

# Newsletter

March 2022

## The war in Ukraine is changing the world and Europe's security architecture



**On 24 February, Russian President, Vladimir Putin, launched an attack on Ukraine on the pretext that the country was a threat to Russia and he needed to guarantee security for the Russian people. The truth is that he had a series of other goals, whose consequences were perhaps less clear to the Kremlin.**

Behind the veiled propaganda trying to justify the destruction of Ukraine under the slogan of "denazification", Putin's main motive was to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and pull it back into the Russian sphere of influence. This idea that sovereign countries are not free to choose their political, economic and military alliances is

also a signal to other former Soviet Republics such as Georgia and Moldova, as well as EU Member States currently considering NATO accession, such as Finland and Sweden.

The best-case scenario for the Kremlin in Putin's game, played at the expense of Ukraine and its people, would be the annexation of parts of the country, especially Donbass and the coast of the Black Sea, in order to gain influence in those waters and secure the illegal annexation of Crimea to Russia effected in 2014. This would provide territorial continuity between Russia and its forces deployed in Transnistria, and in turn could be a precedent for taking over Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia. Meanwhile, all three countries concerned - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia - have urgently applied for EU membership.

The destabilisation of these nations is likely to have a cascade effect on EU and NATO member states such as Poland, Romania and the Baltic countries, which in turn would threaten the whole European Union and the Western world in general.

A scenario where Russia expands at the expense of its neighbours would put an end to the security architecture that Europe has been used to since 1991. However, Europe has reacted, showing that it has the ability to defend itself.

It was high time. For years, we have been watching and not acting quickly enough. The EU has been too slow in discussing European defence and a common external policy. The lack of solidarity between Member States and narrow national interests have blocked our decisions in these fields, thus depriving the EU of a common international position capable of protecting European interests.

Finally, and under the pressure of events, the Union has adopted a package of harsh sanctions, which are already affecting Russia's ability to finance its warfare and the overall Russian economy. The fast reaction of the EU has prompted other countries to align and adopt equally harsh measures, including the traditionally neutral Switzerland.

However, this is not the first time the EU has used sanctions. What really marks a historical change is the decision to arm and support Ukraine. Despite its commitment to multilateralism and peaceful resolution of conflicts, the EU has been forced to adopt this decision by Russia's unilateral aggression against a neighbouring country, in spite of international rules. This new courage and readiness to defend our values could start the long-expected concretisation of concepts such as "open strategic autonomy", "European sovereignty" and a "European Defence Union", which have been widely discussed in recent years.

While this new EU self-awareness is good news, it will also come at a cost.

We should expect an increase in cyberattacks, instrumentalisation of migrants, misinformation and other hybrid threats, some of which are particularly dangerous for the EU countries' stability and democracy.

Moreover, with the new refugee crisis bringing two million Ukrainians to seek safe haven in the European Union, we need to find cooperation mechanisms that will finally work and allow us to face this and future crises, at whatever border of the Union they may happen.

The unimaginable sufferings of the Ukrainian people, as well as of the families of Russian soldiers who are already dying, remind us of the huge costs of wars for civilians and societies.

European citizens will not be spared by the impact of sanctions on the Russian Federation. The repercussions on our economy will hit the most vulnerable in the first place, particularly those citizens who will not be able to afford energy price spikes, but also entire sectors, like tourism.

Considering that Russia is our main supplier of crude oil (around 25% of our imports) and natural gas (45%), with some Member States depending on it for 80% or more of their supply, the impact will be significant. Putin uses our energy dependency as a weapon against us. Even before the invasion, Moscow was deliberately manipulating the market, causing energy prices to rise, with the goal of eroding consensus on the Green Deal.

We cannot afford this disruption: we need the energy and ecological transition to reduce climate change and create the competitive and green industry we need for the years to come. Therefore, we can only welcome the Commission's REPowerEU plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030. According to the Commission, if we diversify our gas supplies, use more biomethane and renewable hydrogen, and reduce faster the use of fossil fuels by boosting energy efficiency, increasing renewables and addressing infrastructure bottlenecks, we can reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two-thirds before the end of the year.

We can achieve all this through common action and cohesion: a more united Europe is a stronger Europe, and the European Economic and Social Committee should never stop reminding the European decision-makers of the need for more solidarity and more resilience in our Union.

