

The political conditions for delivering the One Europe One Market roadmap

From Apparent Consensus On Generalities
to Workable Compromises On Specifics

This note is the result of a broader consultation process involving experts and stakeholders with relevant experience in the field, including at the Jacques Delors Institutes, at AREL and at Friends of Europe. The drafting process was coordinated by Tullio Ambrosone and Andrea Lamberti.

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Executive Summary

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The One Europe, One Market Roadmap provides an ambitious framework for translating the European debate on competitiveness and the future of the Single Market into a concrete delivery agenda. Its success, however, will depend not only on the quality of the measures proposed, but on the ability to resolve the political disagreements that emerge when broad objectives are translated into specific decisions.

Consensus remains strong on the general direction: deeper market integration, greater investment, lower energy costs, stronger connectivity, increased economic resilience and greater European industrial and technological capacity. Yet behind this apparent consensus lie competing national interests, economic structures, institutional preferences and different views of the appropriate balance between European integration and national autonomy.

This paper maps the main political fault lines across five strategic areas of the Roadmap: the Savings and Investments Union; the Energy Union and clean transition; the Connectivity Union; the development of a more strategic Single Market; and social and territorial cohesion. Across these areas, several recurring tensions emerge: European versus national authority; resilience versus investment capacity; the distribution of the costs and benefits of integration; openness versus strategic autonomy; and competitiveness versus social and territorial protection.

These disagreements cannot be addressed through technical negotiation alone. Many require explicit political choices and, in some cases, compromises across different policy areas. The package logic of the Roadmap is therefore essential: progress in one dossier may create the political space required for agreement in another.

The purpose of this paper is not to prescribe a single solution to each controversy, but to make the principal political cleavages explicit and clarify the space within which workable compromises must be built. The Foundation's forthcoming European roadshow will build on this mapping by testing these fault lines across different national contexts and identifying possible areas of convergence.

Introduction

The One Europe, One Market Roadmap (the OEOM Roadmap), signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on 24 April 2026, represents an ambitious attempt to convert the extensive debate on the future of the Single Market and European competitiveness into a concrete delivery agenda. By committing the three institutions to reach agreement on the principal measures by the end of 2027, the OEOM Roadmap seeks to close the gap that has too often separated strategic diagnosis from political implementation in the European Union. It is therefore both a political commitment and an operational framework designed to make delivery verifiable and, ultimately, achievable.

The timetable is, however, exceptionally demanding. This was clear from the outset: many of the initiatives covered by the Roadmap concern policy areas in which European integration has remained incomplete for decades, precisely because they involve significant economic interests, national prerogatives and different understandings of the appropriate level of European intervention.

The concern now emerging among stakeholders is that delays may already be accumulating during the initial phase of implementation. At this stage, the perception of slippage can itself become politically consequential.

If the process does not begin with sufficient momentum, negotiations will become increasingly compressed, the credibility of intermediate deadlines will weaken and the final agreements will become more difficult to achieve. An agenda of this scale cannot rely on acceleration during its final months to compensate for insufficient progress at the beginning.

The Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation is contributing to this process through its *One Europe, One Market for All* campaign, a dedicated action plan designed to support the development, adoption and implementation of the Roadmap.

As an initial contribution, the Foundation published [*One Europe, One Market: Europe's Strongest Response to a World in Transformation*](#), with the aim of contributing to the definition of the agenda that ultimately led to the Roadmap. The Foundation intends to remain actively engaged throughout its implementation. If delivered in its full ambition, the Roadmap could produce a generational transformation of European integration. It could extend the logic of the Single Market to financial services, energy and connectivity, reinforce Europe's industrial and technological capacity, and provide the scale required to compete in a profoundly altered global economy. Maintaining political momentum around this project is therefore an essential component of delivery.

At this stage, achieving results requires first and foremost an exercise in political candor. Behind the main obstacles facing the Roadmap lie genuine political cleavages, competing objectives, material interests and policy visions dividing Member States, political families, institutions and stakeholder communities.

Most are well known to those directly involved in the negotiations, yet they are rarely addressed explicitly in public. There appears to be a reluctance to identify them openly. As a result, public discussions frequently create an appearance of consensus because they remain focused on general objectives on which agreement is relatively easy: completing the Single Market, mobilising investment, lowering energy costs, strengthening

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resilience and improving European competitiveness. This apparent consensus often dissolves as soon as discussions move to specifics behind closed doors, where the underlying disagreements inevitably re-emerge and determine negotiating positions.

This dynamic is understandable but ultimately counterproductive. The interests and policy concerns underlying these positions have their own legitimacy and cannot be removed through political goodwill alone. Avoiding them in public does not reduce their influence; it merely displaces substantive negotiation into bilateral exchanges, technical meetings and informal institutional processes. This makes it more difficult to identify possible trade-offs, test alternative solutions and build the broad political ownership required for durable agreements. It also creates the impression that implementation is being obstructed by technical detail, when the actual barriers are often political choices that have not yet been made.

This paper therefore pursues a deliberately straightforward objective: to state clearly the principal political issues currently slowing progress across a broad selection of the Roadmap’s most strategic dossiers.

Its contribution does not lie primarily in identifying disagreements within individual files, many of which are already familiar to the actors directly involved. Rather, it lies in bringing these disagreements together within a single political framework, making it possible to examine them comparatively, identify recurring cleavages and understand how negotiating positions in one area may constrain – or create room for – compromise in another. By presenting a cross-file map of the political obstacles to implementation, the paper seeks to move the debate beyond the fragmented and predominantly sectoral manner in which these issues are usually considered.

This work is therefore not intended to be an exhaustive technical assessment of each legislative proposal. Nor is its purpose to suggest that every position carries equal analytical weight or that every compromise should lie mechanically between two opposing poles. It is to clarify the broader political space within which workable agreements must be found, both within individual dossiers and across the Roadmap as a whole. Policymakers cannot design an acceptable balance unless the interests, concerns and principles requiring reconciliation have first been made explicit and considered in relation to one another.

Open political debate is especially important because implementation of the Roadmap will require compromises that are both substantive and broadly supported, and in many cases will need to be constructed across different policy areas rather than within a single file. Innovative policy solutions may make it possible to reconcile objectives that currently appear incompatible – for example, European consistency with national sensibilities, financial resilience with greater investment capacity, industrial scale with effective competition, or supply-chain security with economically sustainable implementation. Such solutions are more likely to emerge from a structured and candid exchange among the relevant actors than from opaque negotiations conducted almost exclusively through bilateral contacts.

Where disagreements remain implicit, outcomes tend to be determined primarily by institutional leverage, national veto power in some cases and the relative strength of organised interests. Power relations are inevitably part of every negotiation, but they cannot by themselves sustain an agenda as broad, interconnected and ambitious as One Europe, One Market.

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The architecture of the Roadmap was itself designed to facilitate this broader form of compromise. Negotiating a range of measures within a common political framework makes it possible to balance concessions and achievements across different policy areas. A Member State or political group that accepts a difficult compromise in one dossier may secure progress on another priority elsewhere in the package. Distributional effects can similarly be addressed across files rather than within the narrow boundaries of a single legislative proposal.

