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EU Policy Updates and Forecast

Period: November-December 2025

EBN and EU|BICs in Brussels

EBN activities:

- **[Meeting] EBN Executive Committee met with the Cabinet of Ekatrina Zaharieva, EU Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation, in Brussels on 18 November.**
  Strategic dialogue focusing on advancing a united, place-based innovation infrastructure, championing operational excellence of ESOs, and pushing for ambitious policy reforms to enable the EU Startup & Scale-up Strategy and European Innovation Act.

- **[Position paper] EBN responded to the Committee of the Regions' call for evidence on the EU Startup and Scale-up Strategy.**

- **[Event] EBN Techcamp 2025** [Post]
  An unforgettable journey of innovation, creativity and hands-on learning on autonomous systems and agri-food innovation.

- **[Certification] Li Dak Sum Incubator becomes the first certified EU|BIC in China** [Website]

- **[Member exchange] Building bridges between Olomouc and Navarra: A Knowledge Exchange story** [Website]
  As part of the EU|BIC Knowledge Exchange Programme, EBN facilitated and matchmade an inspiring visit for the staff of EU|BIC ICOK (Innovation Centre of the Olomouc Region), Czechia, to EU|BIC CEIN (Centro Europeo de Empresas e Innovación de Navarra), a leading innovation centre in Navarra, Spain.

European Commission

College of Commissioners/ Chefs de Cabinet

- **[Meeting] 19/11/2025 (Brussels) [Agenda]**
  - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of **European Business Wallets.**
  - Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations (EU) 2024/1689 and (EU) 2018/1139 as regards the simplification of the implementation of **harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Digital Omnibus on AI).**
  - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: **2030 Consumer Agenda and action plan for consumers in the single market: 'A new impulse for consumer protection, competitiveness and sustainable growth'**.

- **[Meeting] 25/11/2025 (Brussels) [Agenda]**
  - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: **2026 European Semester - Autumn Package Delivering on the Competitiveness Compass**: pushing forward with reforms and investments.

DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology (CNECT)

- **Commission proposes Digital Package, including Digital Omnibus [legislation]**
  The European Commission has unveiled a comprehensive digital package to **streamline EU rules on AI, cybersecurity, data governance, and compliance**, enabling businesses, from startups to scale-ups, to redirect resources from administrative burdens toward innovation and growth. Key elements include the Digital Omnibus, which adjusts **AI Act timelines** for better support tools, **extends SME simplifications** to small mid-caps (saving €225 million annually), centralises oversight via the AI Office, and introduces a **single-entry point for cybersecurity reportin**g under NIS2, GDPR, and DORA. Additional measures **modernise GDPR for clearer privacy rules**, reduce cookie banner interruptions with one-click consent, and **consolidate Data Act rules with SME exemptions**, yielding €1.5 billion in savings, while boosting AI access to high-quality datasets.[1]

  Complementing these reforms, the **Data Union Strategy** enhances data access through labs and a legal helpdesk, alongside safeguards for data sovereignty, and the European Business Wallet offers a unified digital identity for secure cross-border document signing, storage, and exchanges with public authorities, potentially unlocking €150 billion in yearly savings. Overall, the package targets €5 billion in administrative cost reductions by 2029, aligning with the Commission's simplification agenda of 25-35% burden cuts.

  Proposals now head to Parliament and Council, with a Digital Fitness Check consultation open until March 2026 to refine the EU digital rulebook.

DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (GROW)

- **Enterprise Europe Network Annual Conference 2025**: Driving innovation, decarbonisation and security for SMEs: a stronger Network in action [Website]

- **Commission presents new Bioeconomy Strategy** to drive green growth, competitiveness and resilience across Europe [Website]

DG REGIO - Regional and Urban Policy (REGIO)

- Executive Vice-Presidents Mînzatu and Fitto in Romania to discuss **the future of Cohesion policy** [Website]

