachmann, 2025). This fragmentation also affects security of supply: one study found that uncoordinated national procurement of generation capacity could increase the risk of power shortages by 54% during periods when several countries face scarcity at the same time (Menegatti & Meeus, 2026). The Letta Report (2024), a major review commissioned by the European Council, describes building a genuine Single Energy Market as one of the essential, and unfinished, foundations for reaching the EU's goals.

The average lead time for a cross-border interconnection project in Europe exceeds ten years, with lengthy permitting procedures among the main causes of delay. Meanwhile, 11 member states are projected to miss the EU's 2030 target of 15% interconnection capacity (Geneletti & Cremona, 2025).

However, there are also encouraging examples of what coordinated and determined action can achieve. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania spent years disconnecting their electricity grids from the Soviet-era system they shared with Russia and Belarus, fully joining the European grid in 2025 and eliminating a long-standing point of geopolitical leverage (Moscovici & Nguyen, 2025). Moldova and Ukraine synchronised with the European grid within weeks of Russia's 2022 invasion in an emergency procedure - a move that helped Ukraine's electricity system survive sustained attacks on its infrastructure. These cases show that ambitious, security-driven energy integration is achievable when there is sufficient political will and financial support behind it.

There are several mechanisms available across the EU that address the central barrier to energy infrastructure investment: the mismatch between long project timelines, high capital costs and uncertain revenue streams. Blended finance has proven effective in this regard. The Biscay Gulf interconnector combined a €0.6 billion Connecting Europe Facility for Energy (CEF-E) grant with a €1.6 billion European Investment Bank loan, while the Aurora Line secured CEF-E funding covering nearly half its construction costs (Geneletti & Cremona, 2025). By absorbing part of the upfront cost through concessional grants, this approach reduces the capital at risk for private lenders, making otherwise marginal projects commercially viable. Another way to help finance the transition is the introduction of cap-and-floor revenue regulation that targets the specific challenge of financing capital-intensive flexibility assets such as long-duration energy storage. By guaranteeing a revenue floor sufficient to cover fixed costs and debt service, while capping upside returns during periods of high market prices, this structure provides the revenue certainty required to attract investment-grade financing over 15-25 year asset lifetimes, without exposing consumers to windfall profit risk (Energy Storage Europe Association, 2026).

The EU supports the transition towards a renewable and more integrated energy system through a range of complementary instruments. REPowerEU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) accelerate investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, grids, storage and hydrogen, while the Affordable Energy Action Plan focuses on reducing energy costs and mobilising investment in clean energy. The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF Energy) finances cross-border energy infrastructure and electricity interconnections, while the Modernisation Fund supports the upgrading of energy systems in lower-income Member States. The Innovation Fund promotes the demonstration of innovative net-zero technologies, and Cohesion Policy funds, including the European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund, support regional investments in renewable energy, efficiency and clean infrastructure. The Just Transition Fund assists regions and communities particularly affected by the shift away from carbon-intensive industries. In addition, InvestEU and the European Investment Bank (EIB) mobilise public and private financing for sustainable energy investments, while Horizon Europe supports research and innovation and LIFE - Clean Energy Transition helps implement policies and build capacity for the clean-energy transition.

There are promising financing mechanisms and most of the technical solutions required to deliver a successful energy transition are already available, too. And, yet, progress remains too slow, and the availability of the billions that must still be mobilised depends heavily on sustained political will, public support and knowledge about what is possible.

An overwhelming majority of 88% of the European population say that it is important that the EU takes action to increase renewable energy and energy efficiency, and 75% that reducing fossil fuel imports will enhance energy security and benefit the EU economically (European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 565: Climate Change, 2025b).

The potential role of nuclear power for expanding low-carbon energy capacity faced concerns within the team regarding the associated risks for the population and environment. In addition, current small modular reactor technology is deemed insufficiently mature to serve as a reliable and, even more important, timely component of the energy transition.

Renewable power is now cheaper than fossil fuels and could generate global savings of $12 trillion by 2050, with energy-efficiency measures offering the most direct route to lowering consumer costs (Kardaś, 2024). But as the costs and disruptions of the transition become more visible - new infrastructure sited near people's homes, higher upfront costs before savings materialize - there is a risk of political backlash that could slow or reverse progress if the benefits are not communicated and delivered in ways people can feel directly.

Against this backdrop, the team identified core challenges in the search for promising interventions to advance a clean, secure and affordable energy system.

Key Constraints Limiting Progress and Emerging Questions

A narrative gap. Europe's slow progress in the energy transition is not primarily due to a technology problem but to a communication one: there is no story compelling enough to mobilize citizens and political leaders at the pace the moment requires. Climate- and efficiency-framed arguments have failed to generate the same urgency and funding latitude that, for example, security and defence narratives currently have, despite the energy transition being fundamental for security - including economic security.

Import dependency and low risk-awareness. Europe remains heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels, and the public and political debate does not yet fully register the scale of the economic and security risk this creates.

Incumbent power structures. Much of Europe's energy system, and the political and economic interests built around it, remains tied to the old fossil-based model. These incumbent structures have limited incentive to change, which slows the pace of reform even where technical solutions already exist.

A persistent financing gap. Investment in grid modernisation, storage and renewables consistently falls short of what is needed, and it remains unclear who should bear the cost - national governments, the EU or private capital - and under what conditions.

National interest versus European interest. Across nearly every one of these problems runs the same underlying tension: national priorities and short-term political cycles continue to outweigh collective European interests, fragmenting what could and potentially should be a single, coordinated energy market with a connected, smart grid with modular options and energy communities.

Short-term thinking overrides long-term outcomes. Mobilising political support and resources for disaster prevention - whether hardening the grid against disasters or preventing climate-driven disasters through a transition to a grid that is equipped to distribute renewably sourced power - is difficult because the events to be prevented may never happen. This is especially true in political environments shaped by electoral cycles, where short-term, visible results tend to outweigh long-term resilience and risk reduction.

By narrowing the focus to these key constraints, the team identified five central questions:

- How can the energy transition be framed as a matter of hard security, not just climate policy, to unlock broader political support and funding?
- How can interconnectors, storage and grid resilience be prioritised and financed in a political environment shaped by short-term national incentives?
- How can we build a truly integrated European energy market when national priorities continue to outweigh collective European interests?
- How can we create a more disaster-resilient energy system that is less vulnerable to extreme weather events and other disasters?

Based on these guiding questions, the team developed three solution approaches that are best understood as three linked layers of a single strategy: a narrative that creates political momentum across Europe, a dedicated fund that turns that momentum into capital and a set of local tools that turn investment into long-term resilience on the ground.

The ideas presented are prototypes: early-stage concepts developed to spark discussion and inspire further thinking, rather than complete or finalised proposals.

A Pan-European Communication Campaign: "Power Shield Europe"

By Yoko Alender, Katrin Uhlig, Mihael Zmajlovic

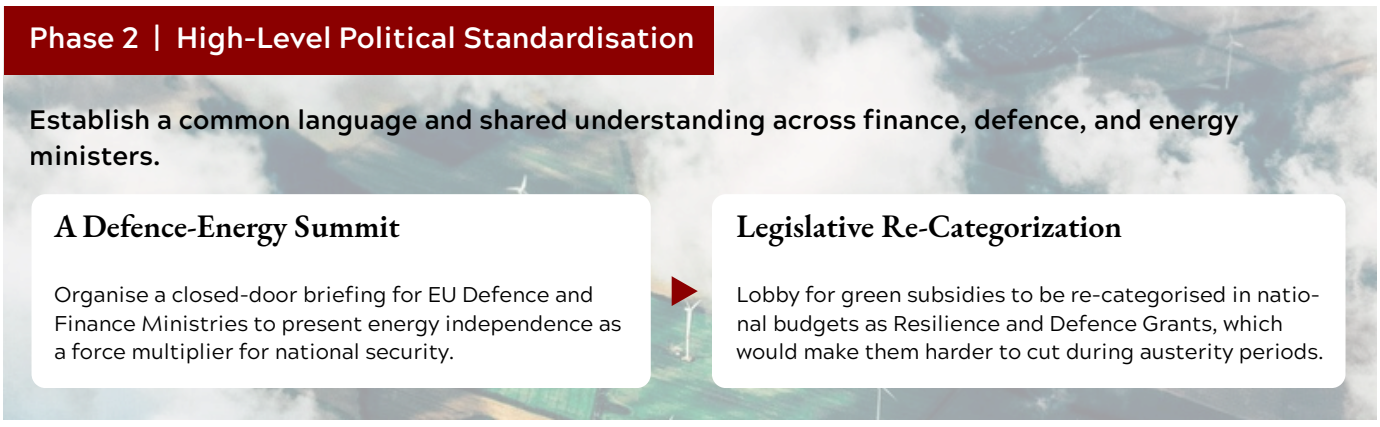
The core of this idea is to reframe the transition around a single strategic insight: namely, that EU countries spend about €1 billion every day importing fossil fuels, only to create insecurity rather than sustainable resilience, and therefore staying dependent on external powers at the risk of economic coercion and economic damages through climate-change-induced natural disasters.

If the EU reframes energy infrastructure as hard security issue, then:

- Political leaders can justify investment more easily.
- Citizens will view energy transition as protection rather than sacrifice.
- Defence and resilience budgets can support energy projects.
- EU institutions can coordinate faster and more decisively.
- Member states will co-operate around shared security interests.

Instead of communicating through climate and market-efficiency language, the aim is to recast renewable assets, batteries and grid interconnectors as civil defence infrastructure and strategic assets. To prototype an implementation plan for this idea, the team developed a five-phase roadmap.





Phase 3 | The ‘Power Shield Europe‘ Narrative Launch

Public-facing rollout, with a narrative shift away from ‘saving the planet’ toward ‘protecting the home’.

Visual Identity

Use ‘hard security’ aesthetics: heavy typography, shield motifs, and maps, rather than traditional green or nature imagery.

The Daily Drain Dashbord

A real-time digital clock (placed in capital cities and online) showing the €1 billion per day leaving the EU.

Localised Messaging

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland: Focus on energy sovereignty and decoupling from hostile neighbours.

Germany, France: Focus on industrial protection and price stability as a shield against social unrest.

Southern Europe: Focus on energy export power as a new form of geopolitical influence.

Phase 4 | Grassroots Mobilisation

Empowering citizens to see themselves as active participants in energy sovereignity and resilience.

Home Certification

A program for households or apartment associations, stating that those installing a heat pump or solar panels are ‘security certified’ and not just ‘eco-friendly’, combining symbolism and information.

Energy Co-Operative Forces

Support local energy communities by framing and equipping them as ‘Energy Civil Defence Units’ that ensure a locality stays powered even if the central grid faces a shutdown due to hybrid attacks, extreme weather events or other threats.

Professional Endorsements

Feature testimonials from former military or intelligence officials explaining why a decentralised grid is harder to sabotage than a centralised fossil-fuel plant.

Phase 5 | Normalisation and Feedback Loops

Ensuring that the narrative has long-term impact.

The Independence Index

An annual report showing how much coercion risk the EU has eliminated as renewables grow (money spent on import/at home on energy, lessening peak price, etc).

Emergency Simulations

Conduct public ‘resilience drills’ that demonstrate how local storage and micro-grids keep hospitals and schools running during simulated hybrid attacks.

This campaign aims to build the political urgency and cross-country public support needed to unlock the large-scale investments required.

An EU Energy Resilience Fund

By Ioannis A. Kefalogiannis

Once the campaign has started to created political momentum and mandate, the next step is to turn this into capital by supplying the financing backbone for enhanced transition efforts. To this end, this prototype proposes the creation of a €2 trillion Energy Resilience Fund on European level.

Investing in resilience is cost-effective. US studies have found that every $1 spent on hazard mitigation saves around $6 in future disaster and recovery costs (Multihazard Mitigation Council, 2019). Resilience in the electric distribution system is the ability to anticipate, absorb, adapt to and rapidly recover from high-impact, low-frequency events like storms, cyberattacks or physical attacks. As distribution is the most vulnerable part of the grid, accounting for over 80% of outages, enhancing its resilience is critical for protecting infrastructure and ensuring continuity of essential services, therefore safeguarding the proper functioning of the economy, among other things.
The fund would finance energy-transition projects such as modernising grid infrastructure and establishing enough storage and administration capacities in a way that contributes to the resilience of the grid infrastructure as well as to overall resilient energy supply. It would centralise funding instruments currently scattered across separate funding mechanisms and step up financial efforts.

The team developed a three-phase roadmap outlining how the fund could be established:

Phase 1 (2026-2027) | Establishment of the Energy Resilience Fund

The EU Council decides the establishment of the fund, with €1 trillion through 30-year EU bonds and €1 trillion after 2027 from the new EU budget as well as from taxation of fossil-fuel gains, energy companies and sustainability tax.

Phase 2 (2028-2030) | Research for and Design of a Resilient Electricity Grid

The European Commission in co-operation with all member states works on joint EU standards on grid resilience, technical and legislative harmonisation, and digitalisation of the continent's energy infrastructure system. At the same time, it prioritises interconnections with key partners in Africa and the Middle East, and checks the compatibility with their energy systems.

Phase 3 (2031-2035) | Building the Resilient European Electricity System

Implementing strategies for enhancing grid resilience, such as:

- **Grid Modernisation**: Implementing smart grids, including self-healing networks that automatically isolate faults and reconfigure power flows.
- **Infrastructure Hardening**: Undergrounding lines, enhancing physical security of substations, and trimming trees.
- **Advanced Technology**: Using AI and data analytics to predict vulnerabilities and optimize grid responses to extreme weather, in addition to analysing power flow in real time for general optimal distribution under varying production conditions.
- **Operational Strategies**: Utilising microgrids and distributed generation (for example, solar, wind) to provide localised power, increasing system resilience and reliability.

A Toolbox for Decentralised Energy Production and Consumption

By Meyrem Almaci and Fitore Pacolli

The prototype proposes local and decentralised measures that form the citizen-facing, bottom-up layer of the strategy – where capital and standards translate into resilience people can actually feel. The Energy Resilience Fund could also be a channel through which capital, advice, and technical assistance flow down to these measures.

The prototype proposes three phases: from short-term disaster relief and preparedness to a more advanced model of decentralised energy production and consumption in energy communities. Today's infrastructure is too centralised and too vulnerable to disruption, whether from cyberattacks, sabotage, military aggression or extreme weather events. These measures are aimed at reducing the vulnerability of households and the economy to power outages.

To develop an implementation plan for this idea, the team created a three-phase roadmap:

Short-Term (3-5 Years) | The 'Freedom Package'

A tool for disaster relief and preparedness:

The Freedom Package is a household-level energy survival kit - for example, consisting of a small solar panel, battery and heat pump - to guarantee basic heating, cooking and light during a power crisis. It could be distributed ahead of a potential disaster, prioritised for the households most exposed to natural or man-made disasters, or only during an active crisis to provide immediate relief. The estimated cost would be around €2 billion, depending on the rollout strategy.

Medium-Term (10 Years) | Smart, Small, Modular Grids

Strengthening grid autonomy in emergencies:

The idea is to accelerate support for the establishment of smart, small modular grids (micro-grids) that let neighbourhoods function independently during outages - as long as they can resort to large batteries that have power stored or to their own small production capacities - while remaining in principle connected to the larger grid network during periods of regular functioning of the grid.

While grid modernisation can facilitate the integration and distribution of renewable energy in response to fluctuations in supply and demand, a centralised grid structure remains vulnerable to systemic shocks. Implementing a modular grid architecture instead could enhance resilience by allowing functioning micro-grids to remain operational during outages elsewhere in the network through the isolation of affected sections. Moreover, modularity could help contain outages originating within a given area, thereby preventing them from propagating to other parts of the grid.

Medium-Term (10 Years) | Supporting ‘Prosumerim’ in Energy Communities

Accelerating decentralised energy production and consumption:

Across the EU, there are 8,000 energy communities today, which enable citizens and local actors to collectively produce, consume and share renewable energy (European Commission, 2025a). Energy communities can increase public acceptance of renewable energy projects and help mobilize private investment in the clean-energy transition. By giving citizens a more active role in local energy systems, they can also contribute to lower energy costs, reduced energy poverty, greater efficiency and new green employment opportunities.

An example of ‘prosumerism’ in an energy community could look like this: a group of households jointly owns a solar photovoltaic installation. During sunny periods, the households produce electricity and use it to meet their own demand. Surplus electricity is shared with other members of the community or fed into the grid. When household’s own production is insufficient, they can draw electricity from the community or the wider grid. Energy communities could also be organised through municipalities.

To date, several EU instruments support the creation of energy communities: LIFE - Clean Energy Transition, the European Energy Communities Facility, the European Regional Development Fund, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Horizon Europe, the Social Climate Fund, and the European Investment Bank/InvestEU. To accelerate the energy transition, it is essential to strengthen existing support mechanisms and actively disseminate knowledge on how to establish and operate such structures.

This set of measures completes the strategy to accelerate the energy transition from narrative to financing to tangible energy resilience at the local level.

All concepts presented in this chapter are intended as starting points for discussion and further exploration.

Bibliography

Butorac, S. (2026). Guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure: Revision of the TEN-E Regulation. Briefing. European Parliamentary Research Service.

Energy Storage Europe Association. (2026). Policy Options to Anticipate Europe's Long-Duration Energy Storage Deployment. Position Paper. Brussels.

ENTSO-E. (2026). Grid incident in Spain and Portugal on 28 April 2025: ICS investigation expert panel final report.