This possibility of cross-file bargaining is one of the Roadmap’s principal political strengths. It will be lost, however, if each initiative is negotiated in isolation by separate technical communities without a sufficiently strong mechanism for political coordination. If the purpose of the Roadmap is to make compromise possible, its implementation must preserve the package logic on which that purpose depends.

A central difficulty arises from the relationship between the political nature of these cleavages and the institutional settings in which they are usually addressed. Many of the disagreements examined in this paper concern fundamental questions about the current stage of European integration: which functions should be exercised at European level; how solidarity and responsibility should be balanced; how the costs of common policies should be distributed; and which forms of sovereignty Europe requires in an increasingly competitive and conflictual world. The existence of such differences is neither surprising nor inherently problematic in a Union built on unity in diversity.

The difficulty is that the EU’s institutional architecture often channels these political questions into predominantly technical processes.

This may result from the forums in which negotiations take place, the roles and mandates of the officials participating in them, or the highly specialised language through which proposals are assessed. The debate can consequently become confined to legal design, regulatory calibration and implementation, while the underlying political choices remain unresolved. Officials and experts may refine the available options, but they often lack the mandate and room for manoeuvre required to rebalance competing interests, reconsider established red lines or negotiate trade-offs across different policy areas.

A more open public debate can restore the political dimension that these negotiations require. It can enable governments, European institutions, political forces, industry, social partners and experts to explain both the positions they defend and the interests and assumptions underlying them. It can also create the political mandate required for negotiators to move beyond established red lines and explore compromises that would remain unavailable within a narrowly technical discussion.

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It should be understood as a further step in the broader effort by the Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation to support the implementation of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap. Additional research and policy-engagement initiatives will follow, including a roadshow across several European capitals to mobilise political attention and encourage dialogue among national and European stakeholders. These activities will deepen the analysis and help identify possible areas of compromise. Yet this initial mapping remains indispensable. Before

solutions can be developed and political agreements constructed, the disagreements holding back implementation must be stated clearly, understood in their full political significance and brought into an open European debate.

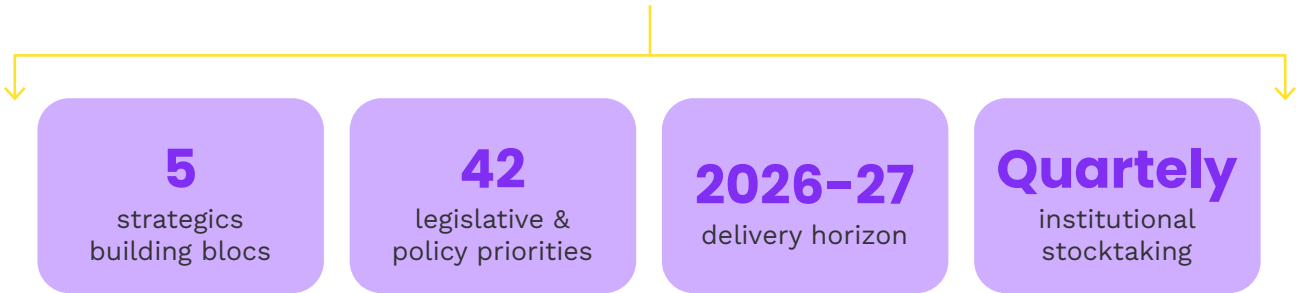


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ONE EUROPE, ONE MARKET ROADMAP
at a glance



The Main Fault Lines Shaping Implementation

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As argued above, the principal obstacles to implementing the Roadmap reflect competing objectives, material interests and different understandings of the direction European integration should take. The purpose of the following chapters is to identify the main areas in which these differences must be reconciled if the Roadmap is to move from political commitment to implementation.

The paper is organised around five policy clusters. The first three concern finance, energy and connectivity, sectors identified by the Letta Report as central to the next stage of Single Market integration and in which national fragmentation continues to impose particularly significant costs. The fourth chapter, “A Strategic Single Market”, brings together a more heterogeneous group of policies that are connecting the Union’s economic security, technological capacity and strategic interests in a more conflictual environment. The final chapter addresses social and territorial cohesion, arguing that the limited attention devoted to these issues in the One Europe, One Market Roadmap constitutes a political issue in itself.

The cleavages examined in these chapters do not follow a single political geography. Some reproduce established divisions among Member States. These include differences between fiscally conservative countries and those advocating greater risk-sharing or common financing, as well as between economies with a strong manufacturing base and those more heavily oriented towards services. Such structural differences affect national exposure to the costs of adjustment and consequently shape preferences concerning regulation, solidarity, industrial support and the pace of integration.

Other divisions have become more prominent as a result of the changing geopolitical environment. Member States increasingly differ in their assessments of external economic dependencies and of the relationships Europe should maintain with powers such as China and Russia. These differences now influence positions on matters ranging from energy security and industrial policy to trade openness, technological sovereignty and high-risk suppliers. Questions previously treated largely as matters of market efficiency are therefore increasingly assessed through the lenses of resilience, security and geopolitical alignment.

A further fault line runs between the need for European scale and the determination of Member States to preserve national authority. More integrated markets frequently require common rules, stronger European institutions, shared financing or the transfer of supervisory and regulatory responsibilities to the EU level. At the same time, national governments remain reluctant to relinquish control over politically sensitive competences, revenue sources and policy instruments.

The relevant disagreements are not, however, confined to relations among governments. Several of the Roadmap’s initiatives bring into the open conflicts among economic and social interests that have not previously been confronted at this level. Industrial producers, financial institutions, telecommunications operators, innovative firms, workers, consumers and regulated professions may bear different costs and derive different benefits from the same measure. The ambition of the Roadmap makes these distributional effects more visible because it extends European integration into areas that have remained largely governed by national rules and institutional arrangements.

Finally, some cleavages are fundamentally political. They concern the appropriate role of public intervention in the economy, the balance between openness and strategic protection, the relationship between market flexibility and social rights, and the future of the European social model. The sections that follow seek to clarify the terms of those choices and the interests that any workable agreement will need to reconcile.

Before turning to that analysis, the table below offers a schematic overview of the principal political nodes, mapping each cluster to the dossiers concerned and the positions in play.