On 24 February, at the EESC's plenary session, a spontaneous and heartfelt debate took place and all members expressed their solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Immediately after, the EESC President, Christa Schweng, sent a letter to all Economic and Social Councils of the Member States, calling for common action and coordination.

At its meeting on 9 March, the External Relations Section (REX) put forward proposals to be further discussed with the other institutions in order to respond to the crisis in a way that will allow Europe and Europeans to defend their values, help partners in our immediate neighbourhood and guarantee the wellbeing of citizens. On the same day, the Bureau of the REX section decided to stop any communication with the Russian Civic Chamber, which is openly supporting the aggression against Ukraine using the same arguments and even the same language as the Kremlin, and to reinforce our dialogue with independent Russians CSOs.

The time has come to act to defend the sovereignty of a like-minded country, to create a new security architecture in Europe, and to establish solid, lasting peace on our continent.



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# The Green deal is dead, long live the Green deal!

The unfolding war in Ukraine has shocked the world. As we stand, Russia's Vladimir Putin will never be forgiven for starting the unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, which has taken innocent lives and crushed people's hope for peace. And he will never be forgiven for starting a geopolitical conflict at a time when the world needs to address other challenges, not least climate change and post-pandemic recovery.

These will now be reluctantly put on the backburner, as we switch our attention to defence and security. While no one knows what the days ahead hold, there will no doubt be a new focus: energy security and supply.

EU dependency on energy imports stands today at 60%, the highest in the last 30 years. In 2021, the EU imported 45% of its gas from Russia. Our dependency means that we still pay Russia hundreds of millions of euros every day for natural gas and oil imports – all together €1 billion daily, despite sanctions.

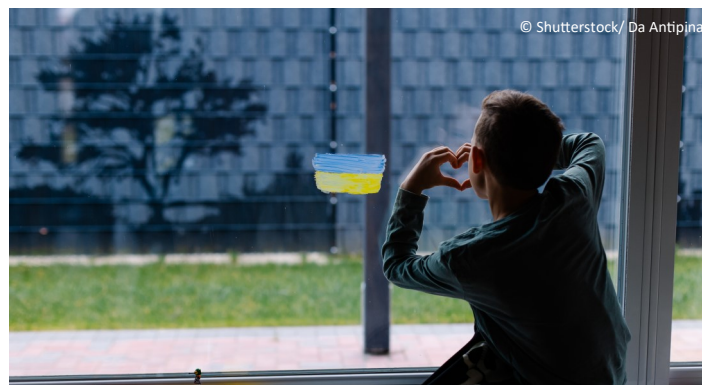
EU sanctions don't explicitly target Russia's energy supply to Europe, but they make it harder for Russian vessels to supply energy products, as access to ports in Europe is restricted. Belarus has threatened to stop flows in the Yamal-Europe pipeline, while Russia has said it will keep exporting natural gas. This is reflected in the prices.

Against this backdrop, we know that our own energy markets remain very tight. We have to look for new suppliers and new solutions. We have to effectively diversify supplies from our current main supplier, and fill our gas storage capacities before the next winter begins.

Turning to the gas market, LNG would need to play a key role to replace the missing pipeline gas. The EU is therefore turning its head towards partners like the US, Qatar, Norway and Algeria. While this may fill a gap in the short-term, experts say there is not enough LNG to meet all of Europe's energy needs. Not all EU Member States have LNG terminals, and thus we see the need to speed up their deployment, while also working on solidarity.

To address this challenge, Europe is pushed to reduce its consumption of fossil fuels and to diversify its supplies as much as possible. This action must be accompanied by a quick rollout of renewables, e.g. wind, hydro, solar, biofuels and others.

However, all EU Member States have different technical, natural and geomorphological conditions. Therefore, the Commission should allow Member States the freedom to choose the technology best suited to their situation. We should also maximise electricity generation from bioenergy and invest in waste-to-energy plants. We also need to build a circular economy that will help change the resource supply.



More innovation is required to roll out new solutions. The EU's public investment in R&D&I in clean technologies is still very low (at 2010 levels) and must be rapidly increased to ensure the swift rollout of renewables and low-carbon gases. Capacities for storing electricity must also be increased. In any case, the EU must establish a regulatory framework that allows businesses from all sectors and of all sizes to innovate and create products and services without endangering technology neutrality.

In the meantime, it is crystal clear that we will go back to nuclear and temporarily even coal. The European economy is concerned by the war and we have to ensure that all means are at our disposal.