European Commission. (2025a). Energy communities. Energy. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/energy-consumers-and-prosumers/energy-communities_en?utm

European Commission. (2025b). Eurobarometer. Language selection | EU. https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3472?utm

European Commission. (2026). Affordable energy. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/strategy/affordable-energy_en

European Commission. (2026). Citizens Energy Package. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/energy-consumers-and-prosumers/citizens-energy-package_en

European Commission. (2026). Clean Energy Investment. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/funding-and-financing/clean-energy-investment_en

European Commission. (2026). EU funding possibilities in the energy sector. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/funding-and-financing/eu-funding-possibilities-energy-sector_en

European Commission. (2026). EU funding programmes. https://commission.europa.eu/funding-and-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes_en

European Commission. (2026). Funding and financing. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/funding-and-financing_en

European Commission. (2026). InvestEU Programme. https://investeu.europa.eu/investeu-programme_en

European Commission. (2026). Just Transition Fund. Available at: European Commission - Just Transition Fund

European Commission. (2026). REPowerEU. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/energy/repowereu_en

European Commission. (2026). Recovery and Resilience Facility. https://commission.europa.eu/funding-and-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en

European Commission. (2026). Recovery plan for Europe. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/recovery-plan-europe_en

European Investment Bank. (2026). Chapter 6: Securing Europe's green and competitive future. In EIB Investment Report 2025/2026: Capitalising on Europe's strengths.

European Investment Bank. (2026). EIB approves over €9 billion in financing to boost European businesses and energy autonomy. https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2026-273-eib-approves-over-eur9-billion-in-financing-to-boost-european-businesses-and-energy-autonomy

Eurostat. (2026a). Energy in Europe - 2026 edition - Interactive publications. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/energy-2026

Eurostat. (2026b). EU imports of energy products decreased again in 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260325-3

Eurostat. (2026c). Renewables make up 26% of EU energy use. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260723-1

Eurostat. (2026d). Small increase in renewable heating & cooling in 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260126-1

Geneletti, G., & Cremona, E. (2025). Money on the line: Scaling electricity interconnection for Europe's energy future. Ember.

Heussaff, C., & Zachmann, G. (2025). Upgrading Europe's electricity grid is about more than just money. Policy Brief 04/2025. Bruegel. https://www.bruegel.org/policy-brief/upgrading-europes-electricity-grid-about-more-just-money

Kardaś, S. (2024). Power to the people: How the EU's energy transition can help fight the 'greenlash'. Policy Brief. European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR).

Letta, E. (2024). Much more than a market: Speed, security, solidarity - Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens. Report to the European Council.

Menegatti, E., & Meeus, L. (2026). Cross-border solidarity versus national capacity markets: risk of inadequate capacity procurement. Working Paper. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.

Moscovici, A., & Nguyen, P.-V. (2025). Grids package: Connecting the dots. Policy Brief. Jacques Delors Institute.

Multihazard Mitigation Council (2019). Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: 2019 Report. National Institute of Building Sciences, Washington, DC.

Rodríguez-Fernández, L., Fernández Carvajal, A. B., & Fernández de Tejada, V. (2022). Improving the concept of energy security in an energy transition environment: Application to the gas sector in the EU. The Extractive Industries and Society, 9, 101045.



Security Starts at Home: Reframing Civic Resilience in Belgium

Prototype developed by

Liesa Scholzen *(ProDG, Belgium)*

Coordinator

Isotta Ricci Bitti

Analysis and editing by

Open European Dialogue

← Contents

Security Starts at Home: Reframing Civic Resilience in Belgium

A roadmap for integrating civic resilience into the national security architecture

Europe is investing heavily in defence, competitiveness and crisis preparedness. Social cohesion, by contrast, is increasingly treated as a secondary concern - something to be addressed once the more urgent business of security and growth has been financed. This creates a strategic weakness that is easy to overlook because it does not announce itself as a crisis. Societies with low trust, weak civic participation and growing polarisation are less resilient to external shocks and internal disruption, whether that disruption arrives as war, energy shocks, disinformation or economic dislocation (Delhey et al., 2023).

The prototype presented here addresses the gap between how policymakers talk about security and the social foundations that make security possible.

Part of the problem is definitional. In the European Union, cohesion is frequently reduced to Cohesion Funds – a financial instrument, a line in the Multiannual Financial Framework – rather than understood as a strategic objective in its own right. The issue is not a lack of security policy; it is that cohesion is no longer fully recognised as part of the security architecture. Funds are a tool; cohesion is the objective.

The terms themselves need unpacking before the argument can be made cleanly. Social cohesion is not a single, self-evident concept: it typically refers to the strength of social relations, a sense of connectedness to institutions and community, and an orientation toward the common good - trust, solidarity and civic participation among them (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). It is distinct from civic resilience, which described a society's capacity to absorb and recover from shocks, and from social trust, which is one input into cohesion rather than a synonym for it. Institutional trust in particular is uneven and specific: people trust some institutions far more than others and that variation, not a single aggregate number, is often what predicts whether citizens feel they have a stake in the system at all (OECD, 2024b). Without this distinction, cohesion risks becoming a catch-all term that sounds precise but explains very little - exactly the ambiguity that limits its usefulness to policymakers.

The original purpose of cohesion policy was never simply redistribution (Mendez et al., 2025; Schwab, 2024) – it was ensuring that economic, territorial and social differences did not threaten the stability and unity of the EU. That strategic purpose has not disappeared. It has simply stopped being visible in how the debate is framed. The question is not whether the EU should keep funding cohesion, but whether the tool still fits the objective it was built to serve.

The Civic Resilience Roadmap

The prototype developed is a civic resilience roadmap: a narrative and policy-adoption strategy that helps policymakers frame social cohesion as a core element of national security. It offers a path from stakeholder engagement and public dialogue to parliamentary action and policy testing. The goal is to change how policymakers understand the relationship between social cohesion, resilience and security.

The roadmap is primarily addressed to policymakers, who already recognise the need for investment in security. However, security is a complex policy field and strengthening it will be a long-term undertaking. The narrative proposed in this roadmap aims to support political decision-making by ensuring that social cohesion does not become a casualty of security investments, but is instead recognised as an integral part of a country's security strategy. After all, a country's ability to protect itself against external threats is significantly weakened if its internal cohesion and stability are undermined.

The roadmap does not seek to convince the general public of the need for security investments. Rather, it focuses on equipping policymakers with a framework to make the case for cohesion alongside security, and to carry that argument from the regional to the federal level. By making social cohesion an explicit political priority, policymakers can also help foster broader public understanding of its importance. Communication should therefore remain flexible and audience-specific: the security-oriented language used to engage policymakers may need to be adapted when addressing communities and the wider public. While these conversations serve different purposes and require different approaches, they ultimately contribute to the same goal: ensuring that security and social cohesion reinforce one another rather than compete for political attention and resources.

The roadmap is designed specifically for Belgium: a complex country in terms of territorial, linguistic and institutional fragmentation. But it draws on European best practice where civic resilience is already embedded in security thinking. Finland is the clearest reference point (Finnish Government, 2025; Woolmore, 2025). Its comprehensive security model explicitly integrates societal resilience, citizen trust and civic participation as pillars of national security, alongside military preparedness. Belgium cannot import that model wholesale for, but it can learn from its logic and adapt it to a distinctly Belgian path.

Reframing Cohesion as a Security Asset

The central element of the roadmap is to stop presenting social cohesion as a welfare issue competing with security spending, and instead to position cohesion as a security asset in its own right. This changes the conversation from 'social policy versus security' to 'social cohesion as a precondition for security' (Hunter, 2023).

The shift in frame matters because it changes what follows from it. A competition frame forces trade-offs and invites budget-line thinking: every euro for cohesion is read as a euro not spent on defence. A precondition frame does the opposite. It makes the case that unlocks political attention, broader coalitions, and more durable public support by arguing that security is unachievable without the trust and participation that cohesion produces.

Three Shifts in Thinking

- Social cohesion and security are mutually reinforcing, not competing, priorities. Trust, belonging and civic participation are strategic resources that determine how well societies respond to geopolitical, economic, or environmental crises.
- Cohesion and cohesion funding are not the same thing, and conflating them weakens the argument. Cohesion is the objective - funds are a tool to achieve it.
- Narrative matters. If cohesion continues to be discussed only as a social policy objective, it will be sidelined whenever fiscal pressure rises. Understood instead as civic resilience, or a foundation of democratic stability and societal preparedness, it becomes part of Europe's long-term security architecture.

The message for Belgian and European policymakers is simple: civic resilience is one of the most important foundations of security policy.

This is not an either/or choice, and it is not an argument for more spending. The reframing is about having a vision for how society holds together, one built on inclusion rather than exclusion. Its main effect is to give cohesion the prominence it currently lacks in the security debate.

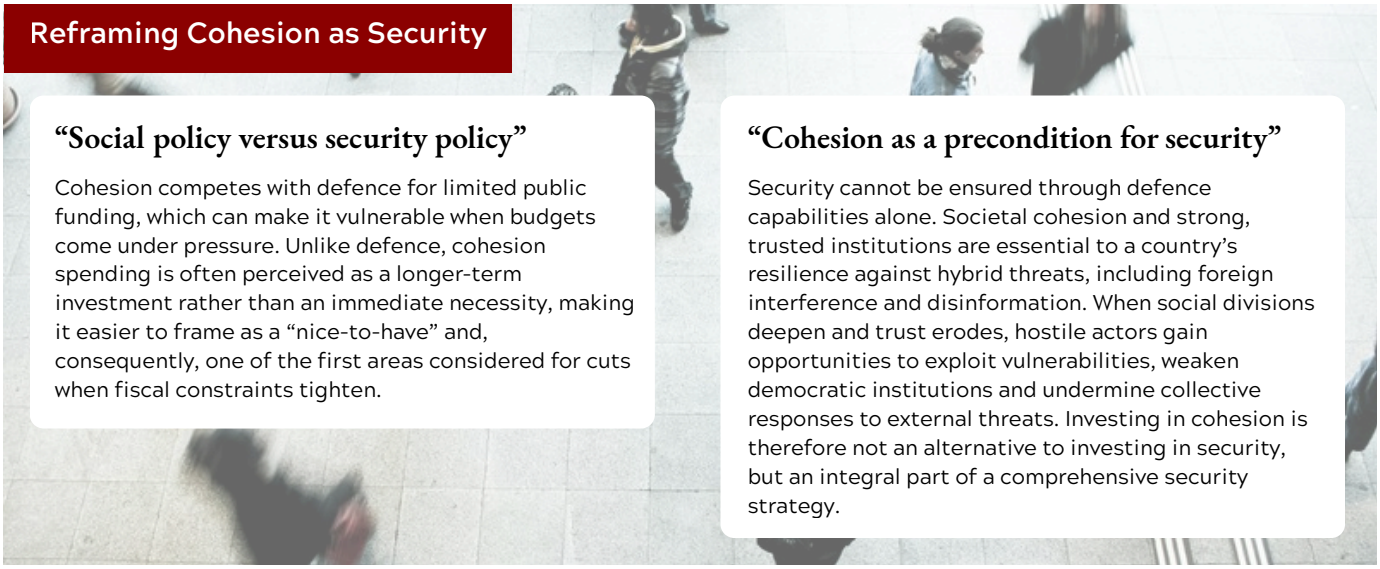
This reframing allows policymakers to move past the traditional debate about the size of the social budget and ask a more actionable question instead: What level of social trust, civic participation and solidarity does Europe need in order to remain resilient in an age of geopolitical competition?

The Belgian Case

Finland's comprehensive security model took more than 20 years to build (Finnish Government, 2025; Woolmore, 2025), and it rests on conditions Belgium simply does not have: universal conscription connecting every citizen to the state, a comparatively small and linguistically homogeneous population, one of the highest level of interpersonal trust in the world, and a Security Committee that coordinates across every ministry with buy-in at every level. Belgium has close to the opposite of each of these: three language communities, a federal structure so complex it barely functions as a single polity, no conscription since 1994 and a much lower level of interpersonal trust.

What is transferable is not the model but the logic. Finland treats trust as a defence asset, and Belgium does not have the same favourable conditions to make a similar argument. It can anchor its argument in the fact that hosting the NATO headquarters, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and the EU institutions, make it a primary target for hybrid operations (ECFR, 2025b), influence campaigns, and institutional subversion.

The 2023 Belgian State Security Service annual report documented increasing foreign interference attempts. A society with deep inequality, diminished confidence in public institutions, territorial fragmentation and weak social cohesion is one where those operations succeed more easily (Delhey et al., 2023; OECD, 2024b; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2024). That is the security case for civic resilience in Belgium: vulnerability to hybrid warfare as a function of social fragmentation.



Reframing Cohesion as Security

"Social policy versus security policy"

Cohesion competes with defence for limited public funding, which can make it vulnerable when budgets come under pressure. Unlike defence, cohesion spending is often perceived as a longer-term investment rather than an immediate necessity, making it easier to frame as a "nice-to-have" and, consequently, one of the first areas considered for cuts when fiscal constraints tighten.

"Cohesion as a precondition for security"

Security cannot be ensured through defence capabilities alone. Societal cohesion and strong, trusted institutions are essential to a country's resilience against hybrid threats, including foreign interference and disinformation. When social divisions deepen and trust erodes, hostile actors gain opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities, weaken democratic institutions and undermine collective responses to external threats. Investing in cohesion is therefore not an alternative to investing in security, but an integral part of a comprehensive security strategy.

A Targeting Trap?

Belgium's cohesion-security nexus carries a specific and recent history when it comes to terrorism that cannot be set aside. For a period, the country was the highest per-capita contributor of foreign fighters to Syria in Western Europe.

For a period, the country was the highest per-capita contributor of foreign fighters to Syria in WesterAnalysis has consistently located the failure as structural rather than ideological: the Molenbeek area having the highest youth unemployment in Brussels, weak institutional presence, the capital's governance fragmented across 19 uncoordinated communes, and intelligence gaps in the police structure (Burgoon, 2006; Krueger & Malečková, 2003; Krieger & Meierrieks, 2010). A parliamentary commission of inquiry documented in 2017 systematic failures of inter-service coordination and information-sharing between federal and local police.

This history demonstrates the civic-resilience argument, but it must not be allowed to define it. The moment social cohesion becomes shorthand for 'We need to invest in Molenbeek so young men do not become terrorists,' a universal social-investment argument has been converted into a targeted counter-extremism program aimed at one community - a trap Denmark and the United Kingdom fell into. Civic resilience has to be about all communities, all regions, all citizens. The parliamentary commission's findings of governance failure, institutional fragmentation and lack of coordination support the structural argument without involving ethnic or religious targeting, and that is the line the roadmap has to take.

There is a dividend generated for society when a security strategic investment is designed to include, not just defend. Two examples illustrate this point.

In the first example, Belgium restructured its civil protection system in 2019, reducing the number of operational units from six to two (RTBF, 2021). The communities that lost their local unit experienced this as abandonment, not efficiency. A security-dividend approach would have paired that consolidation with community-resilience programmes, volunteer networks or local emergency-preparedness training in the towns that lost coverage. Preparedness investment that excludes the communities it is meant to protect erodes the cohesion it depends on.

The same logic applies to defence procurement. Belgium's purchase of 34 F-35A fighters concentrated its industrial return in a handful of firms (RTBF, 2021). A security-dividend approach would ask what workforce, training or local supplier programmes could have extended that benefit to regions without a stake in the supply chain.

Naming the Threat

Finland's model works partly because the country has a clear, named, proximate threat. Belgium's threats are diffuse – terrorism, hybrid interference, cyberattacks, disinformation, democratic erosion (Lessenski, 2023) . 'We need civic resilience because inequality is bad' is not a security argument. 'Belgium hosts the institutions adversaries most want to destabilise, and a fragmented society makes it easier for them' is. That is the difference between a narrative that moves policymakers and one that reads as a restatement of the welfare case in security language.

Testing Political Sequencing

Belgium's German-speaking Community (Ostbelgien), with nearly 80,000 people, is small enough to serve as a laboratory for the prototype. At the regional level, the roadmap would set up a mechanism for thinking through how the reframing affects people in practice: what it would change in their communities, their services and their sense of belonging. What that mechanism shows then becomes the evidence base for the federal case. If the reframing works there, this will provide a proof of concept to bring to Wallonia, Flanders and the federal level.

The roadmap sequences this deliberately across three phases: a regional phase spent building a small cross-linguistic coalition in Ostbelgien's parliament, a federal preparation phase spent building endorsement and reaching out to ministerial cabinets, and only then a federal pitch built on evidence.



The design constraint behind this sequence is Belgium's federal architecture itself. An initiative emanating from this community parliament with 25 seats and extremely limited competences cannot reach the federal security architecture from there without going through Wallonia - the region within which Ostbelgien's territory sits, and which retains most regional competences not specifically devolved to the German-speaking Community - or through the federal parliament directly, each operating in a different language and with different political dynamics.

There is no straight path for a community parliament to shape national security strategy – the path runs through coalition politics, negotiation among language communities and the federal government-formation process. Testing the narrative at the regional level before spending political capital at the federal level is the only sequencing available.





This is why the three-step ‘collect, build, test’ method matters as a whole. Each phase in the sequencing is only as strong as the evidence the method has produced by that point: the regional phase draws on cases collected at the local level, the federal preparation phase is carried by narrative outputs built along the way. Each of the outputs – a parliamentary speech, a video pitch, an op ed, a policy brief and a roundtable at the Committee of the Regions – is an opportunity to observe whether the narrative changes how the issue is discussed in public debate, not only whether it is well received where it is delivered. The federal pitch is only attempted once testing with stakeholders shows the reframing is effective.

It follows that the narrative cannot be ‘Belgian civic resilience’ in the singular. The term cohesion already carries three different political meanings across the country’s linguistic registers. It is associated with integrationist demands in Flemish discourse, with solidarity transfers from Flanders in francophone discourse and with cultural survival as a minority in the German-speaking community. Therefore, the reframing - from ‘social policy versus security’ to ‘cohesion as a precondition for security’ - has to be tested in three registers and adapted to the three contexts, rather than simply translated once and distributed.