CLUSTER	POLITICAL NODE	MAIN FILES/ DOSSIERS	POSITIONS IN PLAY
SAVINGS & INVESTMENTS UNION	National vs. European supervision	<i>Market Integration and Supervision Package (ESMA powers)</i>	Centralisers stress consistent enforcement and full Single Market scale; defenders of national supervision cite proximity and risk-sensitivity.
	Stability–growth calibration	<i>Report on the competitiveness of the EU banking sector; amendments to the EU banking framework</i>	Resilience gains since the financial crisis are broadly accepted as a base to preserve. Disagreement is on whether rules now over-constrain lending; positions range from “no dilution” to targeted recalibration, short of deregulation.
	Completing the Banking Union	<i>European Deposit Insurance Scheme; crisis-management and deposit-insurance framework; barriers to cross-border banking integration</i>	Some Member States want legacy risks reduced first, fearing permanent transfers; others see fragmentation itself as the risk. Views span strict sequencing to parallel risk-reduction/risk-sharing.
ENERGY UNION	Interconnection cost-sharing & price-convergence pace	<i>European Grids Package; Energy Highways; TEN-E framework</i>	Member States primarily adjust their position depending on whether the asymmetric allocation of interconnector costs is favourable to them or not. Main opposition forces argue about the domestic cost associated to the creation of an interconnection (reinforcing the national network) or the unfavorable price convergence it could lead to.
	ETS review	<i>EU ETS post-2030 review; free-allowance allocation rules; Market Stability Reserve</i>	Supporters of a strong and progressively tightening carbon signal emphasise investment certainty and decarbonisation as well as the need not to penalize first movers; energy-intensive industries stress carbon costs, carbon leakage risks and the limited availability or price of affordable alternatives in what they consider to be a too short of a timeframe.
	Pace, transition assets & financing	<i>2040/2050 climate targets; transitional infrastructure rules; EU-level financing instruments</i>	High-cost, less-electrified and manufacturing- or carbon-intensive economies tend to demand greater flexibility, continued support for transitional assets and stronger public backing for adjustment. Lower-cost, more electrified or transition-ready countries place greater weight on preserving the agreed timetable, avoiding carbon lock-in and directing resources towards clean technologies

CLUSTER	POLITICAL NODE	MAIN FILES/ DOSSIERS	POSITIONS IN PLAY
CONNECTIVITY UNION	Spectrum governance & licence duration	Digital Networks Act	EU-harmonisation advocates seek scale and pan-European investment; defenders of national control cite local needs and coverage. A parallel debate weighs long/ unlimited licences (predictability) against shorter ones (flexibility, entry).
	Copper switch-off timing	Digital Networks Act	Direction is uncontested; the divide is on speed and rigidity — a binding deadline to force migration versus a demand/market-paced transition with targeted safeguards.
	High-risk suppliers phase-out	Cybersecurity Act 2.0	Security-first advocates want a binding, harmonised phase-out; others favour a case-by-case, risk-based approach that preserves functioning assets and limits new vendor concentration.
A STRATEGIC SINGLE MARKET	Market openness vs. strategic autonomy	Industrial Accelerator Act (“Made in EU”, reciprocity); EU public procurement reform; Cloud and AI Development Act	One side warns EU preference raises costs and invites retaliation, favouring diversification and trade partnerships; the other argues unilateral openness is untenable given foreign subsidies.
	Scale & competition in merger control	Revision of the EU Merger Guidelines	One position prioritises effective competition and requires claims concerning scale, resilience and future efficiencies to be specific and verifiable. The other calls for greater weight to be given to global competition, longer time horizons and dynamic effects on investment, innovation and security.
	EU Inc. scope & workers’ rights	EU Inc. / 28th-regime proposal	Venture-capital investors and start-up ecosystems prioritise simplicity, speed and international attractiveness; trade unions seek safeguards against the erosion of workers’ rights; and the notarial and legal professions defend ex ante checks and legal certainty. Other national constituencies seek targeted adjustments protecting specific domestic arrangements.
	Direction vs. autonomy in research policy	European Research Area Act; FP10; next Multiannual Financial Framework	One position wants funding steered toward strategic technologies (AI, semiconductors, biotech); the other defends excellence-based, open, undirected research as itself a strategic asset.

CLUSTER	POLITICAL NODE	MAIN FILES/ DOSSIERS	POSITIONS IN PLAY
SOCIAL & TERRITORIAL COHESION	Position of the social dimension in the Roadmap	<i>Quality Jobs Roadmap; EU Quality Jobs Act</i>	Social-democratic forces and trade unions want the Quality Jobs agenda incorporated into, or given equal priority with, the Roadmap; market-oriented forces and employers favour a separate, lighter framework built through social partner consultation, warning that merging would dilute the Roadmap's competitiveness focus and complicate its delivery timetable.
	Fair labour mobility: facilitation vs. safeguards	<i>Fair Labour Mobility Package; social security coordination rules</i>	Business associations and net-sending Member States prioritise modernising labour mobility rules through digitalisation and better coordination between national administrations, and are wary of new obligations on an established cross-border business model. ETUC and mostly net-receiving Member States seek a stronger enforcement mandate for the European Labour Authority and clearer rules on the posting of third-country nationals, to uphold equal pay for equal work in the same place and prevent social dumping.
	Role of cohesion policy in support of the Roadmap	<i>Post-2027 MFF negotiation (2028–2034); National and Regional Partnership Plans</i>	Cohesion Member States, the Committee of the Regions and regional and local authorities regard cohesion policy as a pro-growth policy that unlocks the untapped economic potential of all territories. Net-contributor Member States see it as a compensatory policy whose primary purpose is to support the weakest territories adversely affected by market integration, and call for tighter targeting. With no cohesion-specific deliverable in the Roadmap, the debate plays out in the MFF negotiation.



Savings and Investments Union

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European or national supervision: consistency versus proximity

The Savings and Investments Union brings together several of the most persistent political obstacles to financial integration in Europe and its principal dossiers form a central component of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap. Support for deeper and more efficient European financial markets is broad, while substantial disagreement remains over the institutional and regulatory conditions required to achieve them.

The principal fault lines concern the appropriate level of supervision, the balance between financial resilience and the capacity to support investment, and the sequencing of national risk reduction and European risk sharing.

The first concerns whether common financial rules can remain effective while supervision is exercised predominantly at national level. This debate increasingly divides larger Member States supporting a stronger role for ESMA from smaller financial centres seeking to preserve national supervisory authority. The second concerns the cumulative effect of the regulatory framework introduced after the financial crisis: while its contribution to financial stability is widely recognised, disagreement persists over whether its present calibration unnecessarily constrains lending, investment and innovation. The third concerns the incomplete Banking Union and, in particular, the absence of a European Deposit Insurance Scheme. Historically embodied by the opposing positions of Germany and Italy, this cleavage reflects a deeper disagreement over whether legacy risks must be addressed before mutualisation can begin or whether risk reduction and risk sharing must proceed together.

One of the central political cleavages concerns the allocation of supervisory powers between national authorities and the European level. In political terms, the divide increasingly separates the EU's larger Member States from its smaller financial centres. France, Italy and Spain favour stronger European supervision, while Germany - traditionally more cautious about centralisation - has recently moved closer to this position. Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta remain among the clearest opponents of transferring significant supervisory powers from national authorities to ESMA.

Supporters of greater centralisation argue that a common rulebook is insufficient if authorisation, interpretation and enforcement remain predominantly national. Differences in supervisory practices can reproduce market fragmentation even where legislation has been harmonised, increasing compliance costs for cross-border operators, creating opportunities for regulatory arbitrage and preventing financial institutions from exploiting the full scale of the Single Market. From this perspective, stronger European supervision would promote consistent enforcement and provide a better overview of increasingly cross-border financial activities and risks.

Those defending national supervision argue instead that domestic authorities possess more detailed knowledge of local institutions, market structures and sources of vulnerability. Their proximity to supervised entities and national stakeholders can support faster intervention and a more risk-sensitive application of common rules. They also warn that excessive centralisation could generate uniform supervisory practices that are poorly adapted to heterogeneous financial systems.

