



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Make Companies Choose Europe: Driving Competitiveness with the Single Market Strategy

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
2 July 2025, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Make Companies Choose Europe: Driving Competitiveness with the Single Market Strategy

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organises the EU Clusters Talk "**Make Companies Choose Europe: Driving Competitiveness with the Single Market Strategy**" on 2 July, 8:30 – 9:45 CET to present the Single Market Strategy, discuss critical challenges for SMEs, and get feedback from clusters on the proposed measures and on their contributions in implementing the strategy.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderator: Andrew Lansley

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Single Market Strategy
Carsten Schierenbeck, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission
3. Panel debate
Anna Rosenqvist, CEO, Interior Cluster Sweden
Cătălin Robert Podaru, CEO, Leviatan Group, TEC Cluster – Technology Enabled Construction
Frederik Loeckx, Managing Director, Flux50
Tadas Kubilius, CEO, Smart Energy DIH
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- The new Single Market Strategy targets the “Terrible Ten” barriers that still constrain EU firms’ cross-border growth.
- Clusters are essential partners in helping SMEs access and use Single Market digital tools, including the Digital Product Passport and the EU Business Wallet.
- Cutting red tape through harmonised rules, shared standards, and interoperable systems is crucial for SMEs to scale across borders.
- The forthcoming Construction Services Act is a major lever to boost cross-border activity in a sector worth ~11% of EU GDP yet accounting for only ~1% of intra-EU services trade.
- Public procurement in larger Member States is still largely national; clusters should push for simpler, more transparent, and genuinely cross-border procedures.
- Delivering the Strategy will require coordinated action between Member States, the Commission, and cluster networks to turn reforms into practical market access.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Andrew Lansley, the following news items were presented:

1. Learn more about the [Clean Industrial State Aid Framework \(CISAF\)](#).
2. [Apply](#) for the AI Scientific Panel; deadline 14 September.
3. [ECCP Investment Survey](#) as part of the Summary Report 2025.
4. [Feedback Survey](#) to the ECCP Discussion Groups until 16 July 2025.
5. Register for the [Matchmaking in Taipei](#), Taiwan, 21–23 October 2025.
6. Register for the [Matchmaking in Bac Ninh](#), Vietnam, 4–6 November 2025.

2. Single Market Strategy

Carsten Schierenbeck, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission

Carsten Schierenbeck opened by outlining the [Single Market Strategy](#) published in May, developed in response to the European Council's calls for action and aligned with the Draghi and Letta reports. The strategy provides a frank assessment of current weaknesses within the Single Market and presents a structured approach to unlocking its untapped potential, particularly relevant given today's geopolitical pressures.

At the heart of the strategy is the identification of the so-called "**Terrible Ten**" barriers: persistent obstacles hampering the internal market. These include regulatory fragmentation, inconsistent packaging and waste rules, challenges with professional qualifications recognition, and limited cross-border service mobility. The speaker emphasised that addressing these issues requires stronger ownership and cooperation from Member States, facilitated through the [Single Market Task Force](#).

He presented the **nine pillars of the new strategy**, highlighting efforts to boost the services market, support SMEs and mid-caps, accelerate digitalisation, reduce red tape, and improve enforcement. He introduced tools such as the Digital Product Passport, the Business Wallet, and a forthcoming digital platform to simplify worker posting and qualifications recognition. These initiatives are designed to ease administrative burdens and increase workforce mobility.

Carsten Schierenbeck also drew attention to **high-potential sectors such as construction**, where only 1% of services are traded cross-border despite representing 11% of EU GDP. A new Construction Services Act is expected next year, forming part of a more sector-specific approach to complement existing horizontal measures in the services field. He also underlined the need to link structural reforms with EU budgetary support to encourage action at the national level.

The [Annual Single Market and Competitiveness Report](#) will continue to serve as a monitoring tool. Carsten Schierenbeck warned that if Member State engagement remains insufficient, the Commission may propose a Single Market Barriers Prevention Act by 2027. Political visibility of this agenda is being raised through new high-level meetings involving national "Single Market Sherpas", linked to the offices of presidents or prime ministers.



In addition, Carsten Schierenbeck confirmed that enhancing **intra-EU services trade** is a key strategic goal, given its largely untapped economic potential. Although he acknowledged national resistance due to vested interests or regulatory traditions, he argued that deeper services integration would help reduce strategic dependencies and enhance Europe's economic sovereignty, especially in the digital and industrial data domains.