We also have to diversify our suppliers for raw materials as much as possible. Concentration creates dependence. But even in the case of coal or nuclear energy, we are facing raw materials imports. Russia is the largest source of uranium imports to the EU that are needed for nuclear power plants.

Beyond the risk of a shock to supply security, we must also address the risk of a price shock. The Commission proposed a response entitled REPower EU at the beginning of March.

The crisis presents a historic opportunity to address our current vulnerabilities to the benefit of our economic and national security. The next step will need to be consistent with our climate goals. We have no choice.

The Green Deal, which aims for a climate-neutral EU by 2050, is not dead, but we need to correct some of its parameters and make it more realistic while allowing for flexibility in order to reach our overarching decarbonisation goals, and give people more opportunities to play a role in the sustainable transition, while simultaneously asking them to reduce their appetite for energy.

*This article was first published in Euractiv. Read the full article on Euractiv: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/opinion/the-green-deal-is-dead-long-live-the-green-deal/>*



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# Reconciling strategic autonomy with sustainability in Europe's industrial policy

**We are living in a period of fundamental changes, disruptions and even threats to our way of life – be it climate change, pandemics or now – war.**

We didn't need and we didn't choose these dangers, and most certainly we did not want and do in no way support this aggression by Russia against Ukraine. The agreed sanctions will have implications for industry in Europe, be it in the form of energy prices or on the availability of resources.

Up to now, the debate has focused on the Green Deal, the right investments in the sustainable and digital transitions of our economies, the re-shaping of supply chains, the creation of industrial alliances or on bolstering Europe's competitiveness through investments in people, skills and R&D. Granted, weaning ourselves off fossil fuels, looking for alternative, ideally domestic, energy sources was already at the top of the priority list, not least due to very high fossil fuel and energy prices of recent months.

Now, we find ourselves in a different reality, however. Investments that were meant to help finance the shift towards renewable energies or towards cross-border infrastructure projects might be at risk of being pushed down the list, behind investments in defence and security. Government debt, already at a height, is set to potentially increase even further. A return to the rules of the EU's Stability and Growth Pact seems unlikely to happen as planned, as countries are debating budget expansions for defence spending.

In this new reality, Europe's dependency on third country fossil energy sources, already highlighted in the Council conclusions of 16 November 2020, manifests itself as a very tangible threat, especially to its energy intensive ecosystem. Moving swiftly and urgently now to more renewable energy sources, investing in and providing sufficient energy storage capacities, also and perhaps predominantly, in the form of hydrogen, is necessary for the EU. At the same time, policy-makers should ease the energy-related cost burden on citizens and companies alike, by reducing taxes and levies.

This new crisis for Europe does not mean that its previous challenges have disappeared. The need to improve the competitiveness of its companies, the skills of its workers and the resilience of its economies remains. The avenues were identified in the EU's industrial strategy, i.e. investments in education, re-skilling and up-skilling of workers, in R&D and in modern infrastructure, and remain correct and necessary. The "just in time" production system, a system of complex global supply chains that characterised the world economy of the past decades seems to be



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coming to a head. Increasing production capacities in Europe, attracting investment, and providing companies with a framework for growth as opposed to a framework for regulatory sclerosis, should be the guiding principle for European decision-makers. The Single Market remains our biggest asset but only if it truly becomes one and is not hampered by narrow national interests.

There is a global competition for investments and for talent and the EU has to take it seriously. Our task is to identify and provide the best framework conditions for industry to be set up and thrive in Europe. Europe's economy has been thriving for decades and centuries because of its many entrepreneurial spirits, also in the shape of SMEs – they are the backbone, drivers of innovation and the bulk of employers, and have to be provided with a framework for growth. Currently though, the trend is to burden them with even more paperwork and restrictive regulations. The task of an entrepreneur is not to fill in forms, and it should not be a political goal to make it so.

It is the task of governments to address the issue of unfair competition and market distortions, in Europe and abroad. If the European Commission wants to ensure that companies can successfully conduct business in Africa or any other third country, it needs to ensure that the required framework conditions, regarding international labour, environmental or good governance standards are respected. This task cannot be left to companies. Europe's governments should pull together, now more than ever, to help the EU's economic actors make use of their strengths and potentials.