- EVP Fitto's **2025 Annual Progress Report on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement** [Website]
  As stated in EVP Fitto's Mission Letter and in line with the Communication 'A Simpler and Faster Europe', the Annual Progress Report covers the period from 1st January – 31 July 2025 and focuses on progress made in delivering results. It covers three parts, one each on simplification, implementation support, and enforcement, while the annexe outlines concrete ways forward. [2025 Annual Progress Report]

- **Implementation dialogue on EU Funding and Regional Competitiveness** [Website]
  This timely and constructive dialogue involved final beneficiaries with experience in using regional programmes of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP), Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3), and the Interregional Innovation Investment Instrument (I3). The exchange allowed Executive Vice-President Fitto to identify best practices as well as challenges in accessing EU funding deriving from the cohesion policy regulatory framework in the area of regional competitiveness, particularly focusing on the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises.

- **Updated guidance on the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy Performance Framework** [Website]

DG Research and Innovation (RTD)

- **Commission partners with private investors to set up multi-billion Scaleup Europe Fund** [Website]
  The Commission brought together top-tier private investors from across Europe to jointly express their intention to establish the Scaleup Europe Fund – a new, multi-billion-dollar fund to invest in the most promising European companies in strategic deep tech areas.

  By joining forces with these potential founding investors, the Commission moves ahead on the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy aimed at building a dynamic and competitive startup and scaleup ecosystem across Europe.

- **Commission launches 'Resource for AI Science in Europe'** [Website]
  The new virtual RAISE institute is the flagship initiative of the Apply AI Strategy and the European Strategy for AI in Science, designed to pool and coordinate essential resources — computational power, data, talent and funding — to drive transformative scientific breakthroughs. Initially funded with €107 million under Horizon Europe and supported by dedicated access to future AI Gigafactories, RAISE aims to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and technological sovereignty, attract and train global talent, and double annual investments in AI to over €3 billion. The pilot phase has already begun with coordination actions and new initiatives under the European Research Area, and the institute will be developed in stages together with Member States, academia and the private sector, towards the next EU long-term budget (2028–2034).

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Executive Agency (EISMEA)

- **2026 EIC Work Programme adopted: €1.4 billion to support deep tech innovators** [Website]
  The Commission adopted the European Innovation Council work programme for 2026, allocating €1.4 billion to support Europe's most promising deep tech entrepreneurs and researchers. The

programme provides what European innovators need most: simplified access to substantial funding, investment and easier access to customers and partners across Europe and beyond.

The 2026 edition introduces several key improvements and new elements — including a simpler, faster application process for the EIC Accelerator and pilot Advanced Innovation Challenges, inspired by the US Advanced Research Programme Agency (ARPA)'s approach.

- **New scale-up investments under the EIC STEP Scale Up scheme**
  The Commission has announced a new group of companies proposed to receive €171 million in equity investments through the EIC STEP Scale Up call, with final decisions now moving to the EIC Fund pending due diligence. The STEP Scale Up scheme provides investments of €10–30 million per company to leverage private co-investment and enable financing rounds of €50–150 million or more, addressing a critical market gap for scaling breakthrough European deep-tech.

- **2030 Consumer Agenda: an agenda focused on improving consumer rights, competition, and sustainable development** [Website]
  The European Commission has launched the 2030 Consumer Agenda, a new plan that will guide EU consumer policy for the next five years. With 450 million people shopping in the single market – and their spending making up over half of the EU's GDP – consumers are a major force in Europe's economy. The agenda aims to boost consumer trust, make the rules clearer, strengthen enforcement, and cut unnecessary paperwork for businesses. Altogether, these actions are meant to improve consumer protection while supporting fairness, competitiveness, and sustainable growth across the EU.

European Parliament

EP Plenary Sessions

- **[Meeting] Access to finance for SMEs and scale-ups. Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, Wednesday, 26 November 2025, Strasbourg [REPORT on access to finance for SMEs and scale-ups]**

  Creating favourable market conditions for European companies to innovate, start up, create, grow and Creating favourable market conditions for European companies to innovate, launch, and scale within Europe remains essential to unlocking the full potential of the Single Market and strengthening the competitiveness of the EU economy.