This divide is embodied in the Market Integration and Supervision Package, which would expand ESMA's direct supervision of significant market infrastructures and crypto-asset service providers while strengthening supervisory convergence in other areas.

Balancing financial stability and growth

Following the global financial crisis, the EU made financial stability an overriding priority. Successive reforms strengthened capital and liquidity requirements, supervision, resolution mechanisms and the broader capacity of financial institutions to absorb shocks without recourse to public support. This greater resilience represents a structural achievement that all sides of the debate seek to preserve.

The political disagreement concerns whether the cumulative framework has been calibrated in a way that also enables the financial sector to support investment, innovation, and economic growth.

One position stresses that prudential safeguards are themselves a condition for sustainable competitiveness: weakening them could encourage excessive risk-taking, undermine market confidence and ultimately reduce lending during periods of stress.

The opposing position argues that the interaction of capital requirements, supervisory practices, reporting obligations and overlapping microprudential and macroprudential rules may have produced unintended constraints on financing.

In particular, conservative risk treatment and regulatory complexity may discourage lending and investment in innovative companies, long-term projects and firms seeking to scale up. This side therefore advocates targeted recalibration, greater proportionality and the removal of regulatory duplication, rather than wholesale deregulation.

Completing the Banking Union: risk reduction and risk sharing

A credible Savings and Investments Union cannot combine integrated capital markets with banking safety nets that remain predominantly national. Although the Single Supervisory Mechanism and the Single Resolution Mechanism are operational, the Banking Union still lacks its third pillar: a European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS). Consequently, depositor confidence and the capacity to absorb banking shocks remain partly dependent on the financial and fiscal strength of each Member State, preserving elements of the bank-sovereign nexus and discouraging cross-border integration. The reform of the crisis-management and deposit-insurance framework has improved the handling of bank failures but does not provide common European deposit protection.

The political divide continues to concern the sequencing of risk reduction and risk sharing. Historically, Germany and Italy have most clearly embodied the opposing sides of this debate. Germany has led those Member States that oppose mutualisation until legacy risks, sovereign exposures and differences between national banking and insolvency frameworks have been addressed further, fearing permanent cross-country transfers and weaker incentives for prudent national policies.

Italy has been among the clearest advocates of the opposing view: that risks have already been reduced substantially and that national safeguards have reached the limits of what they can achieve. In this view, continued

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fragmentation itself generates risk by encouraging national ring-fencing, restricting the movement of capital and liquidity within banking groups and obstructing cross-border consolidation. Under this interpretation, risk reduction and risk sharing should proceed together rather than sequentially.

This cleavage should not, however, be understood as static. The renewed political push towards deeper European financial integration, including through the E6 initiative led by France and Germany and bringing together the EU's six largest economies, shows that established national positions can evolve and that new coalitions may emerge. With the broader political objective of delivering substantial progress on the Savings and Investments Union by the end of 2026, the E6 process may also help create the conditions for renewed progress on the objective of completing the Banking Union.



Energy Union and Clean Energy Transition

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Reducing structural differences in energy costs, expanding cross-border infrastructure and providing a credible framework for decarbonisation are essential to Europe's industrial competitiveness and economic security. Support for these objectives is broad, while substantial disagreement remains over how the costs, benefits and risks of integration should be distributed.

The principal fault lines concern electricity interconnections, the future of the EU Emissions Trading System and the overall pace, instruments and financing of the energy transition.

The first concerns the distributional effects of greater electricity interconnection. High-price importing countries such as Italy stand to benefit from access to cheaper electricity, whereas lower-price countries such as France may face upward pressure on domestic prices as exports increase. Differences in electrification and infrastructure requirements further shape national exposure.

The second concerns the balance between preserving the ETS investment signal and protecting industrial competitiveness. Manufacturing and carbon-intensive economies such as Germany, Italy, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia face higher adjustment costs, while services-oriented and more transition-ready countries – including Luxembourg, Malta and the Nordic Member States – generally place greater emphasis on maintaining a strong carbon-price signal.

The third concerns the broader management of the transition, including its timetable, the role of transitional technologies and the respective contributions of European financing, national expenditure and private capital, and largely reproduces the national alignments emerging from the first two debates.

Allocating the costs and benefits of electricity interconnections

A more integrated European electricity market requires substantial investment in cross-border interconnections and the networks supporting them. Greater interconnection allows electricity to flow to where it is most valuable at any given time, improves system balancing and security of supply, reduces renewable-energy curtailment, and enables investment in generation capacity to be directed towards locations where resources such as wind and solar are most productive.

At the European level, these effects should, in the long term, reduce the overall cost of the electricity system. The effects across Member States, however, will be uneven. The main fault line runs between high-price importing countries such as Italy, which generally benefit from access to cheaper electricity, and lower-price countries such as France, where greater exports may ultimately place upward pressure on domestic wholesale prices.

The degree of electrification also affects national exposure: electricity plays a comparatively greater role in the energy systems of Sweden and Finland than in those of Poland and Romania, making the distributional effects of market integration more significant for a larger share of their energy consumption. Moreover, countries hosting infrastructure may bear permitting, environmental and network-reinforcement costs while a significant share of the benefits accrues elsewhere.

The first political cleavage consequently concerns how investment costs should be shared: equally between the countries directly involved, according to the location of the infrastructure, or in proportion to the benefits generated across the European system. The existing EU framework follows a beneficiary-based approach for projects with cross-border effects, but contributions from non-hosting beneficiary countries have remained extremely limited, particularly in electricity. Some Member States resist financing infrastructure whose principal benefits would accrue abroad – or which could increase prices for their own consumers – while others reject having to bear most of the cost of projects delivering wider European benefits.

The second cleavage concerns the pace at which greater interconnection should produce price convergence. Rapid integration would deliver efficiency gains sooner but could expose lower-price countries and energy-intensive industries to abrupt distributional effects. A more gradual approach would allow time for adjustment and compensation, but could delay investment in electrification, renewables integration and the reduction of Europe's aggregate energy costs.

Preserving the ETS investment signal while protecting industrial competitiveness

The ongoing review of the EU Emissions Trading System is taking shape in an increasingly polarised political environment. Supporters of a stronger ETS argue that a credible and progressively tightening carbon price is essential to make low-carbon investment commercially viable, prevent technological lock-in and provide investors with long-term certainty. From this perspective, weakening the system would penalize front-runners while rewarding firms that postpone decarbonisation, which would undermine the EU's ability to meet its climate objectives.

On the other side, energy-intensive industries emphasise that carbon costs are rising while affordable low-carbon technologies, infrastructure and financing are not yet available at sufficient scale. They warn that an excessively rapid tightening could reduce European production

and investment without lowering global emissions, particularly where exposure to international competition and carbon leakage remains high.

At Member State level, this debate broadly divides manufacturing and carbon-intensive economies such as Germany, Italy, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia, which face greater competitiveness and adjustment costs, from countries favouring a stronger carbon-price signal. The latter include services-oriented economies such as Luxembourg and Malta, as well as Nordic countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Finland, whose greater transition readiness – particularly their decarbonised electricity generation – reduces their exposure to a tighter ETS despite the importance of manufacturing in some of their economies.