Testing the Prototype: What Remains Open

The prototyping process included bringing in the perspective of Alison Hunter, an expert working at the intersection of EU cohesion and security policy. Her critique, alongside the open questions the roadmap has not yet answered, points to where this work goes next.

Hunter’s broader point is that any argument for civic resilience will need to connect with people’s immediate, day-to-day pressures – like the cost of living – to really resonate.

Terms that need unpacking.

The distinction between cohesion and cohesion policy is not obvious to most audiences, nor is the link between social cohesion and civic resilience. Clearer framing is needed – even after the definitional work done earlier in this roadmap, the terms will need continual re-explaining as the narrative moves between audiences.

A word under strain.

There is a risk that social cohesion is heard as a vague or overused phrase in some circles. It should be used deliberately and precisely, rather than assuming it is automatically well understood by all.

Two areas to strengthen.

The roadmap doesn't yet address how[IB1] local-level evidence gains political weight beyond the room it's collected in – cases from Ostbelgien don't automatically move federal opinion on their own. Nor does it name the trade-offs involved: cohesion efforts can widen regional gaps as easily as close them, a tension worth stating directly rather than assuming away

A question of timing.

Europe’s security transformation is often treated as temporary, which risks pushing cohesion questions to later. This is precisely the case for cohesion as a long-term priority rather than an afterthought.

The prototype presented does not yet answer several questions. The one of whether the theme chosen is too big to act on can be met with the argument that one can start with a single action, such as the Committee of the Regions roundtable, and progress from there. Other questions remain open: Are the existing institutions fit for purpose for this transition? How to create embedded systems that are genuinely cross-border rather than confined to individual countries? How to bring people back together around something that is shared, rather than use a term that has come to mean very little? Is the dividend for citizens concrete enough that they can experience it and not be told about it?

None of these questions has a ready answer, and the roadmap does not pretend otherwise. What it offers instead is a sequence for finding out – narrative outputs tested in public, feedback taken seriously enough to organize a political path, however narrow, from a small community parliament outward. The closing message to Belgian and European parliamentarians remains the one the roadmap started with: investing in civic resilience is one of the most important foundations of security policy.

Bibliography

Burgoon, B. (2006). On welfare and terror. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 50(2), 176-203.

Chan, J., To, H.-P., & Chan, E. (2006). Reconsidering social cohesion. Social Indicators Research, 75(2), 273-302.

Delhey, J., Dragolov, G., & Boehnke, K. (2023). Social cohesion in international comparison. Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 75(S1), 95-120.

ECFR. (2025b). From shield to sword: Europe's offensive strategy for the hybrid age. European Council on Foreign Relations.

Finnish Government. (2025). Finland's comprehensive security reinforced through new security strategy for society. Government resolution.

Hunter, A. (2023). Addressing Cohesion Policy's identity crisis in a changing European Union (Discussion Paper). European Policy Centre.

Krieger, T., & Meierrieks, D. (2010). Terrorism in the worlds of welfare capitalism. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 54(1), 902-932.

Krueger, A. B., & Malečková, J. (2003). Education, poverty and terrorism. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 17(4), 119-144.

Lessenski, M. (2023). Media Literacy Index 2023. Open Society Institute - Sofia.

Mendez, C., Bachtler, J., & Wishlade, F. (2025). Cohesion Policy on the rocks? (EoRPA Report 25/3). European Policies Research Centre, University of Strathclyde.

OECD. (2024b). OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions: 2024 results. OECD Publishing.
Rodríguez-Pose, A., Dijkstra, L., & Poelman, H. (2024). The geography of EU discontent and the regional development trap. Economic Geography, 100(3), 213-245.

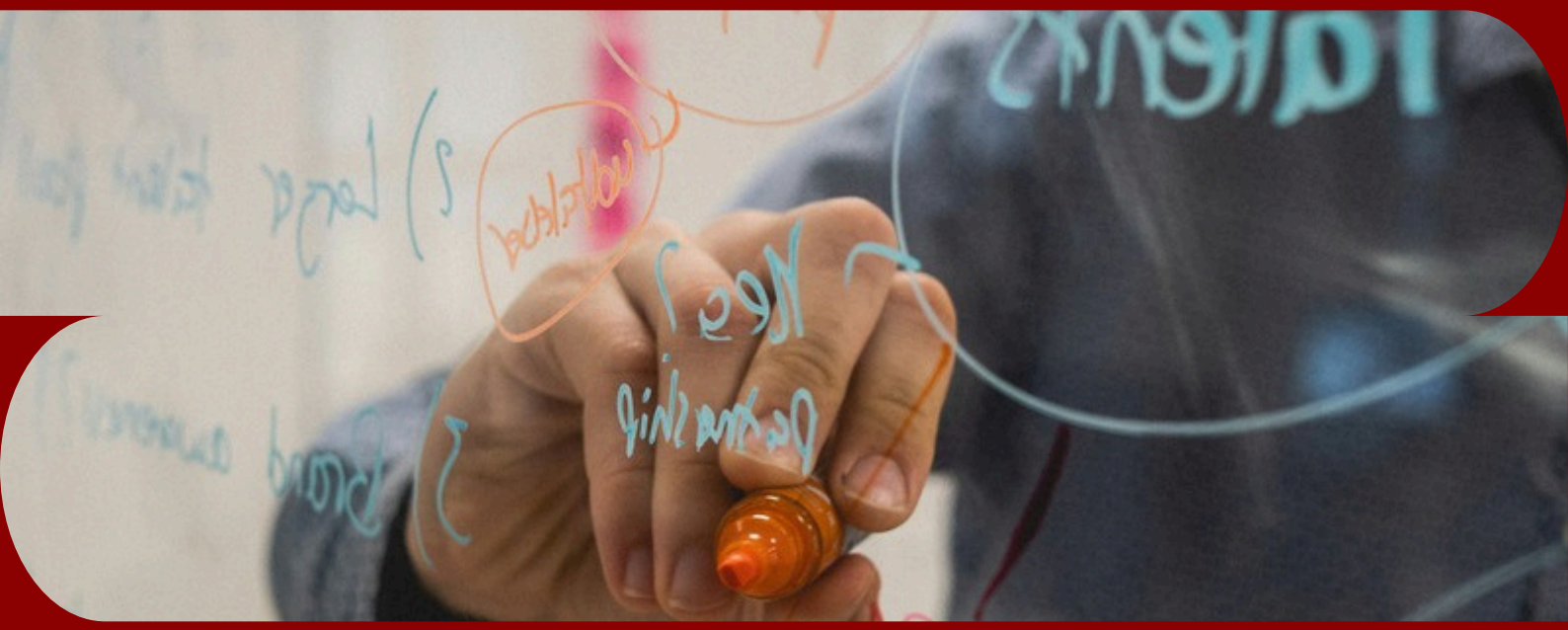
RTBF. (2021, March 17). L'achat des 34 avions de chasse F-35 : une épine dans le pied du gouvernement fédéral. RTBF Actus.

RTBF. (2021, April 20). Réforme de la protection civile : la Région bruxelloise reste sur le qui-vive. RTBF Actus.

Schiefer, D., & van der Noll, J. (2017). The essentials of social cohesion: A literature review. Social Indicators Research, 132(2), 579-603.

Schwab, T. (2024). Quo vadis, Cohesion Policy? Intereconomics, 59(5), 284-292.

Woolmore, T. (2025). The porcupine and the hedgehog: The influence of Finland's comprehensive security model on the British whole-of-society approach [MA thesis, King's College London].



Sweden: The Case for a National Innovation Push

Prototype developed by

Johan Büser *(Social Democratic Labour Party, Sweden)*
Margareta Cederfelt *(Moderate Party, Sweden)*

Coordinator

Davide Albeggiani

Analysis and editing by

Open European Dialogue

← Contents

Sweden: The Case for a National Innovation Push

Why a parliamentary committee is the missing piece in the innovation economy

Innovation is at the heart of Europe's economic security because the capacity to convert knowledge into commercial and strategic value determines whether a country can fund its welfare commitments, sustain its defence, and hold its own in a global economy where trade, technology and security often converge into a single policy space. For a small, open economy like Sweden, this is not only a matter of national performance but also of where the country stands relative to others, and whether it avoids falling behind.

The conditions for Sweden achieving the above are largely European. It cannot pursue a 2040 innovation ambition exclusively from within its borders: its research base, clusters, and firms are nodes in European and global configurations, and the rules governing those configurations - trade agreements, regulatory standards, the design of the Single Market - are largely made in Brussels. The country's innovation strategy and its European position must be worked out together at the same time.

Inputs and Conversion

Sweden begins from a position of strength. The European Innovation Scoreboard ranks it first among EU member states (European Commission, 2026). Its research and development intensity at 3.5% of GDP is among the highest in the world and above the EU average of 2.2% (Statistics Sweden, 2026). The country has built that position through openness. Exports were equivalent to more than half of GDP in 2025 (World Bank, 2026). The scoreboard has Sweden at 173.5% of the EU average in the dimension of attractive research systems, which covers international scientific co-publications, citation impact and the presence of foreign doctoral students (European Commission, 2026).

There is, however, a marked difference in Sweden's performance across the scoreboard's dimensions. Its top position in the EU rests mostly on inputs and framework conditions: 189% of the EU average in linkages between innovation actors, 158% in human resources and 151% in firm investments. In the sales and employment impacts dimension, which measures whether innovation reaches markets, it scores 112%. No dimension falls below the EU average. Among individual indicators, exports of medium- and high-technology products stand at 86% (European Commission, 2026). Sweden's strength therefore appears to lie more in the conditions for innovation than in commercial results.

This 'research-to-market gap' is not a Swedish anomaly. Mario Draghi's 2024 report to the European Commission identifies the same failure at EU level, and argues that Europe's weakness lies less in generating ideas than in turning them into commercial value (Draghi, 2024). Sweden is among the European countries best placed to address it.

Mikael Román offered the analytical frame the prototyping team adopted for addressing the problem (Román, 2026). He argues that innovation policy is still largely designed for a world of stable systems and predictable outcomes that no longer exists. This requires a shift from optimising a national system to navigating interdependent global systems - from instruments to system positioning, from planning to discovery and adaptation, and from a national focus to strategic interdependence.

Interdependent systems always contain latent asymmetries: imbalances in knowledge, capacity, market power and institutional quality. Governance buffers balance this: arrangements that absorb consequences before they turn into crises, with the multilateral trade regime as the paradigmatic case (Román, 2026). What is eroding today is not connectivity but the architecture that made it manageable, with trade restrictions becoming more frequent over the past years. As these buffers weaken, the asymmetries surface. But they are not only sources of vulnerability. When capabilities, needs, and governance frameworks fall out of alignment, new positions open up, and those actors able to occupy them can generate value disproportionate to their size. Román calls this 'systemic arbitrage', distinguishing its exploitative form, which extracts value from asymmetry with a partner without returning any to it, from its productive form, in which both sides gain from a connection that would not otherwise exist. For small states, productive positioning is often the most viable route to sustained influence.

In this context, EU trade agreements take on a different meaning. A new generation of agreements is in place, opening significant economic opportunities and carrying commitments on democracy and human rights that Sweden is particularly interested in advancing. But trade agreements are no longer only instruments of market access. They determine who participates in the innovation economy and on what terms, and they can open or close strategic positions in global technology systems (Román, 2026). Dani Rodrik's case for organising economic policy around productive capabilities rather than market efficiency points to the same conclusion: innovation objectives cannot simply be appended to standard liberalisation frameworks (Rodrik, 2023). Sweden has the standing to make that case in the EU.

Three features of the country's domestic system are relevant here:

The first is geographic. Stockholm is the top region in Europe in the European Commission's Regional Innovation Scoreboard ratings, with South Sweden (Sydsverige) and West Sweden (Västsverige) also in the highest band, and Middle Norrland (Mellersta Norrland) two bands lower as a moderate innovator. The spread is wide: Middle Norrland performs at 72.2 against a Swedish average of 100. Neighbouring Norway has a more even distribution, with its weakest region at 85.7 against its own national average and all six regions improving between 2018 and 2025 (European Commission, 2025).

The second is participation. Vinnova, Sweden's innovation agency, reports that close to 40% of the projects it funded between 2020 and 2025 were led by women, and that women's success rate now matches their share of applicants. However, start-ups owned by women continue to apply for and receive funding at a very low rate (Vinnova, 2026b). The gender gap has narrowed at the project-leadership level but not at that of start-up ownership.

The third is temporal. Strategic positioning unfolds over time horizons beyond electoral cycles, and Sweden's response to long-horizon questions has tended to be built around instruments that end. The National Innovation Council, established in 2015 and chaired by the prime minister, brought together government ministers and representatives of academia and business (Riksrevisionen, 2020). It is no longer active, and its functions have passed to agency-led programmes. By contrast, Finland's Committee for the Future was established in the parliament (Eduskunta) in 1993 as a temporary body reappointed each electoral term, but was made a permanent standing committee in 2000, with a formal role as counterpart for the prime minister on government long-term strategic planning (Ogami et al., 2025). The committee has endured through every government transition since.

Missing Capabilities

Each one of the features above points to the absence of institutional capability rather than of policy.

No mechanism for conversion. Sweden produces knowledge but struggles to convert it into commercial value. As noted above, it performs less well in the European Innovation Scoreboard's sales and employment impacts dimension, and it is below the EU average on the indicator for exports of medium- and high-technology products. Where that failure occurs in the process has not been established. It is not, on the available evidence, a matter of losing young firms to foreign buyers: the most recent government-commissioned study on this question finds that foreign firms acquired Swedish ones that were larger, more productive and more export-intensive than the average, and that most of these continue to operate and grow in Sweden (Heyman & Sjöholm, 2025). The question of what causes the conversion gap is not being tackled by any standing institution.

No Swedish innovation position in trade negotiations. Many of the agreements determining which innovation configurations are available to Swedish firms and researchers are negotiated at the EU level. Sweden has standing institutions for forming EU trade positions: the Kommerskollegium produces the trade policy analysis the country uses to influence EU policy (Kommerskollegium, n.d.), and in the parliament (Riksdag) the Committee on European Union Affairs mandates ministers before EU Council meetings. Neither of these bodies has a defined function for setting innovation objectives, so innovation is treated as one input among others rather than as a tracked category, and Sweden argues its interests in this field case by case rather than in a structured, holistic manner.

No escalation path for regional clusters. Sweden funds regional innovation environments through Vinnväxt and is now selecting its first world-leading clusters through the Excellenskluster programme, run jointly by Vinnova and the Swedish Research Council, with funding decisions due in December 2026 (Vinnova, 2026a). What it does not have is an explicit escalation ladder like Norway's, where tiers of support (Arena for emerging clusters, Arena Pro and Norwegian Centres of Expertise for established ones, and Global Centres of Expertise for those competing internationally) are allocated according to a cluster's maturity and ambition (OECD, 2025). While a Swedish region can be funded, there are limited formal routes to grow from regional strength to an internationally recognised position.

No participation measure past the project stage. Innovation systems that draw on a narrow range of actors are limited in what they can perceive and miss opportunities that those with more varied participants would catch (Román, 2026). Sweden applies that lesson at one point in the process only. Gender criteria are built into the standard Vinnova application, which asks what share of the project team, the work and the decision-making roles is held by women (Vinnova, n.d.). No equivalent expectation applies further along, when research becomes a business, and, as noted above, start-ups owned by women continue to apply for and receive funding at a very low rate. Nothing measures participation at the stage where commercial value is captured.

No institution designed to hold a long-horizon commitment. Sweden has repeatedly demonstrated political intent on innovation. What it has instead of a permanent body are Research Advisory Boards, fixed-term expert groups appointed at ministerial discretion, whose membership is chosen on the basis of individual merit, and which dissolve once they have advised on a single research and innovation bill (Regeringskansliet, 2023). There is no institution that carries the innovation intent across changes of government, so political commitments risk fragmenting with transitions.

No single parliamentary home for innovation. The Riksdag's Committee on Industry and Trade formally prepares general guidelines for industrial policy and connected research questions (Sveriges riksdag, n.d.-c). But innovation now cuts across trade agreements, artificial intelligence, climate, raw materials and the supply of skilled labour, and no single committee's remit spans the whole of it. There is no parliamentary forum in which the problem is addressed in one piece.