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## Guest commentary by Confederation of Swedish Enterprise

# THE 'WOMEN ON BOARDS' DIRECTIVE PROPOSAL FALLS SHORT OF DELIVERING ON ITS INTENDED PURPOSE

While the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise supports the general aim of the "Women on Boards" directive proposal - to improve gender balance in company boards - we do not agree with the means proposed to achieve this. The main reason is that quota rules for company boards imposed at EU level would represent excessive interference with property rights laid down in national company law. It would deny the owners of the company (the shareholders) the right to freely elect board members, which in turn raises serious concerns over company law. It is an integrated part of the ownership rights to freely choose the people who are to manage the owners' collectively owned asset. Furthermore, the proposal fails to comply with the principles of subsidiarity and of proportionality. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise shares the view of the Council's Legal Service that the legal basis referred to in the proposal does not provide the EU institutions with the power to set out rules for the appointment of non-executive members of company boards.

### Why the 'Women on Boards' proposal is problematic from a legal point of view

First, the proposal is not based on company law and how companies are organised; instead, it more closely resembles the recruitment procedures for employees. However, for appointments to board membership, the procedure is completely different. Board members are elected by the owners of the company (the shareholders) at the company's Annual General Meeting (the shareholders' meeting). The overarching rule is that the election of board members at the shareholders' meeting is 'open'; in Sweden, any shareholder has the right to propose a candidate for the board at the shareholders' meeting.

The Women on Boards proposal requires the company - at the request of a non-appointed candidate - to inform her or him of i.a. how the qualification criteria for the board position have been applied. In Sweden, meanwhile, the company has no involvement whatsoever in the election of board members. As a result, the company does not have access to this information and thus cannot disclose it. It seems impractical to oblige the numerous shareholders of larger listed Swedish companies to disclose why they did not vote for a particular candidate.

Furthermore, according to the proposal, employee representatives are to be included when determining whether a company is in compliance with the 40 percent objective. However, shareholders have no control over the nomination and election of employee representatives - this is solely the employees' prerogative. This absence of coordination between the two elements would inevitably create significant complications when seeking to ensure that the company is in compliance with the 40 percent objective. It also leads to that the gender distribution among employee representatives would determine which candidates the shareholders can elect.



### Why the 'Women on Boards' proposal violates the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality

The scope of the Directive clearly goes beyond that which is required to achieve its purpose. The obligation for companies to undertake a comparative analysis applying certain criteria should cover all circumstances that ought to be taken into consideration by the shareholders when determining the composition of the board, e.g. the potential members' competence and relevant experience. However, from a company law perspective, there is no justification for implementing such a widely applicable and far-reaching regulatory measure at an EU level. Neither does the Commission's own impact assessment address this key aspect of the proposal. In addition, adoption of the proposal would undermine and disregard successful measures already taken at national level.

### Why the 'Women on Boards' proposal is not fit for purpose

Board members are trustees, not employees, of the company. Their assignment is built on trust and is the distilled essence of the relationship between owners and board. It is a delicate task to have the weight or relevance of perceived trust assessed by a public authority.

For the reasons set out above, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise firmly believes that the objective of the proposal can be better achieved with measures other than board quotas determined at EU level. We advocate for the use of self-regulatory measures, for example corporate governance codes. Diversity, and a better gender balance in boards, is important - but this should not be achieved through statutory quotas, nor through EU rules.

Read the full article: [https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/english/the-women-on-boards-directive-proposal-falls-short-of-delivering\\_1182090.html](https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/english/the-women-on-boards-directive-proposal-falls-short-of-delivering_1182090.html)

## Debate on

# REVIEWING THE EU STABILITY AND GROWTH PACT

The reviewed Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) will need to manage the difficult balancing act between stabilising a pandemic-ridden European economy and facilitating the investments needed to ensure a strong and competitive future for Europe.

In 2020, when the pandemic struck the global and European economies, governments were forced to intervene massively with measures to support businesses and workers and, as a result, hugely increased their levels of debt. Now, almost two years after the start of the COVID-19 crisis and the SGP consequently being put on hold, the European Commission recently re-launched its review of EU economic governance, which makes questions on the reform of the SGP more valid than ever. To discuss how the SGP's effectiveness can be enhanced, on 25 February, the EESC Employers' Group met with two leading economists.