To sum up, the strategy aims to eliminate structural barriers, ease cross-border access, and reduce burdens on companies, with success depending on close cooperation between the Commission, Member States, and industrial actors.

3. Panel debate

Anna Rosenqvist shared the Swedish furniture cluster's work on **digital product passports** as part of the green and digital transitions. She described the evolution from unfamiliarity with blockchain to leading a Nordic collaboration that manually piloted a digital passport for a chair product. This experience led to further national projects, emphasising the value of engaging the full value chain while preserving data ownership. She underlined the need for standardised, structured information and invited peers to a European knowledge-sharing event in Sweden.

Cătălin Robert Podaru highlighted **Romania's construction sector** as dynamic and innovation-driven, with companies keen on adopting digital technologies like BIM, digital twins, and AI. Despite these advancements, he noted major obstacles in accessing other EU markets due to divergent technical regulations, certification burdens, and procurement procedures. Podaru viewed the forthcoming Construction Services Act as a promising tool to reduce fragmentation and enable wider market access, especially if paired with digital solutions like product passports. He also pointed out the competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the US due to Europe's still fragmented internal market.

Frederik Loeckx addressed the **role of clusters in energy transition and flexibility**. He emphasised the mismatch between rapid technological progress and lagging legislative harmonisation. Using the example of companies unable to scale internationally due to regional regulatory differences, he stressed the urgency of standardisation and digitalisation. Public procurement emerged as a major barrier, with very low cross-border participation rates in large EU markets. While the rules appear open, informal practices, language requirements, and hidden local preferences impede fair competition.

Tadas Kubilius presented a **unique Lithuanian project** that connects prosumers across sectors through a hybrid power plant delivering long-term, contract-based electricity without profit motives. He argued that consumer choice in energy, supported by digital tools and monitoring systems, is a core benefit of a functioning single market. He acknowledged the regulatory challenges of grid integration and cross-border electricity trade but expressed optimism about progress through EU action plans and infrastructure projects.

The speakers were strongly aligned on the **importance of digitalisation, standardisation, and regulatory simplification** to unlock the potential of the Single Market. All agreed that tools like the digital product passport must be developed with common standards and interoperable data structures. There was consensus that fragmented certification and procurement systems hindered SME participation in cross-border markets.



While no fundamental disagreements arose, Frederik Loeckx and Tadas Kubilius offered slightly **different perspectives on energy pricing and regulatory flexibility**, based on their respective national experiences. Kubilius highlighted positive aspects of consumer empowerment and price flexibility, while Loeckx cautioned that grid infrastructure and regulatory divergence remain bottlenecks.

Andrew Lansley asked whether the **Construction Services Act** could mitigate regulatory differences and support SME market access. Podaru responded that although national technical standards are unlikely to change significantly, digital tools and harmonised procurement procedures could help overcome barriers. On the issue of public procurement, Loeckx was asked whether member states follow EU rules. He confirmed they do formally, but pointed to informal national biases, language barriers, and procedural complexities that prevent fair participation.

He also raised two final questions with Rosenqvist: whether posting workers remains a challenge and whether harmonised product standards could enable international competitiveness. She confirmed both, stressing the difficulty of worker mobility in sectors facing labour shortages and the urgent need for common data standards for digital product passports.

The panel concluded with a unified **call for greater cooperation across clusters**, improved alignment of national regulations, and accelerated implementation of digital solutions to strengthen the Single Market. All panellists agreed that simplification, standardisation, and digital tools such as the digital product passport are essential to unlocking cross-border growth opportunities, especially for SMEs. They emphasised that while the European Union holds significant economic potential, real competitiveness can only be achieved if structural barriers are addressed through coordinated policy action and active stakeholder engagement. The Single Market Strategy could serve as a catalyst for making Europe the first choice for innovative and globally competitive companies.

4. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [Supporting the clean energy transition of European industry and businesses](#); deadline 23 September 2025.
2. [Women TechEU initiative](#); deadline 2 September 2025.
3. [Expanding Investment Ecosystems](#); deadline 20 January 2026.
4. [Scaling up deep tech ecosystems](#); deadline 20 January 2026.