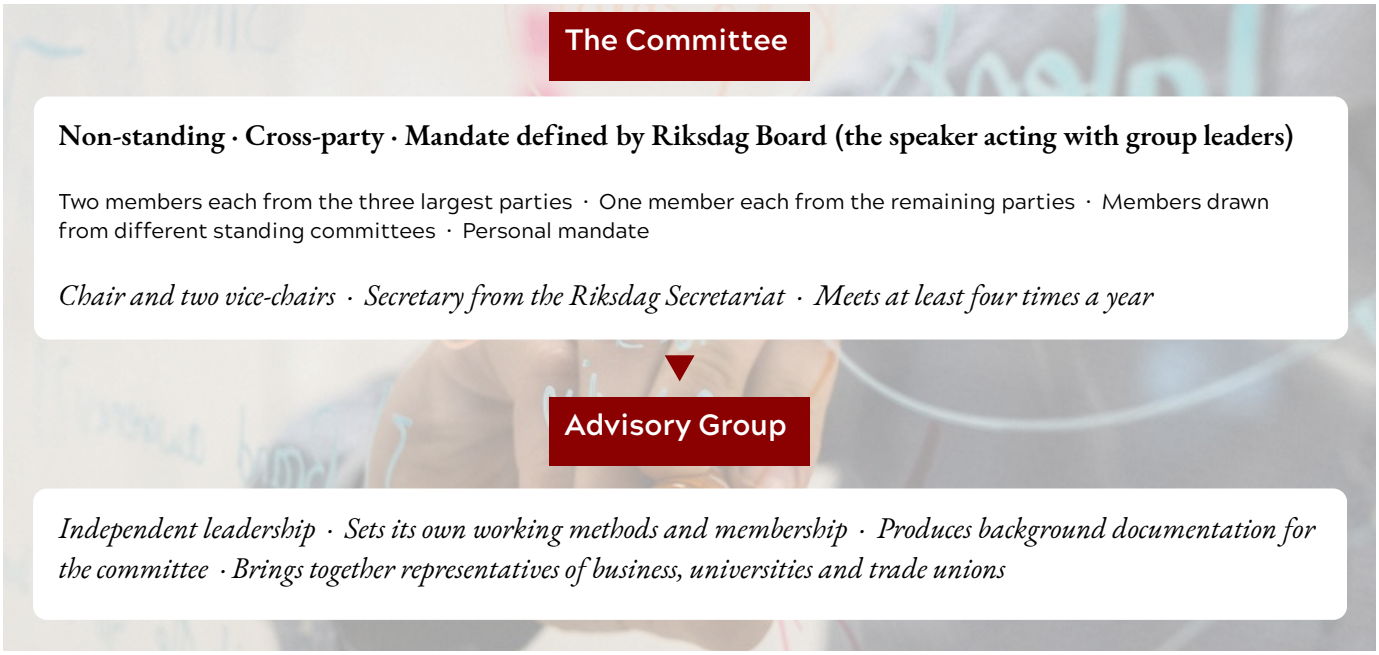
Based on the analysis of these constraints, the team identified three framing questions:

- How can we implement new EU trade agreements to support innovation in Sweden?
- How can we unlock innovation potential by including marginalised groups better?
- How can we nurture and strengthen political will to support innovation in Sweden?

A Parliamentary Committee on Innovation

The team proposed establishing a cross-party committee on innovation within the Riksdag. Its mandate would be to keep Sweden's strategic direction on innovation stable across changes of government, making it closer in form to the central bank or to the Fiscal Policy Council that assesses whether governments are meeting their own budget targets, than to a policy or programme of instruments and inputs. As politics becomes faster and more polarised, long-term direction becomes harder to sustain. The cross-party design is a response to that.

The theory of change is limited to what a parliamentary body can do. The committee would bring politics, business, universities and trade unions into a sustained dialogue on innovation, with a formal link to the government's long-term strategic planning, so that its work would shape decisions. That link is what would distinguish the committee from an advisory forum. For example, the parliamentary Committee for the Future in Finland is effective in large part because its work feeds into a defined government process. The team decided that the civic sector is too broad to be represented through a few seats for civil society organisations, and proposed that it should instead be involved on an ad hoc basis.



The prototype offered is a two-level structure with the committee and an advisory group. This gives two seats to each of the three largest parties and one to each of the others, so that the parties that carry a proposal into government would have enough weight in the committee to treat its conclusions as their own, while every party has a seat and the committee is small enough to work efficiently.

Members would sit in their own right rather than as party delegates, and would be drawn from different standing committees rather than from the Committee on Industry and Trade alone. As the Riksdag Board has the competence to establish a body of this kind and to define its mandate, implementing the proposal would require no new procedural instrument.

The advisory group would elect its own leadership, set its own working methods and membership, and produce background documentation for the committee. Its independence would enable the committee to integrate cross-sector intelligence rather than consult it after the fact.

The mandate of the committee would consolidate ten topics, from regional clusters to measurement and the scaling of small and medium-sized enterprises, into three strategic functions, on the basis that a body addressing all ten separately would likely produce 'thin' work on each. The functions are to identify emerging opportunities, build absorptive capacity and position Sweden internationally. Defining the mandate above all in terms of functions rather than topics would keep the committee's remit narrow enough to enable it to carry out more substantial work and produce decisions.

1. Identify Emerging Opportunities

Determine where Sweden is best placed to act.

- Sweden's position in the global value chain and the strategic positions Swedish companies should occupy
- What innovation will look like in 2040 and how Sweden remains innovative
- Measuring and tracking how innovation contributes to growth

2. Build Absorptive Capacity

Ensure Sweden has the talent, regions and clusters to seize them.

- Strengthen existing clusters and develop new ones across all regions, drawing on rural and urban areas
- Strengthen the innovation capacity of all parts of the economy - traditional industries, service providers, and SMEs - while ensuring new entrants and start-ups continue to emerge alongside established firms
- Unlock the innovation potential of under-represented groups, including women, people with immigrant backgrounds and people with disabilities
- Support entrepreneurship in rural and disadvantaged areas
- Competence supply and development, including craftsmanship

3. Position Sweden Internationally

Translate national capacity into productive global positioning.

- Support Swedish innovators to grow into internationally competitive businesses in Sweden and across the EU
- Attract foreign innovators and partner with global companies
- Strategic international partnerships and Sweden's role in the EU's innovation and trade architecture
- The role of universities and research and development in cross-sector and international collaboration

Learning mechanisms would be built in from the start: annual reviews tracking where Sweden's opportunities have shifted, and foresight hearings drawing on practitioners rather than academic research alone. The Committee would also maintain a formal channel to EU-level processes, carrying Swedish parliamentary thinking into Brussels and bringing back an early view of what is being decided there.

Three conditions are non-negotiable if the committee is to function effectively: it should have a scope limited to structural, medium-term and long-term innovation challenges; its own budget line; and broad cross-party support from the outset. Recent experience shows why each of these matters. The country's two most visible bodies in this area were built for different purposes and on different timeframes, and neither was set up to do what is proposed here.

The National Innovation Council had convening power and prime-ministerial attention, but no anchoring independent of the government that created it. For its part, the AI Commission was established for a time-limited inquiry. It presented its roadmap to the government in November 2024 and published it in February 2025 (AI-kommissionen, 2025). The government cited its report, together with the Digitalisation Strategy 2025-2030, as a basis for its AI strategy work (Regeringskansliet, n.d.). But a time-limited commission of inquiry only answers the question posed when it was appointed, and it does not provide a standing capacity to revisit that question as conditions change. Neither of these two bodies has provided such a standing instrument across governments, or been able to revise its conclusions as needed. Thus, Sweden has no body that does this for innovation.

The team's logic for having a non-standing committee as its prototype is based on the grounds that the objective is targeted policy development rather than debate. To the argument that a standing body would be the needed instrument if continuity across electoral cycles is the purpose, the team's answer is that Sweden achieves durability through political mandates. A domestic precedent is the cross-party group charged in 1991 with producing a plan for rebuilding the public pensions system, which produced a five-party agreement in 1994. The Pensions Group that succeeded it has endured through every government change since without being a standing committee (Sveriges riksdag, n.d.-b; Socialdepartementet, 2009). In a similar vein, the Defence Commission established in 1992 within the Ministry of Defence, with a membership spanning all Riksdag parties, has produced more than 20 reports since 1995 across all changes of government (Sveriges riksdag, n.d.-a). Both are government-convened forums rather than Riksdag bodies, but they show that cross-party ownership, not standing status, is what sustains a long-horizon commitment. What carries a body across government transitions is whether the parties collectively own it, and defining the mandate of the proposed committee through the Riksdag Board would reinforce that ownership.

The team intends to bring the proposal forward during the 2026/27 parliamentary session, the first following the September 2026 elections. The next steps need no formal authorisation. The first is to secure sponsors in the governing parties and in the largest opposition parties. The second is a formal approach to the Riksdag Board, which has the competence to establish the committee and define its mandate. There would also be ongoing discussions with the business, university and trade union sectors, which would be represented on the advisory group.

Conclusion: the Missing Institution

Sweden's problem is not a shortage of research, funding or firms. It leads Europe on innovation. Yet, it has no institution responsible for holding strategic direction across changes of government. The conversion gap is not properly investigated, and long-horizon questions are entrusted to instruments that end. A cross-party committee in the Riksdag, with an independent advisory group and a mandate defined by the Riksdag Board, is a strong solution.

This prototype would have to be tested eventually through a change of government.

Whether the political mandate shared by the parties that led to creating such a body would endure is an open question. There is reason to think it would, as the pension agreement and the Defence Commission have endured for around three decades.

Creating the proposed committee would not require a leap into the unknown, as it would take a form familiar in Swedish politics. It would need the three things such bodies have always needed to survive: a scope narrow enough to produce decisions, a budget line of its own, and the backing of parties that are in government and those that are not.

Finally, the prototyping process demonstrated how this approach would work. Two parliamentarians from opposing parties, who disagree on a lot of political issues, worked through hard questions together to produce a policy design. The prototype scales this practice at the parliamentary level and extends it to business, university and trade union representatives, who can see where innovation stalls but have no formal channel to those who legislate in this field.

Bibliography

AI-kommissionen. (2025). AI-kommissionens färdplan för Sverige [The AI Commission's roadmap for Sweden] (SOU 2025:12). Regeringskansliet, Finansdepartementet. https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2025/02/sou-202512/

Draghi, M. (2024). The future of European competitiveness. Report to the European Commission. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en

European Commission. (2025). Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2025: Sweden and Norway regional profiles. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/rtd/ris/2025/ec_rtd_ris-regional-profile-se.pdf; https://ec.europa.eu/assets/rtd/ris/2025/ec_rtd_ris-regional-profile-no.pdf

European Commission. (2026). European Innovation Scoreboard 2026: Sweden country profile. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. https://ec.europa.eu/assets/rtd/eis/2026/ec_rtd_eis-country-profile-se.pdf

Heyman, F., & Sjöholm, F. (2025). När Sverige säljer: En ESO-rapport om ekonomiska effekter av utländska företagsuppköp [When Sweden sells: An ESO report on the economic effects of foreign company acquisitions] (Rapport till Expertgruppen för Studier i Offentlig Ekonomi 2025:5). Expertgruppen för Studier i Offentlig Ekonomi.

Kommerskollegium. (n.d.). Vårt uppdrag [Our mandate]. National Board of Trade Sweden. https://www.kommerskollegium.se/

OECD. (2025). Norwegian Innovation Clusters. STIP Compass.

Ogami, M., Kameyama, Y., & Tasaki, T. (2025). Future-regarding institutions through a legitimacy lens. Political Studies Review. https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299251359387

Regeringskansliet. (n.d.). Sveriges AI-strategi [Sweden's AI strategy]. https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/sveriges-ai-strategi/

Regeringskansliet. (2023). Regeringen tillsätter ny forskningsberedning [The government appoints a new Research Advisory Board]. https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2023/08/regeringen-tillsatter-ny-forskningsberedning/

Riksrevisionen. (2020). Innovation genom samverkan: Statens satsningar på strategiska samverkansprogram (RiR 2020:6). https://riksrevisionen.se/en/audit-reports/audit-reports/2020/innovation-through-partnership---government-investments-in-strategic-innovation-partnership-programmes-and-strategic-innovation-programmes.html

Rodrik, D. (2025). On productivism. In T. Besley, I. Bucelli & A. Velasco (Eds.), The London Consensus: Economic principles for the 21st century (pp. 77-113). LSE Press.

Román, M. (2026). Innovation as strategic navigation: Governance architecture for Sweden's competitive sovereignty by 2040. Research package prepared for Mission 6, Policy Mission Fellowship. Open European Dialogue. Unpublished.

Socialdepartementet. (2009). Detta är pensionsöverenskommelsen [This is the pension agreement] (Ds 2009:53). https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/departementsserien/detta-ar-pensionsoverenskommelsen_gxb453/html/

Statistics Sweden. (2026). Forskning och utveckling i Sverige 2025 – preliminär statistik [Research and development in Sweden 2025 – preliminary statistics]. SCB. https://www.scb.se/publikation/60272

Sveriges riksdag. (n.d.-a). Kommittéberättelse Fö 1992:B: Försvarsberedningen. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/kommitteberattelse/forsvarsberedningen-fo-1992b-organ-inom_ggb2f%C3%B6b/

Sveriges riksdag. (n.d.-b). Kommittéberättelse S 1991:14: Pensionsarbetsgruppen (se dir. 1991:102). https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/kommitteberattelse/pensionsarbetsgruppen-s-199114_gfb2s14/

Sveriges riksdag. (n.d.-c). The Committee on Industry and Trade. https://www.riksdagen.se/en/how-the-riksdag-works/committees/committee-on-industry-and-trade/

Vinnova. (n.d.). Tips om jämställdhet i ansökan [Tips on gender equality in the application]. https://www.vinnova.se/globalassets/mikrosajter/utmaningsdriven-innovation/dokument/tips-om-jamstalldhet-i-ansokan.pdf

Vinnova. (2026a, June 12). 65 candidates for world-leading cluster of excellence. https://www.vinnova.se/en/news/2026/06/65-wants-to-start-a-world-leading-cluster-of-excellence

Vinnova. (2026b). När jämställdhet möter innovation [When gender equality meets innovation]. Vinnova. https://www.vinnova.se/en/publications/when-gender-equality-meets-innovation/

World Bank. (2026). Exports of goods and services (% of GDP): Sweden (Indicator NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS). World Bank Open Data. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS?locations=SE



From Spending to Capability: A Shared Acquisition Platform for Europe

Prototype developed by

Claudiu Năsui *(Save Romania Union, Romania)*
Andris Šuvajevs *(The Progressives, Latvia)*
Fred Thomas *(Labour Party, United Kingdom)*
Mart Võrklaev *(Estonian Reform Party, Estonia)*
Oleksandra Ustinova *(Voice, Ukraine)*

Coordinator

Rebecca R. Farulli

Analysis and editing by

Open European Dialogue

← Contents

From Spending to Capability: A Shared Acquisition Platform for Europe

A policy prototype for a faster, interoperable European defence cabability

A prototyping team of five parliamentarians set out to address the challenge of ensuring that the European Union's historic increase in defence spending produces deployable capability as well as a resilient industrial ecosystem to sustain it.

Their starting proposition was that EU's security does not depend only on how much European countries spend, but also on whether they can develop and operate systems that are interoperable and supported by resilient EU and trusted-partner supply chains, and suited to a rapidly evolving strategic environment.

This mission formed part of the Fellowship's wider concern with the securitisation of Europe's economic power. It addressed three core questions:

- How can we build a self-sufficient, interoperable defence ecosystem that reduces strategic dependencies and exposure to hostile actors?
- How can we scale smart joint weapons production and procurement across member states?
- How can we mobilise the fiscal architechture and firepower needed to sustain permanent shared capabilities and standing forces?

All three concerns converge on acquisition: the chain that turns requirements into contracts, contracts into production, and production into capability that can be fielded and sustained. It is at each link of this chain that Europe's fragmentation shows up.

The Conversion Problem

In 2026, defence expenditure in Europe is expected to reach €454 billion, up 8.6% from the previous year and 75.3% from 2021.
The figures show the scale of Europe's spending increase, but they do not necessarily indicate whether it has translated into the readiness, interoperability, or collective operational effectiveness needed.

Higher spending does not automatically create greater collective security. The issue is conversion: how effectively financial resources translate into deployable, interoperable, and sustainable capability. Defence spending becomes military capability through requirements, procurement, contracts, production, testing, training, maintenance and replenishment. If these processes are fragmented, slow or poorly connected, additional spending can produce more equipment without a proportionate increase in security.

The conversion problem is not confined to defence: Mario Draghi's 2024 report on European competitiveness identified a related pattern, in which the EU has major research, industrial and financial resources but often lacks the market structure, institutional coordination and scaling mechanisms needed to turn them into real commercial and strategic advantage.

Critical Structural Weaknesses

The mission treated procurement as the central conversion mechanism, identifying three interconnected structural weaknesses that affect how the EU develops and acquires defence technology, and how it translates economic resources into strategic power and collective security.

Procurement is fragmented, and interoperability is treated as a downstream problem.

Defence planning processes remain largely national and fragmented. This makes it harder to aggregate demand, achieve production at scale, and ensure interoperability from the start, which is especially critical for capabilities whose operational value depends on frequent software updates, countermeasure adaptation, modular integration, and rapid replacement.

There is an industrial under-capacity and scaling gap.

Many small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) struggle to transition from a viable prototype to a contract large enough to support production, workforce growth, and consistent supply-chain investment.

A European Commission study found that approximately 40% of defence SMEs in the EU considered access to finance difficult or very difficult. It also identified estimated debt-financing gaps of approximately €1-2 billion. The problem thus seems to be not merely access to capital but also a diffuse systemic uncertainty about future demand, where a supplier can demonstrate a technically credible product and still lack a predictable route to recurring procurement, a reference customer, production commitments or a reliable basis for attracting later-stage capital. This creates a 'valley of death' between a capability that may exist and the market conditions needed to manufacture, maintain and replenish it.

The acquisition and technology timelines are not aligned.

The mismatch is clearest in drones, counter-drone systems, and advanced electronic warfare. Major defence acquisition programmes commonly run over long periods, with delivery often taking years after contracts are awarded. That suits many high-value, long-life systems, including aircraft, warships, armoured vehicles, and integrated air-defence architectures, but for some uncrewed systems, like drones, whose operational performance changes rapidly, a configuration may remain technically functional while becoming operationally less relevant within months.

Ukraine's experience shows that some production, prototyping, and acquisition processes, particularly for rapidly evolving uncrewed and electronic-warfare capabilities, can be accelerated through operational feedback, flexible requirements, and shorter development cycles. This does not mean that every defence acquisition should operate at wartime speed.

The Gap

The EU's current approach to procurement has important strengths that make it able to deploy large amounts of public money, support competition and auditability, impose accountability on suppliers and manage complex programmes whose platforms may remain in service for decades. However, it is not well suited to the category of capability now shaping the battlefield, or to what is actually required if there is a genuine ambition to achieve collective security.