This divide will shape several interconnected elements of the review: the pace at which the emissions cap is reduced after 2030, which will influence the supply and price of allowances; the volume and allocation of free allowances, particularly for sectors exposed to carbon leakage; the possible use of high-integrity international carbon credits; the operation of the Market Stability Reserve; and the use of ETS revenues. The latter issue is particularly sensitive, as the ETS has generated more than €200 billion in revenues for Member States since 2013, yet less than 10% of this amount has been channelled towards industrial decarbonisation. Furthermore, extending the free allocation regime risks weakening incentives for industry to invest in decarbonisation, particularly given that the associated conditionalities are not expected to take effect until 2031 under the current proposal.

Managing the pace, instruments and financing of the energy transition

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While the direction of travel towards a decarbonised European economy is broadly accepted, the pace of the transition remains highly contested.

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The overarching political cleavage, within which the debates over electricity interconnections and the ETS also unfold, concerns how the energy transition should be managed in terms of timing, intermediate pathways and financing. The national positions that emerge largely reproduce the fault lines described above. While the direction of travel towards a decarbonised European economy is broadly accepted, the pace of the transition remains highly contested. One position argues that the EU's legally binding targets – a 90% reduction in net greenhouse-gas emissions by 2040 compared with 1990 and climate neutrality by 2050 – must remain unchanged to provide regulatory certainty, accelerate investment and avoid postponing necessary adjustments. The opposing position calls for greater flexibility, or potentially longer timelines, where technological availability, infrastructure constraints and economic conditions make the existing trajectory excessively costly for particular sectors or Member States.

A second cleavage concerns how to manage the transition phase between the current energy system and a predominantly decarbonised one. Natural gas is the clearest example, but the issue extends to the wider role of transitional technologies and infrastructure. Some actors argue that temporary reliance on such assets will remain necessary to guarantee system flexibility, affordable energy and security of supply until clean alternatives are available at sufficient scale. Others warn that continued investment – particularly when supported by EU funds – could create carbon lock-in, generate stranded assets and divert scarce resources from grids, storage, electrification and clean technologies. The main political question therefore concerns which transitional investments should remain eligible for public support, for how long and under what conditions.

The third cleavage is how to finance the scale of investment required.

The debate concerns not only the balance between public support and private capital, but also the allocation of public expenditure between the EU and national levels. Greater European financing could support projects with cross-border benefits and prevent differences in national fiscal capacity from fragmenting the transition. Conversely, some Member States favour national responsibility and targeted public de-risking, with private investment providing most of the required capital, rather than creating new common European financing instruments. In this context, the revision of the ETS offers a strategic opportunity to finance part of the investment required for industrial decarbonisation by frontloading future carbon-market revenues. By allowing Member States to draw in advance on expected proceeds from ETS auctions, such a mechanism could help bridge the gap between immediate investment needs and the later availability of carbon revenues.



Connectivity Union



The development of a genuine Connectivity Union is a central component of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap.



The development of a genuine Connectivity Union is a central component of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap. European connectivity markets and regulatory frameworks remain largely national, limiting scale, investment coordination and strategic resilience.

The Roadmap addresses this fragmentation through three politically sensitive dossiers: spectrum governance, the transition from copper to fibre networks and restrictions on high-risk suppliers.

The first cleavage concerns the level at which spectrum should be governed. It cuts across conventional groupings of Member States and reflects the tension between the need for European scale and national governments' determination to retain authority over a strategic public asset. The debate over licence duration also raises a deeper question about how European competition policy should respond to global markets increasingly dominated by large non-European actors.

The second concerns the timing and governance of the copper switch-off. National positions are closely shaped by the investment strategies and business models of leading domestic operators, which determine whether an accelerated and legally binding timetable would protect existing investments or impose additional costs.

The third concerns the scope and pace of restrictions on high-risk suppliers. It reproduces the same industrial cleavage while adding a geopolitical dimension, as Member States' positions also reflect their broader approaches to China and their different assessments of technological dependence, commercial openness and security risk.

How should spectrum be governed

Radio spectrum is a scarce public resource and a fundamental input for mobile connectivity; the rules governing its allocation therefore shape competition, investment and the structure of the telecommunications market. The Digital Networks Act proposes a significant shift towards a more European framework. It introduces common criteria for spectrum assignment, an ex ante Single Market procedure allowing EU-level scrutiny of national award conditions, binding European spectrum roadmaps and an EU-level authorisation system for satellite communications. It

also establishes licences of unlimited duration as the default, subject to periodic reviews and “use it or share it” safeguards; where licences remain time-limited, their duration should generally be at least 40 years.

The first political cleavage concerns whether spectrum management should remain predominantly national or become more harmonised at European level. The relevant fault line cuts across conventional groupings of Member States: it lies between the need for European scale and national governments’ determination to retain authority over a strategic public asset. Supporters of stronger EU coordination argue that differences in award calendars, licence conditions, fees and coverage obligations fragment the market and make it more difficult for operators to develop pan-European investment strategies. Common rules would increase scale, accelerate the deployment of 5G and 6G and reflect the increasingly cross-border nature of connectivity.

Those defending national control argue that spectrum policy must respond to differences in geography, population density, market structure and connectivity needs. National authorities are considered better placed to impose appropriate coverage obligations and prevent rural or remote areas from being neglected by investment strategies designed around European scale. This debate also reflects a more fundamental disagreement over whether spectrum should be treated as a European resource administered nationally or as a national public asset.

The second cleavage concerns licence duration. Behind this apparently technical issue lies a deeper political disagreement over how European competition policy should respond to global markets increasingly dominated by non-European actors operating at vast scale. Supporters of long or unlimited rights argue that greater predictability reduces investment risk, supports network financing and encourages the development of spectrum trading and sharing. Opponents warn that indefinite licences could entrench incumbent operators, restrict market entry and weaken the ability of public authorities to reallocate spectrum as technologies and demand evolve.

The governance and timing of the copper switch-off

The Digital Networks Act establishes a structured phase-out of copper networks in favour of fibre. By the end of 2035, Member States would mandate switch-off in areas where fibre passes at least 95% of premises and affordable retail services of comparable quality are available. After 2035, these conditions would no longer apply, with switch-off in the remaining areas generally to be completed by the end of 2039, except where fibre deployment is not economically viable and no adequate alternative exists.

The transition from legacy copper networks to fibre is not itself politically contested. The cleavage concerns how quickly it should occur and whether the timetable should be imposed by legislation or determined primarily by market conditions.

Supporters of a binding timetable argue that market incentives alone may lead operators to maintain copper networks for too long. Running copper and fibre infrastructures in parallel increases operating and energy costs, fragments investment and weakens the commercial case for full-fibre deployment. A common deadline would provide certainty to operators and investors, accelerate customer migration and prevent strategic delays by actors benefiting from the existing network.



The balance between these positions is closely shaped by national industrial choices.



The scope and pace of restrictions on high-risk suppliers

Opponents argue that the economics of fibre deployment and the level of consumer demand differ substantially across territories. A uniform legal obligation could force operators to decommission functioning assets before replacement networks are commercially sustainable, particularly in rural or sparsely populated areas. It could also disadvantage consumers who cannot access affordable alternatives and operators that still rely on regulated wholesale access to copper networks, potentially weakening retail competition. From this perspective, the transition should follow effective fibre availability and market demand, supported by targeted safeguards rather than a rigid deadline—especially since copper networks are expected to become progressively uneconomic in any case.