  Key insights:
  - Reducing bureaucratic and regulatory burdens
  - Unlocking private capital and household savings
  - Bridging the funding gap for scale-ups
  - Strengthening a competitive ecosystem across the EU

Committee of the Regions

- **'Cohesion Policy at the crossroads' - High-level dialogue on the future of Cohesion Policy [blog]**
  This high-level event focuses on the future of Cohesion policy involving representatives from Member States, the European Parliament, and the European Committee of the Regions.

- **Cohesion Policy 'What's going on?' (via #CohesionAlliance)**

  EU Budget Negotiations Intensify as Regional Leaders Demand Greater Voice
  The #CohesionAlliance's October protest at the European Parliament has sparked significant political momentum, with major parliamentary groups (EPP, S&D, Renew Europe, and Greens/EFA) writing to Commission President von der Leyen demanding substantial changes to the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal. This pressure led to unprecedented concessions from von der Leyen, including proposals to give regions more decision-making power and strengthen Parliament's budget allocation role.

  Key Milestones Ahead for 2028-34 Budget Framework
  The European Parliament's draft interim report will be presented on December 11, with committee adoption expected in April and plenary vote in May. Meanwhile, the Committee of the Regions is preparing 20 comprehensive opinions covering all territorial aspects of the MFF, with final adoption scheduled for March 2026. The year concludes with the crucial European Council meeting on December 18-19, where EU leaders will hold their first formal debate on the next budget framework, with Denmark expected to present an initial compromise text.

European Associations

Eurocities

- **Cities step up to rebuild trust in the digital age** [Website]
  European cities are tackling online disinformation by redesigning public services around trust, transparency, and inclusion, proving that digitalisation can strengthen democracy.

- **Cities back bold new Culture Compass for Europe** [Website]
  The new Culture Compass for Europe is a strong political commitment to put culture at the heart of EU policies. To make this vision a reality, city leaders urge the EU to back it with robust programmes and funding.

Bruegel

- **The European Parliament gets it wrong on the European Commission's 2028-2034 budget** [Website]
  Rather than protecting outdated programmes, MEPs should push for a larger EU budget and safeguards to match strategic goals

- **2025 "Triffin Lecture": Are global markets heading towards financial fragmentation?** [Website]

- **The real obstacle to EU capital market integration is unreformed pension systems** [Website]

- **The European Commission's Digital Omnibus could increase risks, not growth** [Website]

  Changes floated to the EU AI and data protection framework jeopardise fundamental protection rights without enhancing European digital competitiveness

- **Efficiency and distribution in the European Union's digital deregulation push** [Website]

  A new framework shows how EU digital reforms must balance efficiency with transparent recognition of distributive consequences

- **Europe's clean, just and competitive transition: a conversation with Teresa Ribera** [Website]

  Time and location: 4 December 2025 11:00-12:15

- **Shifting priorities, slow progress: an analysis of EU tax recommendations** [Website]

Eurada

- **EURADA's Role in Accelerating Europe's Circular Transition: Key Takeaways from the Stakeholder Event organised by the CCRI Knowledge Hub (CCRI KH)** [Website]

  On 20 November 2025, EURADA took part in the Stakeholder Event organised by the Circular Cities and Regions (CCRI) Knowledge Hub in Nivelles, Belgium.

  The event, led by consortium partner EBN, gathered representatives from the European Commission, regional actors and international networks to reflect on how territories can advance the transition to a Circular Economy.

- **Building Smarter Regions: EURADA Explores How AI Can Drive Local & Regional Growth** [Website]

  The discussion highlighted how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping economic and social systems, and how regional development agencies can position themselves to make the most of this technological shift.

- **Smart Specialisation in a Changing Europe: From Cohesion Tool to Competitiveness Driver** [Website]

  The Draghi report, together with broader debates on competitiveness and security, has placed the coordination of European, national and regional efforts at the centre of the EU's future strategic agenda. The next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) aims to organise this

coordination through two new instruments: the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPs) and a European Competitiveness Fund, both designed to integrate industrial and innovation policies more effectively.