Drones and counter-drone systems are a case in point. The EU has identified them as a priority capability area, and the European Commission has proposed dedicated projects and instruments to support their development and deployment. The prototyping team explored an EU acquisition instrument for capabilities like these, whose value depends on rapid iteration, operational testing, interoperability, software updates and predictable replenishment.

The European Capability Hub

The prototype proposed consists of a shared capability-acquisition platform: the European Capability Hub (ECH). This combines pooled procurement, common standards, operational deployment, and continuous technology integration to connect countries with producers, accelerate the EU's collective defence, and strengthen its economic resilience.

The hub would operate according to a cycle and be built around a set of linked functions:

- Pooled procurement
- Common standards and interoperability
- Continuous technology integration
- Operational deployment, testing and feedback

Capability Definition

The cycle begins with the identification of the priority capabilities with participating countries.
The requirement would describe the military effect, operating environment, security conditions, performance thresholds and interoperability needs rather than prescribe one technical product. A counter-drone capability, for example, could be defined by the threats it must detect, track, disrupt or defeat, or by the environments in which it must operate. This approach would identify the part of the requirement that participating states can define together as most needed.

Participating armed forces and national acquisition authorities would own the operational requirement. The European Defence Agency, or another body, could be the proposed authority to support the process for ECH.

Qualified Competition

Next, the ECH platform publishes the capability, and European companies (defence or even dual-use entities) bid to provide it. Bidding is open to firms that qualify based on set criteria.

Supplier eligibility would be reviewed periodically so that new entrants can qualify, while ensuring the continued quality of the supply pool. Qualification would remain distinct from contract award and the competition open to qualified firms in participating states. Awards would be made on best value and not lowest price alone.

Research, Development and Testing

The prototype places R&D and testing within the procurement cycle rather than treating them as activities that end before procurement begins. For selected fast-moving capabilities, testing could include controlled trials, military exercises, technical conformance tests and user evaluation, which would inform the next iteration of the capability requirements.

Continuous testing would not replace safety certification, cybersecurity accreditation, national operational approval, etc., but supplement these processes by making demonstrated performance and interoperability part of recurring procurement decisions.

ECH
CAPABILITY HUB

OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVE: INTEROPERABILITY OFTECHNOLOGIES TOGETHER, FASTER, STRONGER.

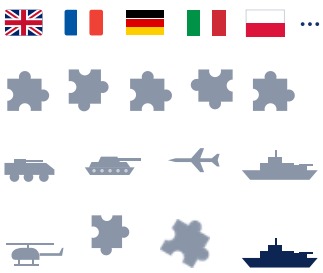
Poolingdemand.Setting standards. Testinginoperations.
Delivering interoperable capabilities at the speed of relevance.



ECH creates a shared capabilities platform to accelerate Europe's collective defence readiness, strengthen industrial sovereignty, and connect European armies with Europe's innovation and production ecosystem.

THE PROBLEM

- Fragmented procurement
- Incompatible systems
- Slow adoption of new technologies
- No economies of scale
- Dependence on non-European supply chains

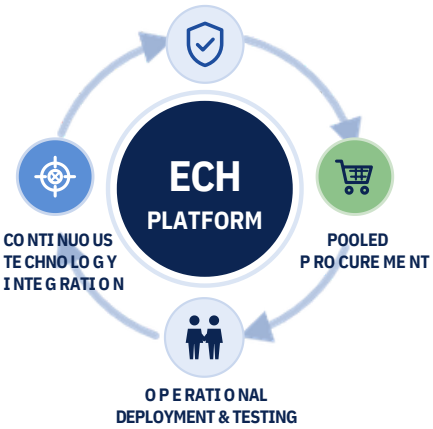


Europe spends substantial sums on defence, but lacks interoperability, production depth, and operational integration.

THE SOLUTION: ECH

- Centralised pooled procurement via Technology-as-a-Service (TaaS)
- Standards & Interoperability requirements validated in operations
- Continuous testing & operational feedback
- Recurring demand for European s uppl i er s
- Industrial sovereignty & economies of scale

THE ECH PLATFORM



POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Eligible to participate:
All EU Member States
+ United Kingdom, Ukraine,
No rwa y

Collective demand drives collective s tr ength.

One ecosystem.
One standard.
One advantage.

European security.
European industry.
European future.

THE MECHANISM: TECHNOLOGY-AS-A-SERVICE (TAAS)

Continuous6-MonthCapabilityCycles

1 CAPABILITY DEFINITION

ECA+ defines priority capabilities with participating countries.

Example:
Medium-range anti-drone airborne system

2 OPEN BIDDING ON ECH PLATFORM

Companies across Europe (dual-use or defence) bid to provide the capability for 6 months .

Transparent pricing.
Fair competition.

3 R&D & TESTING (0–6 MONTHS)

R&D by companies + EDA+.

Joint trials, war games and operational testing.

4 OPERATIONAL FEEDBACK LOOP

Real-world feedback from Ukraine, Middle East and exercises feeds directly back to improve s olutions .

5 NEW BIDDING (CYCLE RENEWAL)

Before 6 months end, new bidding for all c apabilities .

Partners may change per cycle.

6 AWARD & NEXT CYCLE

Lowest compliant bidder selected for the next 6-month cycle.

Cycle restarts.
Capability improves.

6-MONTH CYCLES | **MINIMUM MONTHLY PROCUREMENT FLOOR** (Per Capability Category) | **DEFINED C A PA B ILITY C ATE GOR IE S** | **PREDICTABLE PROCUREMENT CADENCE** | **CO NNE CT ING EUROPEAN ARMIES WITH EUROPEAN INDUS TRY**

APPROVED SUPPLIER LIST
OPEN. FAIR. COMPETITIVE.

- Open to all eligible European and partner companies.
- Transparent criteria and processes.
- Merit-based selection.
- Regular review and rotation.
- Fair access to opportunities for all innovators and industry.

KEY FEATURES

- Standards throughreal-life "Hackathons" and joint trials, validated by operational reality.
- Full interoperability across European armed forces.
- Reliable, resilient European (or friendly) supply chains. Exceptions defined by ECH in rare cases.
- Scales European industry and startups with guaranteed recurring demand.
- Economies of scale within fast-iterating technology cycles.

BENEF IT S

- Operational readiness and battlefield advantage
- Faster innovation and deployment
- Strengthened European industrial sovereignty
- Stronger European economy and strategic autonomy
- Reduced dependence on non-European technologies

EUROPEAN BY DESIGN

PRODUCTIONWITHIN EUROPEOR FRIENDLY & RELIABLE COUNTRIES



ECH: A CONTINUOUS CAPABILITY ENGINE FOR EUROPE'S SECURITY AND PROSPERITY.
FLEXIBLE. COMPETITIVE. INTEROPERABLE. EUROPEAN.

ONE PLATFORM. ONE GATEWAY.
MANY CAPABILITIES. ONE EUROPE.

Recurring Capability Cycles

The prototype proposes continuous six-month cycles. This incremental cadence would suit selected fast-moving technologies. A pilot could test whether six months is appropriate for a defined capability category; other technologies may require shorter, or longer cycles.

Predictable Demand

Recurring demand takes the form of predictable multi-year commitments, more credible than fixed monthly purchasing commitments across all categories. Credible demand can help suppliers plan investment in the workforce, tooling, component supply and production capacity.

Interoperability by Design

The prototype identifies common standards and interoperability as a central ECH function.

What the European Capability Hub Brings

The EU already has significant defence instruments. The ECH is not intended to duplicate them - it is a delivery layer providing a path from a shared operational problem to qualified competition, tested interoperability, recurring procurement, industrial scaling and capability acquisition.

The ECH offers the following potential benefits:

- Operational readiness and battlefield advantage
- Interoperability a procurement condition from the beginning
- Faster innovation
- Strengthened industrial sovereignty
- A clearer demand signal to suppliers
- Stronger EU economy and strategic autonomy
- Testing whether selected fast-moving capabilities can be acquired more responsively without abandoning competition, accountability, certification or security

The prototype addresses the identified structural problem areas in four ways.

It treats procurement as an instrument of strategic power rather than an administrative function. The prototype starts from the premise that economic resources become strategic capability, and it translates the sovereignty question into contracting terms and demand signals.

It closes the gap between the acquisition and technology timelines. A capability is fit for purpose in practice only if the mechanism for buying it can absorb change at the rate change occurs, which is what the six-month cycle is for.

It converts an innovation ecosystem into industrial capacity. This addresses the ‘valley of death’ challenge and the problem that European defence start-ups do not lack funding per se, but a customer whose future behaviour can be conducive to innovative economies of scale.

It changes the politics and the economics of EU defence cooperation. The prototype does not ask member states to choose between national sovereignty and European integration. It turns pooled procurement from a distributional argument about who gets what share of funding into a market-building mechanism, where rolling re-competition, geographic diversity rules and predictable demand allow cooperation to serve national industrial interests, collective security and market integration at once.

Political Economy and the Emerging EU Architecture

Joint procurement is politically and operationally challenging. It affects contracts, jobs, intellectual property, industrial capacity and future strategic dependence. Governments may favour national procurement even where cooperation offers economic and operational benefits. Despite this, the EU has entered a new phase of defence-economic policy, which creates an opportunity to explore purposeful, smart and innovative solutions.

The ECH would be open to member states and eligible trusted partners (Norway, Ukraine, the United Kingdom), subject to the relevant legal, security, funding, export-control and information-sharing arrangements, as well as buy-in from member states. It would operate in line with the EU Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030, which identifies priority capability areas, including drones and counter-drone systems, and calls for countries to close capability gaps through greater cooperation and joint procurement.

Entry Point for A Focused Pilot

A focused pilot within the EU's emerging framework offers a credible route to the implementation of the ECH.

In July 2026, the European Commission proposed DECODER as a European Defence Project of Common Interest for drone and counter-drone capabilities. This project involves 26 EU member states as well as Norway and Ukraine, has an indicative investment bracket of €3.5-5 billion and is intended for completion by 2033. The European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) has a €1.5 billion work programme for 2026-27, including €325 million for the establishment and initial deployment of European Defence Projects of Common Interest.

The ECH could be tested for one defined DECODER capability strand, connected to a recognised priority area that requires interoperability and testing, developing a European industrial base. A pilot could run for 18 to 24 months, with three or four incremental procurement and testing cycles.

The evaluation could examine a set of parameters, including:

- Time from validated requirement to tested capability
- Demonstrated interoperability
- User-assessed operational value
- Availability and sustainment
- Cybersecurity and safety compliance
- Supplier participation, including SME access
- Production readiness and supply-chain resilience
- Delivery times and lifecycle cost
- Whether validated operational feedback can be incorporated securely into the next cycle

A pilot could test out the following six elements of the ECH, which cannot be settled by design.

Cadence: Whether a six-month increment is appropriate for a defined capability category, or whether the technology in question requires a shorter, longer or mixed cycle.

Sustainability: Whether the model is functional as because no European state has run defence acquisition at this cadence at scale.

Supplier incentives: Whether re-competition reduces lock-in without weakening the incentive to invest in production capacity.

Data governance: Whether releasable operational feedback can be validated, classified and shared safely and quickly enough to inform the next requirement.

Partner participation: Exploring participation by Norway, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.
Industrial resilience. Whether supplier diversity translates into reduced dependency in critical components, or whether dependencies persist below the level at which the mechanism operates.

Open Questions and Strategic Reframing

From spending to converting. This means going beyond the dominant indicators, which evaluate progress in budget lines and percentages of GDP, to the more revealing indicator of how much fielded, current capability funding produces.

From ownership to access. Procurement broadly equates capability with possession. Capability-as-a-service raises questions about sovereign control, continuity of supply in wartime, and what happens if a provider fails. Possession of obsolete equipment is not sovereignty, which raises the question of what security and sovereign control actually requires.

From standards as documents to standards as demonstrations. If interoperability can be validated by a testing system, this would show that the system achieves faster a significant part of what standardisation currently does.

From industrial policy to demand policy. EU defence-industrial support operates largely through grants and co-funding. The prototype opens the way to predictable recurring purchase as a more powerful instrument than subsidies, and a cheaper one since it commits to buying what states need anyway.

Conclusion

The EU is increasing defence spending. Whether that spending becomes capability is a different question, and the record so far is uneven. National fragmentation still limits the scale, interoperability and industrial predictability those resources could produce.

The European Capability Hub would operate where spending becomes capability: acquisition. It offers a testable model for a problem existing instrument do not fully resolve how to connect shared operational demand, supplier competition, interoperability testing, operational feedback and recurring procurement for capabilities that change quickly.

The prototype is complementary, providing an acquisition lane for selected technologies whose operational value can change faster than conventional procurement processes. The ECH also aligns with current EU policy in defence and strategic economic growth. The EDIP provides a framework for industrial readiness, common procurement and European Defence Projects of Common Interest, in particular the DECODER programme.

The ECH would provide a delivery layer between these initiatives, which matters because innovation funding does not guarantee a customer, a joint-procurement instrument does not by itself guarantee rapid iteration, and common standards do not automatically produce operational interoperability. The ECH would bring those functions into one cycle: define a shared requirement, draw qualified suppliers, test with users, assess interoperability, create a predictable route to procurement and use verified evidence to shape the next increment.

The EU has the opportunity to become better at converting what it spends on defence into capability. The ECH is a proposal to test one way of doing so.

Bibliography

Becker, P. & Kempin, R. (2025). Strengthening Europe's Defence Capabilities through Clear Tasks and Objectives. SWP Comment. Berlin. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2025C38_StrengtheningEuropeDefense.pdf

Berthelsen, E. (2026). Innovating at the Pace of Relevance: The Case of Ukrainian Unmanned Systems. Defence Studies, 1-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2026.2692416

Bondar, K. (2025). Ukraine's Future Vision and Current Capabilities for Waging AI-Enabled Autonomous Warfare. CSIS Report. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-03/250306_Bondar_Autonomy_AI.pdf?VersionId=E2h8uqROea77udoc_og82HWsrfgfJRTZ

Council of the European Union. (2024). Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the proposal for a Regulation establishing the European Defence Industry Programme. https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/f1e6ba44-4720-4f14-a991-a3a7f3afb475_en?filename=Staff%20Working%20Document%20on%20EDIP.PDF

De Cordoue, B. (2026). For its Defence, Europe needs an Armament Single Market. Blogpost. Jacques Delors Institute.

Draghi, M. (2024). The future of European competitiveness. Report to the European Commission.

EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). (2023). Buying Weapons Together (or Not). Policy Brief. EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris.

European Commission. (2026). European Defence Projects of Common Interest (EDPCI) on Drone and Counter-drone Defence (DECODER). Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space. https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2026-07/Proposal-for-a-Council-Implementing-Decision-on-the-establishment-of-european-Projects-of-Common-Interest.pdf

European Commission. (2026). The EDIP Work Programme. https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/edip-work-programme-adopted-2026-03-30_en

European Commission. (2025). White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan- Readiness 2030. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019_en?filename=White%20paper%20for%20European%20defence%20%E2%80%93%20Readiness%202030.pdf

European Commission. The European Defence Fund. https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf-official-webpage-european-commission_en

European Defence Agency. (2026). Defence Data 2025-2026. https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-publications/2026-eda_defencedata_webpublic.pdf

European Parliament. (2026). EU Joint Defence Procurement. Briefing. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/785665/EPRS_BRI(2026)785665_EN.pdf

Kapstein, E., Ospital, J., Wolff, G. B. (2024). Reforming European Defence Procurement to Boost Military Innovation and Startups. Intereconomics, 2026, 61(4), 224-232. https://www.intereconomics.eu/contents/year/2026/number/4/article/reforming-european-defence-procurement-to-boost-military-innovation-and-startups.html

Sklénar, M. (2026). Procuring Innovative Defence Technology in Europe. GLOBSEC paper. https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/procuring-innovative-defence-technology-europe#attachments

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). (2026). The Defence of Europe in a New Era: An Assessment. https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/publications---free-files/strategic-dossier/pds-2026/complete-file/iiss_the-defence-of-europe-in-a-new-era-an-assessment_16092026.pdf

Conclusion: What the Policy Mission Fellowship Has Built

By Isotta Ricci Bitti

We do not often enough describe a pluralistic democracy not as a system that merely tolerates disagreement but as one that thoroughly depends on people willing to work through it. This observation is not new per se; the political theorist Chantal Mouffe drew on it decades ago, arguing that healthy democracies are not defined by the absence of deep conflict but by the difference between antagonism, in which disagreement is treated as something to be defeated, and agonism, in which disagreement is treated as something to be worked through with an adversary one respects.[1] Most institutional language we commonly hear in defence of pluralism, goes no further than protecting the right to disagree. Not much is said or written about what it takes to move from disagreement to shared action - the harder, and much slower, deliberate work of understanding someone's position well enough to act through it instead of around it

The willingness to do that is not a personality trait some politicians have and others lack. It is a muscle and, like any muscle, if it goes unused more often than it is exercised it atrophies. Interestingly, research on political engagement has found that it is the very people who are most active politically that tend to be the least exposed. Parliaments as institutions are not immune from this challenge. They are full of rooms built for disagreement to be performed - question time, committee hearings, floor debates - and strikingly short on rooms built for disagreement to be worked through.

The Policy Mission Fellowship was designed as one such room. It treats the capacity for productive disagreement as an infrastructure, something to be built rather than something to be hoped for: requiring design, resources, deliberate testing and development.