**Dr Fabian Zuleeg, Chief Executive and Chief Economist, European Policy Centre:**

***"The SGP cannot be implemented without reviewing it first."***

Dr Zuleeg first highlighted that the world is now very different to when the SGP was established. Huge investments are needed in Europe, not only to overcome the successive and ongoing crises that have challenged the fundamental values of the EU, but also to successfully tackle the green and digital transitions – and the context has again changed fundamentally with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

To guarantee that these indispensable investments are made available, an EU-level approach is needed. Investments need to be coordinated at the EU level, but acceptance needs to be achieved at the national level. Dr Zuleeg stated that leaders need to build consensus in Brussels and then explain to their countries what Europe wants to do.

This does not mean, however, that a one-size-fits-all approach can work. Economies have changed considerably since the Maastricht Treaty was signed. Although it is unlikely that the Treaty will be reopened, as this would require unanimity, the development of economies over recent decades would still be a good argument to push for a more independent and country-specific analysis, emphasised Dr Zuleeg.

In Dr Zuleeg's opinion, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that a targeted response was possible because some outdated rules – fixed deficits and debt thresholds – were dismissed. Indeed, in a context of crisis and increasing debt (in the EU, the government debt-to-GDP ratio increased from 77.2% at the end of 2019 to 90.1% at the end of 2020) talking about a 60% target, for instance, is an illusion.

Lastly, Dr Zuleeg highlighted how the bitter but perennial debate around responsibility and stability versus solidarity was no longer relevant, as the EU probably needed tailor-made instruments that



would provide both, in order to address real-world problems, such as strategic autonomy.

**François Ecalles, President of FIPECO (public finance information association):**

***"A consensus needs to be found between what is economically optimal and what is politically feasible."***

Mr Ecalles focused on the fundamental question of the 60% rule and put forward four options:

1. Debt sustainability would depend on the specific environment of a country at a given moment in time in this scenario. Debt objectives should be adapted to this by means of a technical analysis.
2. Raising the 60% target.
3. Redefining GDP public debt, for example, by removing investment spending from the debt account.
4. More flexible rules: this would mean that once debt surpasses 60% of GDP in a specific country, the SGP would require it to decrease at a sufficiently and regular pace to be monitored.

As the first three options would be politically unfeasible or technically difficult, Mr Ecalles sees the fourth option, to make rules more flexible, as the most promising one.

The possible adaptation of the 60% objective also has to be seen in the light of Europe's North-South divide. Mr Ecalles explained that while the 60% objective might be achievable for northern countries, for the EU's southern members, some of which have even surpassed the 100% debt-to-GDP ratio, the 60% goal is already a distant goal. So, while for northern countries rules must not be changed in order to avoid economic instability and a widespread increase in debt for the EU, countries in the south will not have the same ability to make the necessary investments for environmental and digital transition if the rules are not made more flexible.

In addition to the SGP, Europe cannot overlook what is needed to complete the Economic and Monetary Union, banking union and capital markets union, in order to enhance stability and predictability.

The Employers' Group is working on a position paper that will set out its views for a reviewed SGP that is fit for purpose.



# Extraordinary Employers' Group meeting

## WHAT COMPETITIVENESS WILL LOOK LIKE IN THE NEW EUROPEAN GROWTH MODEL

Emmanuel Macron launched the French presidency of the Council of the EU by proposing the idea of a new European growth model. This new model should make it possible to create employment, reconcile economic development and climate ambition, respond to digital challenges and rely on a redesigned European financial framework.

But how can we achieve a Europe that can reconcile the paradox between growth and prosperity on the one hand and a sustainable future for our planet on the other? How can we guarantee the competitiveness of our companies in this just transition?

To answer these questions, the EESC Employers' Group met with high-level speakers from business, academia and other EU institutions on 15 March.

In his introductory remarks, Stefano Mallia pointed out that when the event was planned, it was envisaged in a different context. Priorities had shifted since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, with security, energy and migration now top of the agenda. This could also be seen at the European Council summit in Versailles, which was originally scheduled to discuss the new European growth model, but re-focused its agenda to adopt a declaration on the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

However, European prosperity is the best demonstration that our values are not only right, but also make our society healthy and resilient, which made the discussion even more timely.

### Panel 1: Internal dimension of EU competitiveness: unlocking the full potential of the Single Market

Europe's competitiveness starts at home. To give its companies, and especially SMEs, the chance to thrive, it has to work towards removing all barriers that limit the power of its Single Market. Europe has to offer a competitive business framework that attracts skills and investment, allows for innovation and protects its SMEs.

