



Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament plenary debate on urgent actions to revive EU competitiveness, deepen the EU Single Market and reduce the cost of living – from the Draghi report to reality

Strasbourg, 11 February 2026

Thank you, Madam President, dear Roberta,

Deputy-Minister Raouna, dear Marilena,

Honourable Members,

In the last plenary, we focused on the geopolitical shockwaves that Europe is facing and on our united response. But our power on the global stage depends greatly on our strength on the economic front. Competitiveness is not just the foundation of our prosperity but of our security, and ultimately of our democracies too. This is why competitiveness has been at the top of our agenda from day one. At the very start of the mandate, we turned the Draghi and Letta reports into a plan for change, the Competitiveness Compass. And since then, it has been a year of action. With the Clean Industrial Deal. AI Factories and Gigafactories. Five new trade deals. Ten simplification omnibuses. The Grids Package. Tailor-made action plans for the automotive, steel and chemicals industries. The Savings and Investment Union. The greatest surge in defence investment in our history – with SAFE and the Roadmap 2030. And so much more. This is the urgency mindset we need, and we will relentlessly stay the course until we get it all done.

Today, I would like to focus on progress and next steps in three key areas. First, trade. Second, the Single Market. And third, simplification.

To the first topic: trade. A competitive Europe can only be an independent Europe. Today, dependencies are at risk to become weapons of coercion. Therefore, we must eliminate the bottlenecks in our most strategic value chains. And we can do this by stepping up production in Europe – and by expanding our network of reliable partners. This is why trade is so important. We must be laser-focused on opening growth opportunities and new markets to our companies. We need more rules-based, reliable trade with like-minded partners. Therefore, in 2025 we concluded trade agreements with Mexico, Indonesia and Switzerland. Last month, I signed our trade agreement with Mercosur. And two weeks ago, I was in India to sign the largest free trade agreement ever. The mother of all deals. It has a market of 2 billion people. 25% of global GDP. It grants Europe unique access to the fastest growing large economy – a clear 'first-mover' advantage for our businesses. Not only is this a breath of fresh air for European exporters, this will also create alternative supply chains in strategic sectors – from chips to clean tech. And more trade deals are on their way with Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, the UAE, etc. This is the European way to independence. And Europe's independence moment is now.

Let me continue with the Single Market. The IMF says that interstate barriers in our Union are three times higher than interstate barriers in the US. So how can we compete on an equal footing? We have the second-largest economy in the world, but we are driving it with the handbrake on. The good news is: This can be fixed. But we need single-minded focus on the Single Market. And we need to tear down barriers one by one. That is why, next month, we will propose the 28th regime. We call it EU Inc, a single and simple set of rules that will apply seamlessly all over our Union so that business can operate across Member States much more easily. Our entrepreneurs will be able to register a company in any Member State within 48 hours – fully online. EU Inc will ease access to finance in the start-up and scale-up phases. EU Inc enables smooth cross-border operations, and it allow rapid wind-down – if a company fails. This is the speed we need. And this is 'Europe made easy'.

The same is true for capital markets. Let me take the US example again. One financial system, one capital market, and a handful of other financial centres. Here in Europe, we do not only have 27 different financial systems, each with its own supervisor. But also, more than 300 trading venues across our Union. That is fragmentation on steroids. We need one large, deep and liquid capital market. And this is the goal of our Savings and Investment Union. We have made proposals on market integration and supervision. And now we need you to get them over the finish line. Our companies need capital right now. So let us get this done this year. And thank you for your support, because my plan A is to move by 27. But if this is not possible, the Treaty allows for enhanced cooperation. We have to make progress, one way or the other, to tear down the barriers that prevent us from being a true global giant.

Honourable Members,

Completing our Single Market also means completing our Energy Union. And this is vital to bring prices down even further. Prices remain too high and too volatile. And we know why. It is because of lack of interconnection and grids and our reliance on fossil fuels. The data is as clear as daylight. In 2025, electricity from gas cost on average more than EUR 100 per megawatt-hour. The price of electricity from solar? EUR 34. Electricity from nuclear? EUR 50 to EUR 60 per megawatt-hour. The figures are telling. Low-carbon energies are not only homegrown and clean. They give us more independence, more security and they bring costs down. This is why today, we are investing heavily in low-carbon energy. Last year, for the first time ever, we produced more electricity from solar and wind than from all fossil fuels combined. And nuclear keeps rising year on year. But we need more than that. To lower and stabilise costs, we need the infrastructure for a true Energy Union. This is why we introduced the European Grids package. It will speed up permitting and fast-track the construction of Energy Highways across our Union. Just last month, we reached an agreement on the first such project. The Bornholm Energy Island. It will create a new bridge between Denmark and Germany, connecting both countries to 3 gigawatts of offshore wind energy. It will transform the Baltic wind from a national resource into shared European power. The goal is simple. Clean energy must flow freely all across our Union.

Finally, on European preference. I believe that in strategic sectors, European preference is a necessary instrument that will contribute to strengthen Europe's own production base. It can help create lead markets in those sectors and support the scaling-up of European production capabilities. But I want to be clear – it is a fine line to walk. There is no 'one-size-fits-all'. That is why every proposal must be underpinned by robust economic analysis and be in line with our international obligations.

Honourable Members,

In all of this in the Single Market, we must be driven by the greatest sense of urgency. We need a clear timetable and everyone's commitment to get things done. This is why we need a Joint Single Market Roadmap to be completed by 2028. I will propose that, together with the Parliament and the Council, we endorse such a roadmap at the March European Council. It will include a commitment to swiftly adopt some key proposals, all by end of next year. Because time is of the essence.

Honourable Members,

My final point is simplification. We know why it is vital. European companies tell us they spend almost as much on bureaucracy as on research and development. This cannot be. We have made simplification a core focus. And in one year, we have delivered more than in the previous decade. We have already proposed to slash bureaucratic costs for companies by EUR 15 billion every year. But all the omnibuses must reach their destination. But we do not only need to look at the omnibuses at the European level. We must also look at the national level. There is too much gold-plating – the extra layers of national legislation that just make businesses' life much more complicated and create new barriers in our Single Market. Let me give an example. A truck in Belgium can weigh up to 44 tonnes. But if you cross the border with France, it can only carry up to 40 tonnes. In June 2023, we proposed legislation to harmonise this. Almost two years later, it is still under discussion by the co-legislators. Another example. Shipping waste from one Member State to another should be efficient, easy and quick. But with gold-plating, there are different national practices in every Member State. Some Member States for instance only accept correspondence by fax. It is true. It can take several months for traders to get green light from the authorities depending on the different rules in different Member States. If we are serious about simplification, we must crack down on gold-plating and fragmentation.

It is time for a deep regulatory housecleaning – at all levels.

So what matters now is speed of delivery. So we need everyone to play their part. This is the moment for unity and for urgency. This is how we make Europe move faster – and this is how we make Europe stronger.

Thank you, and long live Europe.

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