It brings together four traditions. The first is mission-oriented policymaking: organising public effort around a specific, ambitious outcome.[2] The second is prototyping: testing a concrete version of an idea before committing to it at scale, a discipline more often associated with public-sector innovation labs than with national parliaments.[3] The third is Adaptive Leadership: helping people tackle problems that have no ready-made technical solution and that require them to change their own habits, assumptions or ways of working.[4] The fourth is dialogue as a tool for diagnosis, and for building a more sophisticated understanding of complex problems and of the positions and perspectives held by other political actors.

In its first edition, 25 members of parliament from different parties and countries decided to engage in the work of moving through disagreement rather than around it. It was more than an exercise in goodwill: *they committed significant, sustained time as well as expertise, producing six novel policy prototypes that could be developed further and, potentially, deployed. Legislators already have established channels for meeting and cooperating across borders. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, founded in 1889, and COSAC, which since 1989 has brought together the EU affairs committees of national parliaments and the European Parliament, have long provided parliamentarians a place to met across borders. The Policy Mission Fellowship builds on that tradition, though, by advancing and testing a more specific hypothesis: whether, designing the right conditions - including time, space and constructive partnerships with expertise - parliamentarians from different countries and parties can turn a common concern about a single, pressing issue into shared work, and do so in remarkably little time.

[1] Mouffe, C. (2013). Agonistics: Thinking the world politically. Verso.
[2] Mazzucato, M. (2021). Mission economy: A moonshot guide to changing capitalism. Allen Lane.
[3] Bason, C. (2010). Leading public sector innovation: Co-creating for a better society. Policy Press.
[4] Heifetz, R. A. (1994). Leadership without easy answers. Harvard University Press.

← Contents

The six prototypes presented in this report offer a glimpse into a different way to operate politically. A small addition to the growing field of democratic innovation, deliberate experiments in institutional design, to improve the ability of our democratic system to deliver results for its citizens amidst growing complexity and increasingly diversity of perspectives and world views.

People who do not share a party, a country or even a mother tongue, can build tangible solutions together, if the room is built for it. One edition cannot, of course, prove this approach will work in all contexts, but it is provides evidence that a different kind of politics is possible, and that is no small thing.

The work started with the 2026 Policy Mission Fellowship does not end here.It is the leading edge of an effort that the Open European Dialogue and its partners have been championing for a decade: that dialogue is not a courtesy democracies extend when it is convenient, but a fundamental pre-condition that underpins democracy's very legitimacy. Ten years of building spaces for exchange across parties and borders have shown us that dialogue, taken seriously, renews trust and sharpens political judgement, in ways that debate aimed only at winning simply does not.

That is why this report is an important milestone for us, but not a conclusion. If the first edition of the Fellowship has shown that political cooperation of a different nature is possible, the Coalition for Dialogue and Collaboration in Politics is where we are working to build the case that it can work at scale. Conceived to be developed into a research and action platform, it will bring together politicians, academics, think tanks, foundations and innovators to develop the tools policymakers need to practise dialogue and collaborative policymaking.

Its purpose is to take what has already worked – in the Fellowship and beyond – and build these experiments into a researched and scalable practice: uncovering a set of methodologies and approaches that parliaments and institutions can learn about, adopt and integrate with the support of a dedicated community of experts and practitioners.

Dialogue is our most powerful democratic instrument. It is also, right now, one of our most threatened. If you believe what you have read here is worth building on, help us take it further and join the Coalition for Dialogue and Collaboration in Politics.

Isotta Ricci Bitti is the Deputy Head of the Open European Dialogue and the Co-founder and Managing Director of APROPOS-Advancing Process in Politics.

Methodological Spotlight: The Design of the Policy Mission Fellowship

This methodological spotlight describes the core elements of the Policy Mission Fellowship design and the rationale of the choices behind that design. The Fellowship's curriculum and methodological approach was developed by the Open European Dialogue (OED) team. The chapter further draws on research by Raquel Jesse and Isotta Ricci Bitti on the design of high-level political dialogues.

1. The Premise

The OED's approach rests on the simple premise that the setting in which politicians meet and work influences how they engage with one another. Conventional parliamentary and diplomatic formats are built for stating and defending positions, often in public and under time pressure, leaving little to no room to change one's mind, test an unfamiliar idea, or to engage seriously with the perspectives of other political actors, be they from another party or another country. Research on judgement and decision-making, including Kahneman's distinction between fast, intuitive thinking and slow, reflective thinking, suggests that our capacity for reflective reasoning is not a fixed trait, but a function of context and depends heavily on the circumstances in which people find themselves.

The OED therefore treats the quality of political deliberation primarily as a design question. Its methodology is concerned with designing the how of politics – the conditions under which politicians work through a problem – rather than the focusing on specific policy outcomes or conclusions.

2. Design Principles

Five principles guided the design of the Fellowship.

Diagnosis precedes design. Before shaping a process, the OED first asks what is actually obstructing progress on the problem at hand. Where the obstacle is a gap in knowledge, expert input and analysis can provide value. Where it lies in differing values and priorities, information alone rarely suffices, and participants need space to emerge and work through those differences directly. Most political problems contain some mixture of both.

Different problems require different approaches. The Fellowship combines a series of fit-for-purpose processes so that each kind of problem has room to be addressed on its own terms, providing tailored responses to the specific kind of problem diagnosed, rather than a single format applied indiscriminately. In practice, this has meant, for example, sequencing the work in different phases – separating evidence-collection, diagnosis, and solution-building into distinct phases.

Process neutrality. All Fellowship sessions are politically neutral and professionally facilitated. The OED takes no position on the issues discussed, and the content developed during the programme belongs to the Fellows. The team that designs and facilitates the process, together with the experts contributing to it, bears responsibility for its quality and evidentiary basis. The conclusions are the Fellows' own.

Protected conditions for candour. All discussions take place under the Chatham House Rule. Psychological safety describes a shared belief that a group is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, and has been identified as a precondition for reflective reasoning. Under perceived social threat, cognitive resources shift away from the prefrontal cortex, the seat of judgement, planning and complex reasoning, toward faster and more defensive processing. Psychological safety is a working precondition for the kind of thinking the Fellowship exists to make possible.

← Contents

Attention to three dimensions of progress. The OED looks at the progress along three dimensions:

- Relational: the quality of working relationships between participants across party and national lines, including the trust needed to speak openly.
- Epistemic: how well participants understand the evidence, the problem and one another's reasoning, and whether new ideas emerge from their work together.
- Substantive: the concrete results of the work, from a common definition of the problem to proposals and agreed next steps.

The Fellowship was sequenced so that relational and epistemic work precedes before substantive work.

3. The Cohort

The cohort is designed to bring together parliamentarians across countries and the political spectrum. Composition is a methodological choice. A cohort that spans countries and parties means that no single national or ideological framing of the problem dominates. Similarly, working groups are mixed across countries and parties by design, not organised by political family. It also creates a setting rarely available in formal institutions. Official cross-border formats are often limited to members of governing parties or to those in senior positions, which excludes opposition members and backbenchers. This breadth of composition is not incidental: research on collective intelligence shows that groups solve complex problems better when they draw on genuine diversity of perspective, not merely a wide range of individual ability.

4. The Mission and its Co-Design

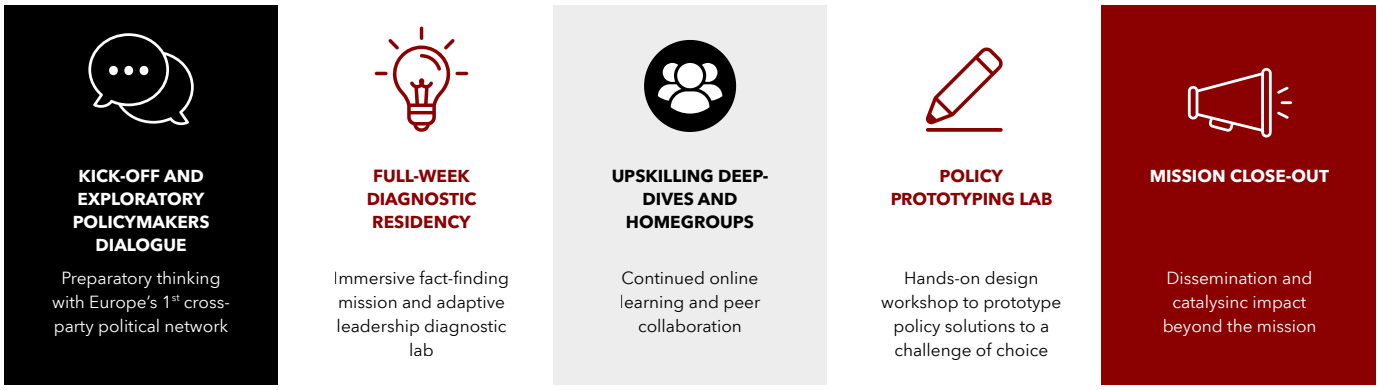
Each Fellowship cohort works on a single mission: a political challenge selected for its urgency and its relevance at both national and European level. The 2026 mission was "The securitisation of Europe's economic power." It was framed by three guiding questions, asking how European countries can:

- strengthen their economic security architecture amid rising geopolitical competition;
- direct strategic investment effectively, balancing defence imperatives against fiscal credibility and social cohesion;
- build new political narratives around security and social investment that make room for long-term prosperity.

The guiding questions set the direction of the work. The mission's precise focus was then refined with the selected Fellows through a collaborative design process. This serves three purposes. It anchors the work in live political priorities rather than a brief fixed in advance. It builds on the portfolios and spheres of influence Fellows already hold, which makes follow-through more likely. It also keeps the mission flexible enough to respond to emerging political developments, both during the programme, and most critically, in the gap between recruitment and deployment. Co-design also gives Fellows a shared stake in the process, which supports relational progress from the outset.

5. The Fellowship Journey

The Fellowship ran for five months across five stages, combining two in-person meetings, five days in London and three days in Berlin, with online sessions before, between and after them.



Phase 1: Starting the conversation. Phase 1 creates a direct link between policy challenges Fellows are already working on in their constituencies, through personal policy challenges submitted in the application phase, rooting the conversation in their policy priorities. A first online encounter begins the work of relational trust-building, so Fellows can move on to substantive exchange quicker once in Phase 2.

Phase 2: Getting to the root of the problem. Phase 2 devotes an entire week, in London, to diagnosis alone, deliberately withholding any move toward solutions. Fellows meet with relevant stakeholders and institutions working on the mission theme. Experts are briefed to provide input that tests Fellows' existing assumptions and raises unanswered questions, rather than simply presenting preferred policy options. Two closing days of leadership work, based on the Adaptive Leadership framework (Harvard Kennedy School), asks Fellows to turn the diagnostic lens on themselves and examine their own habits as political leaders before joint work begins.

Phase 3: Training new muscles. Phase 3 shifts from diagnosis to capacity-building with training modules designed for developing the skills that cross-party, cross-border policymaking demands – such as communicating with divided publics, building legislative majorities across party lines, understanding the EU budget. A simulated trade-war exercise, run with the London School of Economics, lets Fellows test and train their judgement under pressure, in a setting where decisions carried no political cost.

Phase 4: From insight to solution idea. Phase 4 opens only once diagnosis is complete. Fellows work in mixed teams to turn their analysis into policy prototypes. Each team defined what needed to change, mapped who would be affected and how, and outlined how the proposal could be communicated and implemented.

Phase 5: Testing. Each team user-tests its prototype with the people it would affect, including experts, officials and constituents, and revises it in light of their feedback. From this point, responsibility for the work passes to the Fellows themselves, who carry it forward independently – into their parties, their parliaments, and the political conversations that follow.

The Five Stages of the Policy Mission Fellowship

Stage	Format	Primary Purpose	Primary Dimension
1 / Starting the conversation	Individual preparation; online kick-off	Anchor the work in each Fellow's own context; establish initial connection with the group of Fellows	Relational
2 / Getting to the root of the problem	In-person week, London	Diagnose the problem; test assumptions against expertise; leadership reflection	Relational, epistemic, substantive
3 / Training new muscles	Online sessions; simulation	Develop practical skills; test instincts under pressure	Epistemic
4 / From insight to solution idea	In-person week, Berlin	Open the solution space; develop policy prototypes in mixed teams	Substantive
5 / Testing	Stakeholder feedback; showcase of results	Test and refine prototypes; define next steps	Substantive

Annex 1 / The 2026 Fellows

Effie Achtsioglou

New Left (Greece)

Néa Aristerá

Effie Achtsioglou is a Member of the Greek Parliament, co-founder of the newly formed party New Left, and former Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity. At age 31, she became the country's youngest female Minister upon her nomination. As Minister (2016-2019), she initiated and tabled significant reforms in labour rights, social security, and welfare. In her time as Member of Parliament (2019-today), she served as Shadow Minister of Finance (2020-2023), Shadow Minister of Labour and Social Security (2019-2020), and Vice Chairperson of the Constitutional Reform Committee (2019).

Yoko Alender

Estonian Reform Party (Estonia)

Eesti Reformierakond

Yoko Alender has been a member of the Estonian Parliament, the Riigikogu, since 2015, re-elected in 2019 and 2023, and elected to the Tallinn City Council in 2013, 2017, and 2021. She is the Chairman of the Environment Committee and served previously as Minister for Climate. Yoko has a Master's degree in Architecture and City Planning and has worked in architecture, city planning, and cultural management. She continues her doctoral studies and teaches at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Yoko is also Vice-President of the European Alliance of Liberals and Democrats.

Meyrem Almaci

Green (Belgium)

Groen

Meyrem Almaci has been in Belgian politics since 2007, including terms in both the Federal Parliament (2007-2019, 2025-present) and the Flemish Parliament (2019-2024). She led the Flemish Greens' parliamentary group (2007-2014) and served as party president until 2021. Her committee work includes chairing the Culture Committee in the Flemish Parliament and serving as Vice-President of the Committee on Economic Affairs in the Federal Parliament. Her parliamentary work has focused on budgetary oversight, financial accountability, and environmental policy. She chaired the Culture Committee in the Flemish Parliament and currently serves as Vice-President of the Committee on Economic Affairs in the Federal Parliament. Since December 2025, she has been Co-President of the Green European Foundation. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Social-Cultural Work from Hogeschool KVMW Gent, a second Bachelor's degree in Moral Sciences, and a Master's in Comparative Culture Studies/Anthropology from the University of Ghent. Her academic research at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and KU Leuven centred on minority participation in higher education. Meyrem holds dual Belgian-Turkish nationality and is fluent in Dutch, French, English, and Turkish, with conversational proficiency in German and Spanish. She is married and is the mother of two sons.

Eva Biaudet

Swedish People's Party of Finland (Finland)

Svenska folkpartiet i Finland

Eva Biaudet served as a Member of Parliament from 1991 to 2026, with a notable break to fulfill international and national roles. She worked as OSCE Special Representative for Combating Human Trafficking and subsequently as Finnish National Ombudsperson for Minorities. She also held ministerial positions as Minister for Health and Social Services (1999-2000) and Minister for Gender Equality (2002-2003). Throughout her parliamentary career, Biaudet established herself as a leading advocate for human rights, gender equality, and international cooperation. She was active in the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Grand Committee on EU affairs, and the Nordic Council. She chaired the parliamentary peace mediation network and served as Chair of the Swedish People's Party Council, while remaining engaged in multiple parliamentary networks supporting women human rights defenders. Beyond Parliament, Biaudet has been a committed human rights activist, chairing several prominent NGOs. She currently chairs Fingo, the Finnish umbrella organisation for international development policies. Based in Helsinki, she is a mother of four adult children and grandmother of three.

← Contents

Johan Büser

Social Democratic Labour Party (Sweden)

Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti

A Member of the Swedish Parliament representing Gothenburg since 2014, Johan Büser has established a career in international affairs and parliamentary diplomacy. As Deputy Head of the Swedish OSCE Delegation since 2022 and former Head of the delegation, he led the OSCE PA Delegation Election Observation Mission to Moldova in 2024 and has participated in election observations across multiple countries, including the United States, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Armenia. He currently serves as Treasurer of the OSCE PA and holds deputy positions on the parliamentary committees for Foreign Affairs and the Labour Market. Before entering national politics, Johan served on the Gothenburg City Council. He holds a Master of Law from Gothenburg University and currently chairs the Business Region of Gothenburg.

Margareta Cederfelt

Moderate Party (Sweden)

Moderata Samlingspartiet

Margareta Cederfelt represented Sweden's Stockholm constituency for the Moderate Party in the Riksdag, serving two separate terms from 2000 to 2002 and from 2006 to 2026. She chaired the Swedish IPU Delegation and serves on the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the War Delegation, bringing over two decades of parliamentary expertise in foreign affairs and international cooperation. Margareta has also held prominent leadership positions in international parliamentary organisations, including as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (2021-2023) and President of Parliamentarians for Global Action (2017-2021). She has extensive experience as an election observer and special coordinator for OSCE missions across Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. She currently serves as Chair of the IPU Working Group on Science and Technology and holds advisory positions with several urban development organisations in Toronto. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Nursing and a Master's degree in Social Science.

Ioannis A. Kefalogiannis

New Democracy (Greece)

Néa Dimokratia

Ioannis A. Kefalogiannis is a member of the Hellenic Parliament. He holds a Law degree from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, a Master's degree in Politics and International Relations from Columbia University, and specialised in negotiation techniques at Harvard Law School. First elected to Parliament with the New Democracy party at age 30, he became the youngest member during the 2012-2015 term and served as Secretary of the Hellenic Parliament until 2019. He has been re-elected five times and previously served as Deputy Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Deputy Minister of National Defence as well as Minister for Climate Crisis & Civil Protection of the Hellenic Republic from 2025-2026. Ioannis has led significant legislative reforms, including the modernisation of military service and the establishment of a Joint Information Technology Corps for cybersecurity. He has served on the National Defence and Foreign Affairs, European Affairs, and Armament Programs and Contracts committees. Beyond politics, he began his career at the UN Security Council, practised law, and has been involved with UNICEF since 1994.