The balance between these positions is closely shaped by national industrial choices, with governments tending to favour the approach that best accommodates the investment strategies and business models adopted by their leading domestic operators.

The proposed Cybersecurity Act 2.0 would replace the largely voluntary approach developed through the 5G Toolbox with a binding EU phase-out of high-risk suppliers.

While the objective of reducing strategic and cybersecurity risks is widely supported, there is disagreement over the scope, speed and degree of discretion permitted in implementing these measures.

Supporters of mandatory phase-outs argue that risks associated with foreign state influence, ownership structures or extraterritorial obligations cannot always be addressed through technical safeguards alone. Continued dependence on high-risk suppliers could expose critical European infrastructure to interference, disruption or coercion. From this perspective, only binding and harmonised restrictions can prevent vulnerabilities in one Member State from affecting the wider European system, while also strengthening strategic autonomy and supporting the development of trusted European supply chains.

Opponents argue that automatic phase-outs may require operators to write off functioning assets, duplicate investments and undertake complex network replacements within unrealistic timelines. Depending on the breadth of the restrictions and the speed of implementation, the required replacement programme could be economically unviable and operationally unsustainable. Limited alternative supply and technical capacity could further increase costs, delay network deployment and produce new dependencies on a smaller number of vendors. They therefore favour a case-by-case and risk-based approach that distinguishes between critical and non-critical components, protects investments that do not present material security risks and prioritises diversification and targeted mitigation over complete removal.

National positions are shaped primarily by two factors.

The first reproduces the industrial cleavage identified in the previous section: governments tend to favour the approach that best protects the investment strategies and business models adopted by their leading domestic operators, whose reliance on high-risk suppliers varies considerably.

The second is geopolitical and reflects divergent approaches to China:

Member States that regard technological dependence on Chinese suppliers primarily as a security vulnerability tend to support rapid and binding phase-outs, while those attaching greater importance to commercial openness favour more gradual and risk-based restrictions.



A Strategic Single Market

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The Single Market is increasingly expected to do more than remove internal barriers.

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The Single Market is increasingly expected to do more than remove internal barriers. In an environment shaped by strategic rivalry, foreign subsidies and technological dependencies, it is also being asked to support industrial scale, secure critical capabilities and convert Europe's knowledge base into economic and technological power. This explains why the chapter on “A Strategic Single Market” brings together four otherwise heterogeneous dossiers. Each examines how rules designed to promote openness, competition and market efficiency can also advance economic security, industrial capacity and technological leadership while preserving social protection and scientific freedom.

The first fault line concerns the balance between market openness and strategic autonomy, with positions ranging from strict European preference to case-by-case cooperation with trusted partners and the preservation of an open trading model.

The second concerns whether merger control should give greater weight to industrial scale and global competition, a debate shaped by whether domestic firms are likely to lead or become targets of European consolidation.

The third concerns the scope and design of EU Inc., where venture-capital investors, start-up ecosystems, trade unions, legal professions and national constituencies pursue different and sometimes overlapping objectives.

The fourth concerns the implementation of the fifth freedom proposed by the Letta Report and the balance between directing European research towards strategic priorities and preserving scientific autonomy.

Balancing market openness and strategic autonomy

The European Union has built much of its economic success and international identity on market openness, trade liberalisation and non-discrimination. This model is now being tested by a geopolitical environment characterised by strategic dependencies, extensive foreign subsidies, export restrictions and the increasing use of economic relations as instruments of coercion. The Industrial Accelerator Act reflects the resulting policy shift by introducing “Made in EU”, low-carbon and reciprocity requirements in public procurement and public support schemes for strategic sectors. Similar considerations are expected to shape the broader reform of EU public procurement rules.

The underlying cleavage concerns how far the EU should depart from market-neutral instruments to protect and develop strategic industrial capacity.

One position argues that, as other major economies already deploy subsidies, domestic preferences and other industrial-policy instruments, maintaining unilateral openness would leave European firms competing on structurally unequal terms. Price-based market openness also fails to account for the strategic value of maintaining industrial capacity in Europe. Foreign subsidies, protected markets and state-backed overcapacity can undermine European producers even when they remain competitive under normal market conditions. From this perspective, public procurement and support schemes should be used more actively to create demand for European products, reduce critical dependencies and develop domestic capacity in strategic sectors. France has been the clearest champion of this “Made in EU” approach, which treats public procurement and public support as instruments of European industrial policy.

The opposing position argues that European-preference and local-content requirements would amount to a self-imposed cost on the EU economy. Restricting access to the most competitive global suppliers could raise procurement and production costs, reduce competitive pressure and slow innovation. Such measures could also invite retaliation, complicate compliance with international commitments and weaken the open trading system on which many European industries depend. From this perspective, resilience should be pursued primarily through diversification, trade partnerships and stronger competition rather than through measures favouring domestic production. This position is backed traditionally by the Nordic Member States, whose economies remain closely integrated into global trade and international supply chains.

Between these positions, Germany has increasingly advanced a case-by-case approach, sometimes described as “Made with EU”. This model would permit targeted European preferences while preserving cooperation with trusted third-country partners where reciprocal access and shared economic-security interests can be demonstrated. It represents a significant softening of Germany’s traditional free-trade stance: Berlin increasingly accepts the case for selective industrial protection while seeking to avoid rigid local-content requirements that could exclude close partners or disrupt established supply chains.

Scale and competition in EU merger control

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EU merger control has traditionally focused on preserving effective competition within the Single Market.

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A second tension concerns the revision of the EU Merger Guidelines, which will update a framework developed largely two decades ago. EU merger control has traditionally focused on preserving effective competition within the Single Market, preventing concentrations that could increase prices, reduce consumer choice or weaken incentives to innovate. This approach remains broadly supported, but disagreement has emerged over whether the existing framework gives sufficient weight to scale, investment capacity and competition from global players.

Both sides regard competition policy as an essential part of the Single Market; the cleavage concerns how its objectives should be interpreted in a more geopolitical and technology-intensive economy.

One position argues that a framework centred on static market shares and short-term price effects may prevent European companies from achieving the scale required in sectors characterised by high fixed costs, network effects and intensive research investment. Firms confined to fragmented European markets may remain structurally smaller than competitors from the United States and China, many of which benefit

from larger domestic markets or state support. From this perspective, merger assessments should take greater account of global competitive constraints, longer time horizons and dynamic effects on innovation, investment, resilience and security. The debate over whether the relevant geographic market is European or global should therefore be understood as a question of which competitive pressures are realistically captured by the assessment, rather than as a predetermined political choice.

The opposing position maintains that strong domestic competition is itself the foundation of European competitiveness. Allowing greater concentration in the name of creating “European champions” could protect inefficient incumbents, raise costs for downstream firms and consumers, and reduce the competitive pressure that drives productivity and innovation. From this perspective, scale does not automatically translate into greater investment or international success, while the resulting market power may be difficult to reverse. Claims concerning future efficiencies, resilience or global competition should therefore be accepted only where they are specific, verifiable and likely to benefit European customers.

