EUROPEAN BUSINESS SUMMITS

TAKEAWAYS

EUROPEAN BUSINESS SUMMIT
17 NOVEMBER 2026

The European Business Summit 2026 focused on translating Europe's ambitions for competitiveness, resilience and strategic autonomy into practical results. Across two days, panellists examined industrial and energy security, Single Market barriers, access to finance, digital sovereignty, AI infrastructure, cybersecurity and defence readiness. A recurring message was the need for faster implementation, predictable investment conditions and closer cooperation between policymakers, businesses and investors.

EUROPE FACING THE DOUBLE CARBON CONSTRAINT: RESILIENCE, COMPETITIVENESS AND THE CHOICES AHEAD

Europe faces a double carbon constraint: its dependence on imported fossil fuels and the need to reduce emissions. Speakers stressed that energy availability, material resources and infrastructure must be central to industrial strategy. Energy efficiency and electrification can strengthen resilience and create opportunities for innovation, but technological progress cannot be treated as a substitute for credible planning. A fair and politically sustainable transition will require long-term choices that protect competitiveness while allowing new industries and solutions to emerge.

THE STRESS TEST FOR EUROPE'S SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE

Critical raw materials are essential to Europe's energy, digital and defence transitions, yet supply chains remain exposed to concentrated dependencies and geopolitical risks. Speakers called for more diversified sourcing, faster permitting and investment in refining, recycling and material recovery. Partnerships with resource-rich countries should also generate local jobs, processing capacity and skills rather than focusing on extraction alone. Greater coordination between industrial, trade and investment policies will be necessary to build resilience while preserving Europe's connection to global markets.

THE SINGLE MARKET TEST: CAN EUROPE FINALLY ACT AS ONE MARKET?

Persistent differences in national rules and administrative practices continue to fragment the Single Market, creating hidden costs for businesses operating across borders. Inconsistent labelling, gold-plating and complex procedures were highlighted as obstacles to scaling up. The discussion called for stronger implementation of existing rules, more accessible public procurement and better financing for innovative firms. Reducing internal barriers while maintaining openness to trade would help turn the Single Market into a more predictable platform for investment, innovation and growth.

TURNING CLEAN ENERGY INTO EUROPE'S STRONGEST BUSINESS CASE

Affordable energy is a prerequisite for Europe's industrial competitiveness and decarbonisation. Although clean technologies are advancing, long permitting procedures, grid bottlenecks and uncertain demand continue to delay investment. Speakers highlighted the need for bankable projects, appropriate public guarantees and financing models capable of mobilising private capital. Different sectors require different solutions, including electrification, renewable fuels and hydrogen. The priority is to accelerate deployment while ensuring that the clean transition remains commercially viable for European industry.

ADVANCING TECH SOVEREIGNTY: TURNING STRATEGIC AUTONOMY INTO INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH?

Tech sovereignty was framed as effective control over critical technologies, services and data rather than a question of supplier nationality alone. Panellists discussed cybersecurity, operational continuity, sovereign cloud arrangements and the need for verifiable safeguards. Europe must help its technology providers scale while attracting the investment required for AI, data centres and digital networks. Clear security expectations, fair competition and customer choice were identified as important conditions for strengthening European capacity without creating new barriers or fragmentation.

CAN EUROPE TAKE CONTROL OF ITS DIGITAL FUTURE? THE PATH TO A SOVEREIGN CLOUD AND SOFTWARE

The debate over sovereign cloud services highlighted different interpretations of technological autonomy. Some participants stressed European providers' ability to scale, while others prioritised verifiable controls over data, operations and exposure to foreign laws. Sensitive public-sector workloads may require stronger safeguards than routine applications. Auditing rights, interoperability and switching barriers were identified as practical concerns. A proportionate, transparent approach is needed to reconcile security requirements with innovation, open ecosystems and customer choice.

A NEW ERA OF CYBER THREATS: TIME TO RETHINK THE EU'S CYBERSECURITY FRAMEWORK

Ransomware, AI-enabled attacks and supply-chain vulnerabilities are increasing Europe's exposure to cyber threats. Speakers argued that compliance must translate into operational preparedness, faster incident response and stronger cooperation. NIS2, the Cyber Resilience Act and related initiatives provide a framework, but overlapping rules and inconsistent implementation can burden businesses, particularly SMEs. More coherent requirements, accessible security tools and collaboration between authorities, industry and researchers are essential to strengthening cyber resilience across the economy.

THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF BUSINESS IN SHORING UP DEMOCRACY

Democratic stability, the rule of law and trustworthy information were recognised as foundations for investment and long-term prosperity. The panel explored how businesses can support democratic resilience through responsible conduct, fair market participation and engagement with communities. Independent media, disinformation and the European Democracy Shield featured prominently, alongside concerns about living costs and inequality. Speakers stressed that restoring confidence requires not only growth, but also a sense that economic opportunities and the benefits of prosperity are widely shared.