Matas Maldeikis

Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats (Lithuania)

Tėvynės Sąjunga – Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai

Matas Maldeikis serves as a Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. In his parliamentary work, he focuses on safeguarding Lithuania's national interests, defending democracy, strengthening the European Union, addressing the challenges posed by the growing influence of China, and promoting human rights. He is Deputy Head of the Provisional Parliamentary Group for Relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Head of the Provisional Group for State Efficiency Enhancement and Artificial Intelligence. From 2016 to 2020, he served as the Seimas' Permanent Representative to the European Union and previously worked as an Advisor to the Committee on European Affairs. Matas is a public commentator, and the author of a book on geopolitics, where he analyses the transformation of global power structures and the emerging new world order. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master's degree in International Business.

Nacho Martín Blanco

People's Party (Spain)

Partido Popular

Nacho Martín Blanco holds degrees in Journalism and Political Science, and Public Administration. He has contributed to various print and broadcast media outlets. He served as a member of the Catalan Parliament (2017-2023) and is currently a member of the Spanish Congress of Deputies for the People's Party. Nacho is a Professor of Local Government and Public Policy at Abat Oliba CEU University in Barcelona. He also teaches in the Philosophy, Economics, and Politics program at La Salle School (Ramon Llull University).

Nikola Mažar

Croatian Democratic Union (Croatia)

Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica

Nikola Mažar is a Member of Parliament in Croatia with extensive experience in public administration, post-earthquake reconstruction, and anti-corruption oversight. He holds a Master's degree in Law and has served in senior roles across both national and local government, where he has worked on strengthening institutional capacity and improving the delivery of public services. Throughout his career, he has focused on advancing effective public policy, reinforcing economic security, and promoting transparent, accountable governance. He is committed to practical reforms that build trust in public institutions, support sustainable development, and improve outcomes for citizens and communities across Croatia.

Claudiu-Iulius-Gavril Năsui

Save Romania Union (Romania)

Uniunea Salvați România

Claudiu Năsui has been active in the Romanian Parliament since December 2016 and has held several ministerial positions shaping the country's economic agenda. He served as Romania's Minister of Economy from January to September 2021, where he led key economic policy initiatives during a transformative period. In 2026, he was appointed as Minister for Economic Development and Digitalisation, continuing his work on economic modernization and digital transformation. He holds an MSc in Finance with a specialisation in Market Finance from Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi and a Licence in Economics and Management from Université Paris Dauphine. A Chartered Financial Analyst, he brings extensive financial expertise to his legislative work. Beyond his parliamentary duties, Claudiu has been deeply committed to economic education and civil society. He was as Project Manager of Open Budget, an innovative online platform enabling citizens to visualise and navigate the state budget and co-founded the Society for Individual Liberty (SoLib) in 2010, serving as its President until 2021.

Federica Onori

Action (Italy)

Azione

Federica Onori has a scientific background from Italian and international universities and has worked with the UN, FAO, World Bank Group's IFC, and the European Commission. Elected to the Italian Chamber of Deputies in 2022 (Europe constituency), she heads the Italians Abroad division of the Azione party (Renew Europe group in the European Parliament). She serves as a member and secretary of the Foreign and Community Affairs Commission and as chair of the Committee on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Active in parliamentary diplomacy, Federica chairs the Italy-Spain Inter-Parliamentary Union, serves in the Italian OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation, and is vice chair of the Network of Young Parliamentarians. She participates in various international networks, including the IMF, World Bank, Global Young MP Initiative, and UNITE Parliamentary Network for Global Health.

Fitore Pacolli

Self-Determination Movement (Kosovo)

Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!

Fitore Pacolli Dalipi serves as Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning from the Republic of Kosovo. A senior member of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje, she previously chaired the Parliamentary Committee on Environment and served as Deputy Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. She has also held the position of Chief of Cabinet to the Mayor of Prishtina. Fitore holds an MSc in European Studies from the London School of Economics and a BA in International Relations from London Metropolitan University. She is currently completing her PhD in Law and Politics at the University of Graz, with research focused on democratic development in Kosovo. An active legislator, she has initiated and co-authored numerous laws across foreign affairs, environment, agriculture, and youth protection. She has also taught politics and communication at institutions in Kosovo.

Veronika Remišová

For the People (Slovakia)

Za ľudí

Veronika Remišová is a Slovak politician passionate about transparency, the rule of law, innovation, and European affairs. After nearly a decade at the European Commission, she entered Slovak politics in 2016 to combat corruption and improve public administration efficiency. From 2020 to 2023, she served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Investments, Regional Development, and Informatisation. Today, she leads the political party Za ľudí and serves as a Member of Parliament, the Chair of the Committee on Incompatibility of Functions, and a member of the Committee on European Affairs. Veronika holds degrees from the Sorbonne 1 in Paris (MA), the Collège d'Études Interdisciplinaires in Brussels (MA), and a PhD in Arts from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava.

Luisa Sanz Martínez

Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Spain)

Partido Socialista Obrero Español

Luisa Sanz Martínez holds a PhD in Computer Science Engineering and has more than thirty years of experience as a technologist and educator. Prior to entering politics, she served as Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology and Director of the Bachelor's Degree in Computer Engineering at the International University Isabel I, leading projects focused on cloud-based educational platforms and cybersecurity. Luisa is currently the Spokesperson for Artificial Intelligence in the Committee on Economy, Trade, and Digital Transformation, and Secretary of the Committee on Science, Innovation, and Universities in the Spanish Congress of Deputies. She also collaborates with the EECS faculty at the University of California, Berkeley.

Dr. Sebastian Schäfer

Alliance 90/The Greens (Germany)

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

Dr. Sebastian Schäfer serves as a Member of the Bundestag representing Alliance 90/The Greens as the Spokesman for Budget Policy. He is a member of the Budget Committee, deputy member of the Defence Committee, and serves on the Steering Committee of the German-American Parliamentary Group. Prior to his election in October 2021, he held senior positions in Baden-Württemberg's state government, including Head of Division at the Ministry of Finance, and delegate roles representing the state in Berlin. Sebastian holds a doctorate from the University of Erfurt, where he specialised in Political Economy, Macroeconomics, and Organisation Theory. His academic background includes studies at the University of California at Berkeley and Beloit College in the United States. With extensive experience in parliamentary affairs dating back to 2008, when he began serving as a political advisor in the Bundestag, Dr Schäfer brings deep expertise in budget policy, public finance, and German-American relations to his current role.

Liesa Scholzen

ProDG (Belgium)

Die Freie Bürgerliste für Ostbelgien

Liesa Scholzen has been a member of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium since 2015, where she is primarily involved in education policy. She has been Chair of the Education Committee since 2019. In addition to her role as Co-Chair of the Pro-DG party, Liesa has been the representative of the German-speaking community in the Belgian Senate since 2024. She also represents the German-speaking community in the Committee of the Regions, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and the Inter-regional Parliamentary Council.

Andris Šuvajevs

The Progressives (Latvia)

Progresīvie

Andris Šuvajevs is currently Co-Chair of the Progressives, a green-left party in Latvia that is currently represented in the Latvian Parliament for the first time. He is the party's group leader in the parliament as well as Vice-Chair of the parliament's Budget Committee. Before entering politics, Andris trained as an anthropologist. His interests are in economics, Latvia's economic history, and consumer debt. Prior to entering politics, he worked at a university and a think tank, and briefly as a financial journalist.

Cristina Tajani

Democratic Party (Italy)

Partito Democratico

Cristina Tajani is a Member of the Italian Parliament and Adjunct Professor at Politecnico di Milano. Former Chairwoman and CEO at Anpal Servizi Spa. Previously, she was Adviser to the Ministry of Labour and Councillor for Labour Policies, Economic Development, Commerce, and Human Resources at the City of Milan (2011-2021).She graduated in Economic and Social Studies from the Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi in 2003. In 2007, she received the title of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Labour Sciences from the State University of Milan, where she developed a model for the employment impact assessment of the introduction of temporary agency work in Italy. She subsequently won a research fellowship at the Department of Work and Welfare of the State University of Milan. Cristina was a scholar in industrial relations and political economy at the University of Milan, where she also taught.

Fred Thomas

Labour Party (United Kingdom)

Fred Thomas is the Labour Member of Parliament for Plymouth Moor View. Before entering Parliament in 2024, Fred served as a Royal Marines Officer (2016-2023). Fred served in several joint environments, working in Nuclear Security, Counter-Terrorism, Arctic Warfare, and on operations overseas. Fred is an active member of the Defence Select Committee and works on many issues around defence technology and innovation. Fred speaks Arabic, which he studied as part of his BA and developed further while living in Cairo, where he worked as a journalist before joining the military.

Katrin Uhlig

Alliance 90/The Greens (Germany)

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

Katrin Uhlig is a Member of the German Bundestag. She was born in Duisburg in 1982 and studied languages, business, and cultural studies at the University of Passau. Her studies included multiple stays abroad, including Beijing and San Juan. In 2009, her positions included project assistant at the Institute of Social Studies and deputy project manager at the European Climate Foundation in The Hague. From 2010 to 2017, Katrin Uhlig served as a policy advisor to the Green Party parliamentary group in the parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia. She then headed the Water/Wastewater Division of the BDEW Regional Group NRW from 2017 to 2019 and served as policy advisor and chief of staff for Oliver Krischer, former Member of the Bundestag and vice-chair of the Green parliamentary group, from 2019 to 2021. Since 2021, she has been a Member of the German Bundestag, where she sits on the Budget and Appropriations Committee and the Committee on Economic Affairs and Energy.

Oleksandra Ustinova

Voice (Ukraine)

Holos

Oleksandra Ustinova is a Ukrainian politician and public activist serving as a People's Deputy of Ukraine from the Holos party since 2019. A former anti-corruption campaigner, she played a key role at the Anti-Corruption Action Center, where she helped advocate for major reforms and the creation of institutions such as the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office. In parliament, she focuses on anti-corruption policy, law enforcement, healthcare reform, and national security. Oleksandra chairs the Parliamentary Temporary Special Commission monitoring arms supplies to Ukraine and is an active international advocate, regularly engaging U.S., Canadian, and European lawmakers to secure military support and strengthen Ukraine's partnerships.

Mart Võrklaev

Estonian Reform Party (Estonia)

Eesti Reformierakond

Mart Võrklaev is a member of the Estonian Parliament and served as Estonia's Minister of Finance from 2023 to 2024. He currently sits on the Parliament's Finance Committee and on the Supervisory Board of the Bank of Estonia, where his work focuses on public finance, fiscal sustainability, and long-term economic growth. A member of the Reform Party since 2010, he has played an active role in shaping Estonia's economic policy agenda at both local and national levels. Before entering national politics, Mart served as Deputy Mayor of Rae Municipality and later as Mayor from 2012 to 2019, gaining extensive experience in local governance, budget management, and regional development. Trained in geodesy at the Estonian University of Life Sciences, with further studies in Law at the University of Tartu, he combines technical, legal, and administrative expertise in his political work.

Mihael Zmajlović

Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Croatia)

Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske

Mihael Zmajlović is a member of the Croatian Parliament and Head of the Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. A senior figure in the Social Democratic Party, he previously served as Croatia's Minister of Environmental and Nature Protection (2012-2016) and as President of the Parliamentary Committee on Environmental Protection and Energy. He now advises on sustainable finance, the green transition, and the circular economy, drawing on extensive experience across governmental, municipal, and international roles. Entering politics at the local level, Mihael served first as an Independent Councillor and later as Mayor of Jastrebarsko, where he led a successful political shift in the municipality. He was elected to the Croatian Parliament in 2011, subsequently assuming leadership roles in the Land-use Planning and Infrastructure Committees before joining the national government.

Armand Zorn

Social Democratic Party of Germany (Germany)

Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands

Armand Zorn has been a member of the German Bundestag since 2021, representing Frankfurt am Main I. Since May 2025, he is serving as a Deputy Chair of the SPD parliamentary group, responsible for economic affairs, energy, digital transformation, governmental modernisation, transport, and tourism. Before joining the German Parliament, he worked as a business consultant and as a project lead in development cooperation. Armand studied political science and history at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Sciences Po Paris, the University of Konstanz, and Johns Hopkins SAIS, specialising in international economics.

Further Reading Recommendations

Innovation Powerhouse Europe: The Case for Sovereign Frontier Compute

Compiled by Javier Borràs Arumí (Investigator and Editor, CIDOB) as part of the commissioned Research Package. The package also includes further best-practice governance design cases beyond those used in this chapter, available for future work. April 2026.

- Beraja, M., Peng, W., Yang, D. Y., & Yuchtman, N. (2024). Government as venture capitalists in AI (NBER Working Paper No. w32701). SSRN. https://ssrn.com/abstract=4901035
- Bloom, N., Van Reenen, J., & Williams, H. (2019). A toolkit of policies to promote innovation. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 33(3), 163-184.
- Boston Consulting Group. (2022). Can Europe catch up in the quantum computer race? https://www.bcg.com/publications/2022/can-europe-catch-up-in-quantum-computer-race
- Bradford, A. (2024). The false choice between digital regulation and innovation. Northwestern University Law Review, 119(2), 377-454. https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/nulr/vol119/iss2/3
- Chiappinelli, O., Giuffrida, L. M., & Spagnolo, G. (2025). Public procurement as an innovation policy: Where do we stand? International Journal of Industrial Organization, 100, Article 103157.
- De Sanctis, A. and Al. (2025). Unlocking private investment and boosting productivity with EU programmes. European Central Bank. https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/blog/date/2025/html/ecb.blog20251120~e0ecdcf648.en.html
- Digital Europe. (2025). Making Europe a quantum industry powerhouse: A strategic EU roadmap for investment, talent and industrial scale. https://www.digitaleurope.org/resources/making-europe-a-quantum-industry-powerhouse-a-strategic-eu-roadmap-for-investment-talent-and-industrial-scale/
- Dyevre, A. (2023). Public R&D spillovers and productivity growth [Working paper].
- Eaton, J., & Kortum, S. (1999). International technology diffusion: Theory and measurement. International Economic Review, 40(3), 537-570.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. (2025). EU startup and scaleup strategy. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/jobs-and-economy/eu-startup-and-scaleup-strategy_en
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. (2024). Regional innovation scoreboard. https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/regional-innovation-scoreboard_en
- European Commission. (2025). Quantum Europe strategy. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/quantum-europe-strategy
- European Investment Bank. (2022). A quantum leap in finance: The role of the European Investment Bank. https://www.eib.org/files/publications/20220112_a_quantum_leap_in_finance_en.pdf
- Fuest, C., & Gros, D. (2024). EU innovation policy - How to escape the middle technology trap. Institute for European Policymaking, Bocconi University. https://iep.unibocconi.eu/publications/reports/eu-innovation-policy-how-escape-middle-technology-trap
- Johnson, C. (1982). MITI and the Japanese miracle: The growth of industrial policy, 1925-1975. Stanford University Press.
- Juhász, R., Lane, N., & Rodrik, D. (2024). The new economics of industrial policy. Annual Review of Economics, 16(1), 213-242.
- Le Picard, H. (2025). European startups and generative AI: Overcoming big tech dominance. Ifri. https://www.ifri.org/en/studies/european-startups-and-generative-ai-overcoming-big-tech-dominance
- Lee, N. (2024). Lessons from government-driven VC investments in Korea: Government-sponsored VC funds and publicly traded VC companies. SSRN. https://ssrn.com/abstract=4962456
- Mazzucato, M. (2018). Mission-oriented innovation policies: Challenges and opportunities. Industrial and Corporate Change, 27(5), 803-815.
- OECD. (2025a). An overview of national strategies and policies for quantum technologies. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/an-overview-of-national-strategies-and-policies-for-quantum-technologies_5e55e7ab-en/full-report/component-4.html
- OECD. (2025b). Benchmarking government support for venture capital: Israel. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/benchmarking-government-support-for-venture-capital_82cd3fe1-en/israel_b5c8cc2e-en.html
- Pantea, S., & Tkacik, M. (2025). Venture capital and high-tech start-ups in Europe: A systematic review of the empirical evidence. Venture Capital, 27(4), 435-458. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691066.2024.2315069
- Räsänen, M., Mäkynen, H., & Möttönen, M. [add remaining authors here]. (2021). Path to European quantum unicorns. EPJ Quantum Technology, 8, Article 5. https://doi.org/10.1140/epjqt/s40507-021-00095-x
- Riekeles, G. E. (2023). Quantum technologies and value chains: Why and how Europe must act now. European Policy Centre. https://www.epc.eu/publication/Quantum-technologies-and-value-chains-Why-and-how-Europe-must-act-now-4f3940/
- Schörner, M. (2026). One fund to scale them all? Filling crucial financing gaps with the Scaleup Europe Fund. Jacques Delors Centre. https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/detail/publication/one-fund-to-scale-them-all

← Contents

The Fifth Freedom

Compiled by Eleonora Bertoni, (PhD, Independent Researcher and Policy Consultant) as part of the commissioned Research Package. The package also includes further best-practice governance design cases beyond those used in this chapter, available for future work. April 2026.