At the Member State level, this fault line is primarily industrial.

Countries hosting large corporate players – often the larger economies – are more likely to view consolidation as a means of transforming national industrial leaders into still larger European or global competitors. Countries whose enterprises have limited prospects of leading cross-border consolidation may instead see greater risks that their domestic firms will be acquired by larger European groups, leaving key economic decisions and capabilities concentrated elsewhere.

The scope of EU Inc. and the balance between flexibility and workers’ rights

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EU Inc. has become one of the flagship measures of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap.

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EU Inc. has become one of the flagship measures of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap, attracting significant political attention both in favour of and against the proposal. The main tensions can be traced back to two closely connected questions: whether the regime should primarily serve innovative start-ups or be available to all companies, and how it should protect workers’ rights, particularly board-level participation rights established in several Member States.

These questions are directly linked because the broader the scope of the regime, the more difficult it becomes to justify extensive regulatory flexibility.

A regime reserved for innovative start-ups could adopt highly flexible rules, closer to the corporate models favoured by the US venture-capital ecosystem. Because it would apply to a limited number of companies operating within a specific segment of the economy, policymakers could accept greater experimentation and a lighter framework. Such a targeted regime, however, would lose much of its transformative potential. It would address the difficulties faced by a relatively narrow category of firms without creating a genuinely European corporate framework for the wider economy.

Conversely, extending EU Inc. to all companies would maximise its impact, but would also require greater caution: the framework would have to accommodate a much wider range of company sizes, ownership structures and employment relationships, while preventing avoidance and abuse.

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The resulting alignments are fluid and issue-specific, with different coalitions likely to emerge.

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Strategic direction and scientific autonomy in European research policy

This trade-off is particularly visible in relation to workers' rights. Employee participation has repeatedly proved one of the principal obstacles to ambitious European company-law initiatives. A broadly accessible EU Inc. could allow companies to select a registered office in a Member State with less demanding board-level participation rules, potentially weakening rights that would otherwise apply under another national system. At the same time, actors in the most dynamic segments of the digital economy argue that additional governance requirements—even where justified in principle—could make EU Inc. insufficiently flexible and therefore unattractive compared with non-EU alternatives.

The Commission proposal attempts to reconcile these positions by making EU Inc. broadly available while reserving certain simplified procedures for innovative start-ups and retaining national rules on employee participation. This compromise may, however, be challenged from both directions: it may offer insufficient protection against the circumvention of workers' rights while failing to provide innovative companies with the degree of flexibility required to make the new regime genuinely competitive.

This debate produces no stable or cohesive camps. Venture-capital investors and start-up ecosystems favour a model in which simplicity, speed and international attractiveness are the primary objectives. Trade unions prioritise safeguards against any erosion or circumvention of social rules and workers' rights, while the notarial and legal professions seek to preserve ex ante checks, formal controls and legal certainty.

Other national constituencies advocate targeted adjustments designed to protect specific domestic arrangements or address particular national concerns. The resulting alignments are fluid and issue-specific, with different coalitions likely to emerge around the regime's scope, incorporation procedures, employee participation and regulatory safeguards.

The European Research Area Act should be understood as a principal instrument for implementing the “fifth freedom” proposed by the Letta Report. Building on the Single Market's four established freedoms – the free movement of goods, services, capital and people – the fifth freedom seeks to enable the circulation of research, innovation, data, knowledge, skills and education across the EU. Its purpose is to place the drivers of knowledge and innovation at the heart of the Single Market by removing barriers to researcher mobility, knowledge sharing, access to research and technological infrastructures, and the translation of scientific results into commercially viable technologies. The ERA Act therefore represents an initial test of whether this political principle can be converted into an operational European framework.

The strategic importance of this objective is broadly recognised: technological leadership, scientific capacity and human capital increasingly determine both economic competitiveness and security.

The political cleavage concerns how far European research policy should be directed towards the Union's strategic priorities and how much autonomy should remain with researchers and scientific institutions.

This debate extends beyond the ERA Act itself and will also shape the next Multiannual Financial Framework and the design and implementation of the next Framework Programme for research and innovation.

One position argues that European and national research policies should be more closely aligned with the EU's principal strategic objectives. Scarce public resources should be concentrated on areas in which Europe risks losing technological leadership or developing critical dependencies, including artificial intelligence, semiconductors, biotechnology, clean technologies, defence and other dual-use capabilities. Greater strategic direction could also improve coordination between national programmes, connect research more effectively with industrial policy and accelerate the translation of scientific results into commercially viable technologies.

The opposing position warns that attempts to direct research towards predefined political or industrial objectives may prove counterproductive over the medium and long term. Fundamental research produces its greatest breakthroughs precisely because its outcomes cannot be predicted in advance, while excessive thematic steering risks favouring short-term priorities at the expense of the broad scientific base on which future innovation depends. From this perspective, excellence-based funding, academic freedom and openness to international collaboration are strategic assets in their own right. They also reflect the EU's identity as an open research environment and strengthen its ability to attract global talent at a time when Europe has an opportunity to position itself as a leading destination for independent science.



Social and Territorial Cohesion in the New Single Market



Since the Delors era, social and territorial cohesion has been recognised as an essential component of European economic integration.



Since the Delors era, social and territorial cohesion has been recognised as an essential component of European economic integration. The Single Market generates significant aggregate benefits, but these benefits - and the costs of economic adjustment - are not distributed evenly across regions and social groups. This is why measures to guarantee the exercise of the four freedoms should be accompanied by EU regulations and policies to guarantee that market integration does not undermine workers' rights nor result in social dumping and that all territories can participate effectively in an integrated market.

This principle underpinned the broad social policy agenda developed by the first Delors Commission as well as the 1988 reform of cohesion policy accompanying the Objective 1992 programme: guaranteeing the EU's social acquis and reducing territorial disparities was understood as a condition for making deeper market integration economically effective and politically sustainable.

This relationship remains fundamental, although the social and territorial consequences of integration have become more complex.

It is against this background that the limited attention devoted so far to social and territorial cohesion issues in the One Europe, One Market Roadmap becomes a political issue in itself.

There are some targeted measures aimed at modernising the existing framework for social security coordination rules and labour mobility - notably the Fair Labour Mobility Package - but no broader and ambitious attempt to strengthen the social and territorial dimension of the single market.



The Roadmap should therefore embed the «freedom to stay» articulated in the Letta Report, Much More than a Market.



The Roadmap should therefore embed the «freedom to stay» articulated in the Letta Report, Much More than a Market. The concept presents freedom to move and freedom to stay as mutually reinforcing pillars of European integration: citizens should remain free to pursue opportunities elsewhere without being compelled to leave their communities because of inadequate employment prospects, infrastructure or essential services. Applied to the Roadmap, it requires social and territorial cohesion to be treated as an integral condition of Single Market integration, ensuring that people and businesses can prosper wherever they are established.

Across these social and territorial dimensions, the political debate can be organised around three closely connected questions.