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EUROPE CONNECTS: BETTING ON ITS GRIDS

Electrification can improve energy security, reduce fossil-fuel dependence and strengthen industrial competitiveness, but Europe's grid development is lagging. Permitting and connection delays, high electricity costs and insufficient investment hinder deployment. Speakers emphasised the need to expand electricity networks while planning for hydrogen and CO_2 infrastructure in hard-to-abate sectors. Coordination between energy systems, regulators and investors is needed to make decarbonisation affordable and practical for European industry.

FINANCING EUROPE'S STRATEGIC INDEPENDENCE: MOBILISING CAPITAL FOR RESILIENCE AND GROWTH

Europe has significant savings but struggles to channel them towards innovation, infrastructure and growing companies. Fragmented financial markets and limited access to risk capital can push businesses to seek investment elsewhere. Panellists discussed the Savings and Investments Union, banking integration, long-term institutional investors and public guarantees as means of mobilising finance. Stronger capital markets and more financeable projects would allow Europe to fund strategic priorities while remaining open to international investment.

FROM RULES TO RESULTS: DIGITAL COMPETITION AND EUROPEAN COMPETITIVENESS IN THE AI ERA

As the Digital Markets Act's implementation advances, attention is shifting to its effects on competition, innovation and consumers. Speakers expressed differing views on its impact on developers and smaller firms. The discussion stressed coherent enforcement alongside data protection, cybersecurity and AI rules. Europe needs a predictable digital framework that safeguards contestability while enabling businesses to invest, innovate and compete at scale.

POWERING EUROPE'S AI AMBITION: CAN EUROPE BUILD THE SOVEREIGN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE NEXT WAVE OF AI?

Europe's AI competitiveness depends on computing power, advanced chips, data centres and reliable energy supply. Investment shortages, permitting delays and pressure on electricity networks could limit Europe's capacity to train and deploy AI systems. Panellists discussed how public policy and private capital can accelerate infrastructure development while improving sustainability. Strengthening European capacity, supported by partnerships and open markets, is essential to reducing strategic dependencies and enabling future AI innovation.

AI AT WORK: SHAPING EUROPE'S LABOUR MARKET TRANSITION FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND INCLUSION

AI can raise productivity and transform jobs, but its effects will differ across sectors and workers. The panel considered skills shortages, the risk of displacement and the need to adapt training systems before disruption becomes widespread. Lifelong learning, social dialogue and cooperation between employers, educators and policymakers were seen as critical. The challenge is to ensure that AI adoption improves competitiveness and job quality while giving workers opportunities to participate in the transition.

SPACE AND SECURE CONNECTIVITY AS DEFENCE ENABLERS

Satellite communications, navigation and surveillance are increasingly essential to Europe's defence readiness and crisis response. Cyberattacks, jamming and hostile interference make the resilience of space systems a strategic priority. Speakers examined secure connectivity, dual-use innovation and the importance of interoperable capabilities across national, EU and commercial actors. Initiatives such as IRIS² and GOVSATCOM can support greater autonomy, provided Europe invests in industrial capacity, secure infrastructure and effective coordination with defence users.

MAKING THE ETS PAY OFF

The EU Emissions Trading System remains a central decarbonisation instrument, but a carbon price does not automatically make industrial transformation economically viable. Panellists highlighted investment uncertainty, carbon leakage concerns and the need to protect energy-intensive sectors during the transition. The discussion explored free allocation, the Market Stability Reserve and better use of ETS revenues to support electrification and clean technologies. A credible long-term price signal must be combined with practical conditions that enable businesses to invest.

THE REGULATORY LAFFER CURVE: WHEN REGULATION STARTS REDUCING COMPETITIVENESS

The final panel examined whether the cumulative burden of regulation can eventually undermine the economic benefits it seeks to deliver. Speakers raised concerns about overlapping requirements, administrative costs and uncertainty for investors, while recognising the importance of public-interest protections. Simplification, competitiveness assessments and regular reviews of existing legislation were discussed as ways forward. The central challenge is to make regulation more effective and predictable without weakening essential standards or Europe's long-term growth prospects.

EUROPEAN COMMISSIONERS' KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Four Commissioners linked Europe's competitiveness with the need to strengthen its social, territorial and security foundations.

Roxana Mînzatu emphasised skills development, quality employment and preparing workers for expanding sectors, including defence.

Dubravka Šuica highlighted the implications of demographic change for care, pensions and labour markets, as well as opportunities arising from longer lives.

Andrius Kubilius called for faster defence production, greater investment and stronger readiness in response to security threats.

Raffaele Fitto underlined the contribution of cohesion policy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility to regional investment, infrastructure, innovation and reform.

Together, their interventions stressed the importance of turning European policies into tangible capacity and results.