- Bergsvik, J., Fauske, A., & Hart, R. K. (2021). Can policies stall the fertility fall? A systematic review of the (quasi-)experimental literature. Population and Development Review, 47, 913-964. https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12431
- Brand, A., Niemann, A., & Weber, R. (2024). Introduction: The Europeanisation of identities through everyday practices. Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 32(2), 309-320. https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2024.2310021
- Council of Europe. (2023). Review of the implementation of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). https://rm.coe.int/rfcdc-eng-review/1680b6cbfd
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, PPMI, Grumbinaitė, I., Colus, F., & Buitrago Carvajal, H. (2025b). Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/32313
- European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2023b). Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe - 2023: Early childhood education and care [Eurydice report]. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/670097
- European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2023c). Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe - 2023: The teaching profession [Eurydice report]. Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/849109
- European Commission. (2024). 2024 state of the Digital Decade report. https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/2024-state-digital-decade-package
- Fluchtmann, J., van Veen, V., & Adema, W. (2023). Fertility, employment and family policy: A cross-country panel analysis (OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 299). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/326844f0-en
- Lutz, W. (2020). Fertility will be determined by the changing ideal family size and the empowerment to reach these targets. Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, 18, 63-70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27041930
- OECD. (2024a). Society at a glance 2024: OECD social indicators. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/918d8db3-en
- OECD. (2025). OECD skills outlook 2025: Building the skills of the 21st century for all. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/26163cd3-en
- Thomas, J., Rowe, F., Williamson, P., & Lin, E. S. (2022). The effect of leave policies on increasing fertility: A systematic review. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 9(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01270-w

Secure, Clean and Affordable Energy: Powering Europe's Economic Future

Compiled by Matthew McLaughlan Merelo (Researcher, CIDOB) and Víctor Burguete (Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB) as part of the commissioned Research Package. The research also includes further best-practice governance design cases beyond those used in this chapter, available for future work. April 2026.

- Ahmad Madatali, H., & Lotito, A. (2026). European grids package: Lessons learnt from the implementation of the TEN-E framework (EPRS Briefing No. EPRS_BRI(2026)782622_EN). European Parliamentary Research Service.
- Carton, B., Dolphin, G., Duval, R., Hodge, A., Kara, A., Voigts, S., & Wende, S. (2026). The EU's energy transition: Investment impact and role of carbon pricing revenue recycling (IMF Working Paper No. WP/26/46). International Monetary Fund.
- Criscuolo, C., Dechezleprêtre, A., & Lalanne, G. (2023). Industrial strategies for Europe's green transition. In Sparking Europe's new industrial revolution: A policy for net zero, growth and resilience (Chapter 7). Bruegel. https://www.bruegel.org/blueprint/sparking-europes-new-industrial-revolution-policy-net-zero-growth-and-resilience
- De Sanctis, A., Grynberg, C., & Vinci, F. R. (forthcoming). The European energy landscape and industrial competitiveness: Making the case for an Energy Union (Occasional Paper Series). European Central Bank.
- Eurelectric. (2024). Grids for speed.
- European Commission, Joint Research Centre. (2025). Material requirements for electricity grids [Science for Policy Brief].
- European Commission, Joint Research Centre. (2020). Critical raw materials for strategic technologies and sectors in the EU: A foresight study. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8e167f11-077c-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
- European Commission. (2026). Shared power, shared security: Nordic lessons for Europe's energy resilience [Sustainable Energy Week report].
- Heussaff, C., & Zachmann, G. (2025). Upgrading Europe's electricity grid is about more than just money (Policy Brief 04/2025). Bruegel.
- Hledik, R., Thompson, A. W., Graham, K., Wang, A., & Coghe, P. (2026). Clean flexibility: Opportunities in Europe. The Brattle Group and Acousmatics.
- Horobet, A., Tudor, C. D., Belascu, L., Herciu, M., & Ogrean, C. (2025). The future of energy in the European Union: Balancing renewable growth with globalization and digitalization. Journal of Applied Economics, 28(1), Article 2548821.

- Jäger, P. (2025). Cautionary tale or model for Europe? How member states should react to Germany's new electricity subsidy [Policy brief]. Hertie School, Jacques Delors Centre.
- Klonari, V., Ramirez, L., Martinez, S., Bakovasilis, A., Tardieu, P., Porras, S., Chang, H., Oudalov, A., & Winkens, A. (2025). Delivering a cost-effective energy system for Europe. WindEurope & Hitachi Energy.
- Mišík, M. (2022). The EU needs to improve its external energy security. Energy Policy, 165, Article 112930.
- Nunzi, S. (2025). European strategic autonomy in the energy field: Navigating geopolitical challenges, policy coordination and innovation [Working paper]. LUISS Institute for European Analysis and Policy.
- Papadopoulou, C. (2026). A brief overview of the principle of energy solidarity in EU law and its interplay with divergent national strategies of member states. European Papers - A Journal on Law and Integration, 11(1), 33-55.
- Petrovich, B. (2026). European electricity review 2026. Ember. https://ember-energy.org/latest-insights/european-electricity-review-2026/
- Popkostova, Y. (2023). The impact of the low-carbon transition on the oil and gas economy. European Union Institute for Security Studies.
- Raimondi, P. P. (2022). Walking out of the woods: EU industrial policy between the energy crisis and decarbonisation. Istituto Affari Internazionali.
- Sikow-Magny, C., Belmans, R., & Pototschnig, A. (2026). Proposal for reviewing the Regulation on trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E): Assessment and recommendations (Policy Paper 2026/01). Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Florence School of Regulation.
- Stanley Center for Peace and Security, & E3G. (2023). The geopolitics of the energy transition and opportunities for international cooperation: Readout & recommendations.

Security Starts at Home: Reframing Civic Resilience in Belgium

Compiled by Thanos Chatziioannou (Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University) as part of the commissioned Research Package. The package also includes further best-practice governance design cases beyond those used in this chapter, available for future work. April 2026.

- Achiume, E. T., Rajagopal, B., & de Varennes, F. (2020). UN experts urge Denmark to halt contentious sale of 'ghetto' buildings. UN OHCHR.
- AIMA. (2024). Relatório intercalar: Recuperação de processos pendentes na AIMA. Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo.
- AIReF. (2025). Cuarta opinión del Ingreso Mínimo Vital (IMV). Autoridad Independiente de Responsabilidad Fiscal.
- Algemene Rekenkamer. (2017). Inburgering: Eerste resultaten van de Wet inburgering 2013. Algemene Rekenkamer.
- Assemblée Nationale. (2018). La République en échec: Rapport d'information sur les politiques de la Seine-Saint-Denis (Rapport n° 1014). Assemblée Nationale.
- Becker, S., & Kempin, R. (2025). Strengthening Europe's defence capabilities through clear tasks and objectives (SWP Comment 2025/C 38). Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.
- Belgian Presidency. (2024). La Hulpe Declaration on the future of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2024). Gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt in Deutschland 2023. Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Burilkov, A., & Wolff, G. B. (2025). Defending Europe without the US: First estimates of what is needed. Bruegel.
- CJEU. (2025). Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber), Case C-417/23, 18 December 2025. Court of Justice of the European Union.
- Cour des Comptes. (2020). L'évaluation de l'attractivité des quartiers prioritaires. Cour des Comptes.
- Di Carlo, D., Hemerijck, A., & Karremans, J. (2024). The continental social investment turn. Politics & Society, 53(1), 29-56.
- Divosa. (2022). Cijfers inburgering: Examenniveau en slagingspercentages Wi2013. Divosa Benchmark Statushouders.
- Divosa. (2024). Benchmark statushouders: Resultaten eind 2024. Divosa.
- Draghi, M. (2024). The future of European competitiveness. European Commission.
- Dragolov, G., Ignacz, Z., Lorenz, J., Delhey, J., & Boehnke, K. (2013). Social Cohesion Radar: Measuring common ground. Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- EAPN-ES. (2024). Proyecto Acceso Vital para la detección y movilización de personas en situación de non take-up. European Anti-Poverty Network - Spain.
- ECFR. (2025a). Baltic bellwether: How to boost the EU's civil preparedness. European Council on Foreign Relations.
- Eklund, H. (2025). The Danish ghetto area case. Verfassungsblog.
- Eurofound. (2024). Quality of life in the EU: 2024 results of the Living and Working in the EU e-survey. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Central Bank. (2025). Investment needs for the green, digital and defence transitions [ECB Economic Bulletin]. European Central Bank.
- European Commission. (2016). PEACE funding is bringing divided communities together. Regional Policy.
- European Commission. (2021). The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2023). Enhancing migrant integration services in Portugal. DG REFORM.

- European Commission. (2024). Employment and social developments in Europe (ESDE) 2024. Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2025a). Standard Eurobarometer 103 (Spring 2025). Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2025b). Standard Eurobarometer 104 (Autumn 2025). Publications Office of the European Union.
- European Commission. (2025c). The Competitiveness Compass (COM/2025/30). European Commission.
- European Court of Auditors. (2023). Annual report on the EU budget for the financial year 2022. European Court of Auditors.
- European Parliament. (2025). EP Spring 2025 Eurobarometer. European Parliament.
- FrameWorks Institute. (2018). Framing the economy: How to win the case for a better system. FrameWorks Institute.
- Gobierno de España. (2025). El Ingreso Mínimo Vital llega a 2,4 millones de personas en noviembre. La Moncloa.
- Heath-Kelly, C., & Strausz, E. (2023). Evidence and ideology in the Independent Review of Prevent. Royal Holloway, University of London.
- Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. A., & Yavitz, A. (2016). Lifecycle benefits of an influential early childhood program. Journal of Human Resources, 51(3), 789-827.
- Hemerijck, A. (2017). The uses of social investment. Oxford University Press.
- Hemerijck, A., & Bokhorst, D. (2024). Why social investment holds the key to delivering on the Draghi report. Social Europe.
- Hunter, A. (2024). An EU era of heightened security: What role for the future Cohesion Policy? (Discussion Paper). European Policy Centre.
- IBA Wien. (2022). IBA Wien: New social housing. IBA Vienna.
- IOM. (2022). Technical support to the High Commission for Migration. International Organization for Migration Portugal.
- J-PAL Europe & CEMFI. (2024). Building a Policy Lab with the Spanish Ministry of Social Inclusion. Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab.
- JRF. (2018). Talking about poverty: How experts and the public understand UK poverty. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Letta, E. (2024). Much more than a market: Speed, security, solidarity. European Council.
- MIPEX. (2020). Migrant Integration Policy Index: Portugal. MIPEX.
- NCB. (2022). PEACE IV Shared Education: Impact evaluation key findings. National Children's Bureau.
- NISRA. (2024). Northern Ireland Good Relations Indicators 2024. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
- OECD. (2024a). How's Life? 2024: Measuring well-being. OECD Publishing.
- ONPV. (2023). Rapport 2023: Quartiers prioritaires – Rétrospective 2015-2023. Observatoire National de la Politique de la Ville.
- People's Review of Prevent. (2023). People's Review of Prevent.
- Peter, T. (2023). Setting the record straight on the Vienna social housing model. American Enterprise Institute.
- Pisani-Ferry, J., & Tagliapietra, S. (2025). Reconciling defence and the climate transition. Bruegel.
- Público. (2025). Mais de 133 mil processos AIMA pendentes no Tribunal Administrativo de Lisboa. Público.
- Real Instituto Elcano. (2025). The great challenge for Europe: Balancing external security with internal social cohesion. Real Instituto Elcano.
- Schinkel, W. (2017). Imagined societies: A critique of immigrant integration in Western Europe. Cambridge University Press.
- Sénat. (2024). Projet de loi de finances pour 2025: Cohésion des territoires (Avis n° 145-7). Sénat.
- SEUPB. (2022). PEACE IV Peace4Youth executive summary. Special EU Programmes Body.
- SEUPB. (2023). PEACEPLUS Programme overview. Special EU Programmes Body.
- Social Platform. (2021). Unlocking the Social Scoreboard's potential to create an inclusive, sustainable Europe. Social Platform.
- Stadt Wien. (2019). Widmungskategorie "Geförderter Wohnbau" [Building Code amendment]. City of Vienna.
- Stewart, F. (2008). Horizontal inequalities and conflict. Palgrave Macmillan.
- UNDP & SeeD. (2020). SCORE Index: Social cohesion and reconciliation. UNDP Action for Cooperation and Trust.
- Wiener Wohnen. (2025). Gemeindewohnungen NEU. Wiener Wohnen.

Sweden: The Case for a National Innovation Push

Compiled by Mikael Román (Independent Strategic Consultant and Docent in Environmental Change, Linköping University), as part of the commissioned Research Package. The package also includes further best-practice governance design cases beyond those used in this chapter, available for future work. April 2026.

- Andersson, F.et al.(2026). Från stridsflyg till samhällsnytta: Flygplansindustrins roll i det svenska innovationsekosystemet. Entreprenörskapsforum & Svenskt Näringsliv.
- Binz, C., & Truffer, B. (2017). Global innovation systems - A conceptual framework for innovation dynamics in transnational contexts. Research Policy, 46(7), 1284-1298.
- Committee for the Future, Finnish Parliament. (2023). Annual report 2023: Long-term governance in an era of uncertainty. Eduskunta.
- Corfo. (2022). Chile's inclusive innovation strategy: Integrating underrepresented groups into high-growth ecosystems. Corporación de Fomento de la Producción.
- Danish Disruption Council. (2018). Denmark towards 2025: A government report on technology, competitiveness and jobs. Danish Ministry of Finance.
- European Commission. (2024). European innovation scoreboard 2024. Publications Office of the European Union.

- Kharas, H., & Hamel, K. (2022). The invisible driver of innovation: Why informal and underrepresented actors matter [Policy Brief]. Brookings Institution.
- Letta, E. (2024). Much more than a market: Speed, security, solidarity - Empowering the single market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU citizens [Report to the European Council]. European Council.
- Mazzucato, M. (2021). Mission economy: A moonshot guide to changing capitalism. Allen Lane / HarperCollins.
- Mazzucato, M., & Jacobs, M. (2016). Rethinking capitalism: Economics and policy for sustainable and inclusive growth. Wiley-Blackwell.
- OECD. (2022). Building long-term futures: Foresight for policy and strategy. OECD Strategic Foresight Unit.
- OECD. (2023a). Inclusive innovation: Harnessing new technologies for better lives. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2023b). OECD science, technology and innovation outlook 2023: Enabling transitions in times of disruption. OECD Publishing.
- Roberts, C., & Hale, T. (2023). The political economy of climate commitment: Why some countries follow through. Global Policy, 14(2), 187-199.
- Román, M., Deiaco, E., & Ek, I. (2017). Nurturing spillover from the industrial partnership between Sweden and Brazil: A case study of the Gripen project (Report 2017:01). Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis.
- Vinnova. (2023). Gender and innovation: How Sweden's innovation policy can become more inclusive (Vinnova Analysis 2023:1).

From Spending to Capability: A Shared Acquisition Platform for Europe

Compiled by Gesine Weber (Senior Researcher, Center for Security Studies) as part of the commissioned Research Package. The package also includes further best-practice governance design cases beyond those used in this chapter, available for future work. April 2026.

- Baer, D. & Besch, S. (2024). NATO's Northeast Countries Have a Template for Europe's New Security Reality. Commentary, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Cattler, D. (2025). The EU's Intelligence Debate: Capability First, Structures Last. Commentary, International Center for Defence and Security.
- Chihaia, M. (2025). Military Mobility – A Critical Enabler. EPC Policy Brief / EU Defence Series 2, No. 4. European Policy Centre / International Centre for Defence and Security.
- EUISS. (2023). Strategic Culture: An Elusive but Necessary Foundation for EU Defence. Final Report. EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris.
- European Commission. (2025). European Union Rapid Deployment Capacity. Factsheet.
- European Parliament Research Service. (2022). The EU Rapid Deployment Capacity: This Time, It's for Real? In-Depth Analysis (EXPO_IDA(2022)702568). European Parliament, Brussels.
- Fiott, D. (2025). Sovereignty by Design: Security of Supply in Defence in the European Union. ARES Group, Note, May 2025.
- Fiott, D. (2026). Up in the Air: What Could FCAS Mean for Common EU Defence Projects? CSDS Policy Brief 6/2026, Centre for Security, Diplomacy, and Strategy, Brussels.
- Lindstrom, G. (2007). Enter the EU Battlegroups. Chaillot Paper No. 97. EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris.
- Meyer, C. O. (2006). The Quest for a European Strategic Culture: Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union. Palgrave Macmillan / Springer. Chapter 2.
- Meyer, C. O. (2023). Nature, Emergence, and Limitations of an EU Strategic Culture. In The Oxford Handbook of EU Foreign Policy. Taylor & Francis.
- Meyer, C. O., van Osch, B., & Reykers, Y. (2024). From EU Battlegroups to Rapid Deployment Capacity: Learning the Right Lessons? International Affairs, 100(1), 181-200.
- Meyer, C., van Osch, B., & Reykers, Y. (2024). From EU Battlegroups to Rapid Deployment Capacity: Learning the Right Lessons? International Affairs, 100(1), 181-200.
- Reykers, Y. (2017). EU Battlegroups: High Costs, No Benefits? Contemporary Security Policy, 38(3), 471-495.
- Reykers, Y., & Rieker, P. (2024). Ad hoc coalitions in European security and defence: symptoms of short-term pragmatism, no more? Journal of European Integration, 46(6), 861-879.
- Ross, J. & Téterchen, N. (2025). Die Deutsch-Französische Brigade und der Wiederaufbau der europäischen Verteidigung. DGAP Briefing.
- Weber, G. (2026). Archiving Burden-Shifting through a European Security Patchwork. The Washington Quarterly, 49(1), 69-86.
- Wolff, G., Steinbach, A., & Zettelmeyer, J. (2025). The Governance and Funding of European Rearmament. Policy Brief. Bruegel, Brussels.

The Policy Mission Fellowship is an Open European Dialogue initiative cooperatively run by

APROPOS
Advancing Process in Politics

Robert Bosch Stiftung

King Baudouin Foundation
Working together for a better society

BertelsmannStiftung

iai Istituto Affari Internazionali

CIDOB
BARCELONA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ
ELIAMEP
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗΣ & ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗΣ
HELLENIC FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN & FOREIGN POLICY

in collaboration with

LSE
THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE