

## Elements for an ambitious 2026 European competitiveness agenda

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The informal EU Leaders' Retreat should focus on elaborating a specific agenda to strengthen Europe's competitiveness in all sectors, focusing on Single Market integration, regulatory simplification and energy prices reduction as well as on an ambitious trade policy. Our objective is to reach agreement at the **March EUCO and to anchor this agenda in its conclusions through concrete initiatives, mandates and deadlines**, so as to fully implement it by the end of 2026.

### Completing the Single Market

A fully integrated Single Market remains the central pillar of the EU's competitiveness. To further reduce existing barriers and unlock growth potential, the Commission and the co-legislators should be tasked with decisive action to overcome fragmentation among Member States.

This includes **adopting a 28th legal regime by the end of the year** to overcome fragmented national systems and support the expansion of innovative companies.

Strengthening **cross-border energy infrastructure**, for example through a robust Grid Package, is essential to deepen the energy market and to lower energy prices.

The consolidation of resilient, secure and sustainable value chains for **Critical Raw Materials** (CRMs) it is crucial also to reduce possible supply disruptions. The **ResourceEU plan** should be implemented swiftly.

Cross-border labour mobility should be facilitated and protection of labour standards enhanced by concluding negotiations on the **eDeclaration in the first half of 2026**.

**Access to venture capital** and viable exit options should be improved, by deepening the integration of **Europe's capital markets** and by developing **European-scale market platforms**.

**Updated merger control guidelines** should better enable European companies to compete globally.

### Simplification and fighting bureaucratic burden

Further regulatory simplification is indispensable, as excessive administrative burdens continue to hinder business expansion, innovation and competitiveness.

The **automotive package** as well as the **revision of CBAM** and the **future revision of ETS** shall focus on eliminating all non-necessary burdens on industry and on fully applying the principle of **technological neutrality**.

To substantially **accelerate permitting and administrative procedures the Commission should use the upcoming Industrial Accelerator Act (promoting lead markets for clean European products) and submit a cross-sectoral omnibus on permitting** before the end of this year, making broad use of tacit approval mechanisms.

A comprehensive screening of the EU acquis should identify additional **legal acts to be simplified or withdrawn**, including through a **financial services omnibus** in the first half of 2026.

An **emergency brake mechanism** should allow to halt excessive burdens emerging during the legislative process, for instance to step in at the request of one MS.

This should be complemented by a **principle of discontinuity** ensuring that outgoing Commissions withdraw pending proposals at the end of their mandate.

**Bureaucratic costs arising from changes in the legislative process** should be systematically assessed, while all institutions should exercise legislative self-restraint to avoid creating new burdens.

The Commission President should regularly **report to the European Council** on progress in cost savings and simplification.

### Ambitious and pragmatic trade policy

At a time when Openness and integration into global value chains others are declining, we must strengthen them. An ambitious and pragmatic trade policy is equally crucial to open new markets and opportunities for Europe's economy. The EU should pursue a differentiated, fair and rules-based approach, with a stronger focus on swift progress **and taking full account of the potentials and needs of all economic sectors, including agriculture**.

This includes the **rapid conclusion of ambitious free trade agreements**, faster negotiations, **EU-only agreements** as well as decisive action to **counter unfair practices** and safeguard level playing field and our trade policy interests. Such

measures, including EU preference schemes, must respect our overall trade policy strategy and preferential partners, need to be exceptional in nature, limited and proportionate.