There is no doubt that for Europe to stay competitive it needs to successfully manage the Twin Transitions – and a key factor here



### What competitiveness will look like in the new European growth model

15/03/2022 | 9:00-13:00 | Paris, France

will be investment. As keynote speaker Sandrine Gaudin, the French government's Secretary-General for European Affairs, and European Adviser to the French Prime Minister, stated: "We have a colossal need for investment – and we need a budgetary framework that allows us to reduce debt but also to ensure these investments, especially in innovative technologies, and also to close the gap with the United States."

The competitiveness of the Single Market should always be on legislators' minds. Therefore, competitiveness checks should be introduced for every new piece of legislation, as a control measure to avoid proposals that hinder increased competitiveness, more jobs and sustainable growth.

What came out of the discussion is that Europe needs to facilitate "doing business" more, for example by simplifying market entrance and ensuring easier access to finance.

### Panel 2: External dimension of EU competitiveness: Asserting Europe's place in the world

Strategic autonomy has become a key priority in the last few years. The COVID-19 crisis made Europe painfully aware of its dependency on other markets – an unpleasant truth that gained further impetus after the start of Russia's war in Ukraine – and strengthened the realisation that dependencies e.g. on raw materials, energy and agri-food must be minimised and diversified.

However, this is by no means a call to build a European fortress. What it means is that rather than being naïve, Europe has to create an offensive trade structure that limits its dependency on single players as far as possible, while further continuing to nurture relations with its external partners.

In the end, Europe has a lot to offer – we need to realise our strengths and build on them.

As EESC President Christa Schweng stated in the meeting: "Our businesses and especially our SMEs are the locomotive pulling European society towards a more economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable future." The meeting clearly showed that any new European growth model needs to keep the competitiveness of its enterprises as its main focal point.

## Looking ahead with our partner organisations

# SECOND MEETING ON BUSINESS PRIORITIES FOR 2022

### What will 2022 bring for European businesses?

At the beginning of every year the Employers' Group meets with its partner organisations to discuss the priorities of the year ahead. The second meeting took place on 23 February with the participation of Ben Butters (CEO of Eurochambres), Christel Delberghe (Director General of EuroCommerce) and Véronique Willems (Secretary General of SMEUnited).

The world has changed since this meeting which took place the day before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Although priorities for 2022 have shifted since the start of the war, the meeting clearly underlined that the EESC and its partner organisations are working to achieve the same goals: creating a European business ecosystem that provides opportunities for companies to grow, boost jobs and create prosperity for all.

Both the first and second meeting saw the Twin Transitions, the completion of the Single Market, trade and recovery as priorities for 2022. While these priorities were already discussed in the article on the first meeting (find the text here on page 8: [europa.eu/jmcbk](https://europa.eu/jmcbk)), further priorities will be highlighted below:

### Skills

The Twin Transitions fundamentally transform business in all sectors. To make these indispensable transitions happen and to keep up with them, Europe needs to equip its people with the right skills. Only by adapting national education systems and investing in education and training can Europe overcome its skills shortage. In addition, the functioning of the labour market has to be improved through structural reforms.

### SMEs

Think small first. This mindset needs to become second nature to policy-makers when creating any new legislation, especially as SMEs will continue to be challenged by a transforming business context in 2022. The requirements of the Twin Transitions, disruptions in supply chains and rising energy prices, will have a much higher impact on SMEs than on large companies.



To make SMEs a true driver of Europe's Twin Transitions, SMEs need to be supported with the right business environment. This can be achieved i.a. through thorough impact assessments with SME tests and the setting of realistic and achievable goals.

### Investment

Investment must fuel Europe's Twin Transitions. For Europe to stay competitive, it must create a business environment that supports and boosts investment in innovation, technology and low-emission products and services, at an unprecedented scale. This includes a stable regulatory framework that gives companies the confidence to take investment decisions today.

### Energy

Elevated energy prices were already a main concern during the discussions and have since gained importance with the start of Russia's war in Ukraine. High energy costs suffocate business from all sides. For example, retail is squeezed from all angles. In B2B, higher energy costs are passed on from suppliers, with the retailer having to carry the high energy costs themselves while consumers are not able to spend as much money as they used to due to their own rising energy costs. The energy challenge for Europe in 2022 will be huge: to find sustainable, affordable solutions that significantly lower dependency on external actors.

Now more than ever, Europe needs to unite to defend its values, while delivering tangible results in the post-COVID rebuilding of the economy, investing in future growth capacity and increasing EU competitiveness at the international level.

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