The first concerns the institutional weight to be given to the Union's employment and social agenda relative to the Roadmap's competitiveness objectives. The second concerns the direction that the modernisation of labour mobility rules should take. The third concerns the role of cohesion policy in supporting a more integrated and competitive Single Market.

Position of the social dimension in the roadmap

The first question concerns the political and institutional standing that the Union's employment and social agenda should be given relative to the Roadmap's core objectives.

Proponents of a stronger social dimension argue that the OEOM Roadmap devotes little attention to measures aimed at promoting the quality of jobs and preserving social rights and public services.

These objectives are at the core of a parallel roadmap, the «Quality Jobs Roadmap», presented by the Commission in December 2025 - which includes, among other things, a commitment to propose an EU Quality Jobs Act. Those defending a stronger 'social' Single Market consider that the Quality Jobs Roadmap should be given the same political priority as the OEOM Roadmap or that the initiatives listed in the Quality Jobs Roadmap should be formally incorporated into the OEOM Roadmap.

The opposing position, shared by more market-oriented political forces and employer organisations, holds that the Quality Jobs agenda should remain a distinct and lighter instrument, built primarily through social partner consultation rather than legislative commitment. Its proponents warn that merging it into the OEOM Roadmap, or granting it equivalent priority, would dilute the Roadmap's competitiveness focus and complicate the tight delivery timetable to which the three institutions have committed themselves.

The Fair Labour Mobility Package

The second question concerns the substance of the Fair Labour Mobility Package itself and the balance between facilitating cross-border employment and strengthening safeguards against social dumping.

The first group includes business associations but also Member States that are net senders of posted workers, including third-country nationals employed by their firms. These actors stress the need to modernise labour mobility rules with digitalisation and improve the coordination between national administrations to facilitate the movement of workers and are wary of new obligations that could constrain an established cross-border business model.

The opposing coalition, bringing together ETUC and a group of mostly net-receiving Member States, wants the package to strengthen the enforcement mandate of the European Labour Authority. They demand to clarify when the posting of third-country nationals constitutes a genuine service provision rather than a means of circumventing national labour-migration rules, so as to protect the principle of equal pay for equal work in the same place and prevent a race to the bottom on wages and working conditions.

The Commission has so far tried to manage rather than resolve these tensions by keeping the Quality Jobs Roadmap formally outside the OEOM annex while still committing, in the Roadmap's own text, to «complete the annex as necessary, and review the building blocks to encompass the social dimension of the Single Market».

The role of cohesion policy in support of the roadmap

The third question concerns the role cohesion policy should play in supporting the OEOM strategy.

The Roadmap itself contains no cohesion-specific deliverable, so this disagreement is not being negotiated within it: Instead, it is being played out principally in the parallel and still-unsettled negotiation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034), including current proposals to integrate Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy within National and Regional Partnership Plans.

One camp – prevalent among cohesion Member States, the Committee of the Regions and associations of regional and local authorities – views cohesion policy as a pro-growth instrument in its own right, whose function is to unlock the untapped economic potential of all territories rather than merely to compensate those left behind. They argue that persistent regional disparities in productivity, innovation capacity, human capital and infrastructure represent a drag on the Union's overall competitiveness and its capacity to react to global challenges. They are alert about the need to prevent intermediate or previously prosperous territories being caught in stagnation in order to maintain political support for market integration. Proponents of this view accordingly resist any framing of cohesion policy that would confine it to a narrow set of lagging regions, and favour a broad territorial scope aligned with the Union's wider competitiveness objectives.

The opposing camp, more prominent among net-contributor Member States, sees cohesion policy as a fundamentally compensatory instrument whose primary purpose is to help the weakest territories which are more negatively affected by market integration. They consider that boosting the EU's competitiveness requires concentrating Europe's scarce budgetary resources on a limited range of critical and strategic sectors, allowing the EU to compete with other global competitors. From this perspective, extending cohesion instruments to regions that are not genuinely lagging, or reframing them as a general-purpose competitiveness tool, risks diluting scarce EU budgetary resources. Its proponents therefore call for tighter targeting of cohesion funding on the least developed regions and Member States and remain cautious of proposals that blur the boundary between cohesion policy and other sectoral or competitiveness-oriented EU funds.

This debate extends well beyond the OEOM Roadmap. It runs through the ongoing negotiation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework

(2028-2034), including current proposals to integrate Cohesion Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy within National and Regional Partnership Plans, where the same underlying tension between an efficiency-driven and a solidarity-driven conception of cohesion resurfaces in a different institutional form.

How it is resolved will shape not only the future architecture of cohesion policy, but also the broader question of whether the Single Market should be understood primarily as a mechanism for aggregate wealth creation or as a framework that requires built-in redistribution towards its weakest participants.

This is also the rationale underpinning the Foundation's One Europe, One Market for All campaign: deeper market integration must go hand in hand with ensuring that its opportunities and benefits are accessible across territories and social groups.

Conclusion

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Behind the broad consensus on the need for a stronger Single Market lie different national interests, economic structures, institutional preferences and understandings of Europe's role in a changing global environment.

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The adoption of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap established a common direction for the next phase of European integration. Its implementation, however, will depend on political choices that cannot be resolved through technical design alone. Behind the broad consensus on the need for a stronger Single Market lie different national interests, economic structures, institutional preferences and understandings of Europe's role in a changing global environment. These differences will shape both the level of ambition that can be maintained and the form ultimately taken by the Roadmap's principal initiatives.

The central purpose of this paper has been to make these political cleavages more explicit. By identifying the interests and policy visions confronting one another, the analysis seeks to clarify the parameters within which workable compromises will have to be constructed. Political candour is essential to this exercise. Treating disagreements as purely technical risks postponing the choices required for implementation and obscuring the distribution of authority, costs and benefits that those choices entail.

This mapping should itself be understood as a further step of the broader effort by the Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation to support the implementation of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap.

The positions described in the paper will continue to evolve as legislative proposals advance, economic conditions change and the consequences of individual measures become clearer. Further engagement will therefore be required to test the analysis, incorporate perspectives from different political and economic contexts and identify possible areas of convergence.

The next stage of this process will take the form of a European roadshow.

Beginning in September 2026, the Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation will reach a dozen European cities over the course of one year. The roadshow is conceived as a structured process of political engagement around the implementation of the Roadmap.

By taking the debate into different national and economic contexts, it will confront the analysis presented in this paper with the perspectives of policymakers, businesses, social partners, researchers and other

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The roadshow will also seek to maintain political momentum around the Roadmap, broaden ownership of its objectives and prevent its implementation from becoming fragmented across separate legislative and sectoral negotiations.

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relevant stakeholders. This will help distinguish structural political cleavages from concerns arising from specific institutional or sectoral arrangements, while identifying where reciprocal concessions and workable compromises may be possible.

The roadshow will also seek to maintain political momentum around the Roadmap, broaden ownership of its objectives and prevent its implementation from becoming fragmented across separate legislative and sectoral negotiations. Each stage will contribute to refining the analysis and building a clearer understanding of the political conditions required to preserve the Roadmap's overall ambition. The differences described in this paper will not disappear. Europe's task is to make them compatible with a shared direction and to demonstrate once again the political capacity expressed in its motto: to be “United in diversity”.



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