

BENELUX DECLARATION

Benelux Business
Roundtable



“We, the undersigned organisations, express our full support for deeper strategic economic integration within the Benelux region and the leading role it can play in driving Europe’s industrial resilience forward. We urgently need political backing for tailor-made solutions that match our ambition and operational readiness.”

The Benelux as a trailblazer of Industrial Competitiveness and Integration

The Benelux countries stand at a defining moment. After 80 years of peace and prosperity, the Benelux is once more confronted with fundamental geopolitical changes. Visionary leadership is required once again to deepen regional integration and unlock the tremendous potential of the region for its benefit and for Europe.

Benelux cannot afford hesitation. Bold action, rooted in cooperation and strategic integration, is the only way to continue to develop our unique strengths in a rapidly changing competitive environment. The call for continental coordination is unmistakable. The Benelux must now seize this moment—accelerating integration and standing as a steadfast pillar of Europe’s future.

History of the Benelux

On 5 September 1944, as Europe faced profound geopolitical change, the political leaders of the three countries, pushed by Belgian Minister Camille Gutt and Dutch Minister Johannes van den Broek took the visionary step to establish a Customs Union to drive post-war economic collaboration and reconstruction. This served as a trailblazer for further European integration such as the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and the European Union.

This led to the 1958 Benelux Treaty, which enabled free movement. To maintain its leadership, the three countries secured Article 350 of the EU Treaty (TFEU), allowing for Benelux cooperation beyond EU law where needed.

In 2008, the new Benelux Treaty was signed, expanding to themes such as internal market and sustainability. This success of the Benelux is built on trust, practical cooperation, and a shared interest that deeper integration was not idealistic, but necessary.

The real barrier

Our industries face growing uncertainty and unnecessary hurdles: fragmented regulations, slow permitting and inconsistent policies. Without alignment, we risk deindustrialisation, not decarbonisation – and with it, our economic security and competitiveness. Coordination will have a significant contribution to deal with these challenges.

A strategic roadmap for Benelux leadership

The business case for the Benelux is undeniably clear. The Benelux, in close collaboration with North Rhine Westphalia, must serve as Europe’s industrial testbed, maintain the competitiveness of its industrial base and significantly contribute to the EU’s ‘net zero’ ambition. Therefore, we call on national leaders and the European Commission to take decisive action on the following critical priorities:

Fast-track cross-border infrastructure.

Implement accelerated permitting processes for vital cross-border infrastructure, including hydrogen, CO₂, electricity, and circular economy projects. The Benelux must be recognised as a model for speed, legal alignment, and cross border coherence across Europe. This includes reducing bureaucracy, aligning permitting rules, and ensuring cross-border infrastructure is no longer unnecessarily delayed by fragmented national policies.

Harmonise regulatory frameworks for decarbonisation.

Standardise regulatory frameworks for hydrogen and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS). This critical step will reduce legal uncertainty, unlock innovation, scale up deployment, accelerate lead times and de-risk essential cross-border infrastructure. We advocate for a technology-neutral approach towards decarbonising industry by acknowledging low-carbon hydrogen as a necessary stepping stone towards the production of renewable hydrogen.

Embed energy security and affordability.

Establish energy security and affordability as a non-negotiable pillar of EU industrial competitiveness, recognizing that economic and strategic security are inextricably linked. Furthermore, we must leverage the Benelux as the energy gateway to secure supply chains for North-Western Europe's industries by cooperating on energy imports (e.g., hydrogen, ammonia, methanol).

Strengthen industrial backbone.

Designate the Benelux as a proving ground for integration of industrial clusters through cross-border infrastructure projects. For instance, designate industrial areas and ports as cross border clusters with accelerated permitting and appropriate funding.

Strengthen security and defence capabilities.

Actively promote chemical clusters in the Benelux and North Rhine–Westphalia by designating cross-border cooperation amongst them as Critical Chemicals Sites, thereby acknowledging its significant potential to assure affordable resource resilience, contribute to European defence capabilities and become a main driver of the circular economy.

Unlock capital, de-risk investments and create a market for low-carbon products.

Mobilise and unlock capital and other derisking mechanisms for cross-border strategic energy projects and the creation of lead markets for low-carbon products. This must include robust support through EU investment mechanisms and a stronger role for the European Investment Bank (EIB) in de-risking private investments.

Enhance the port-industrial clusters.

Designate the highly developed port industrial clusters in the Benelux as a testing ground for industrial integration through cross-border energy projects. Specifically, enhance the strongly interlinked Antwerp-Rotterdam-Rhine-Ruhr cluster (ARRRA), which incorporates 40% of the EU Chemical industry, with targeted investment, accelerated permitting, and aligned planning.

The Benelux Business Roundtable stands ready.

Let the Benelux again lead by example and unlock its high potential by driving integration, resilience, and strategic unity. We have no time to lose: Europe's future competitiveness and security depend on decisive action now.

Importance of Benelux cooperation

In 2024, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg jointly exported (in current LCU) over €1.600 trillion in goods and services. At the same time, each country ranked among each other's top EU export partners for goods.

The Benelux region, Europe's most integrated economic zone, is indeed uniquely positioned to drive Europe's industrial transition forward. With deep industrial roots and a long-standing commitment to the EU project, the region's interconnected industrial ecosystem stretches from world-class ports like Antwerp-Bruges and Rotterdam to the Rhine-Ruhr, forming the Antwerp-Rotterdam-Rhine-Ruhr (ARRRA) zone.

Other significant industrial clusters include those in the Northern Netherlands, the Flemish-Dutch Scheldt-Delta region, Chemelot, the Flanders' Catalisti Cluster and the Luxinnovation Cluster Initiative. These clusters should be strategically interconnected through cross-border regulatory sandbox zones - stimulating and enhancing cooperation in **a high-impact Benelux mega-cluster ecosystem** where resources are maximised and innovation accelerated.

CONTACT

Eric ter Hark, Executive Charman of the BBR

Eric.terhark@Beneluxbusinessroundtable.org

Signatories



ACKERMANS & VAN HAAREN



ADVARIO



AGFA



AIR LIQUIDE BENELUX



BASF ANTWERP



BESIX



BP THE NETHERLANDS



CARMEUSE EUROPE



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LUXEMBOURG



DELOITTE



DELTALINQS



DEME GROUP



DOW BENELUX



ENCEVO



ESSENSCIA



EXMAR



FEBELIEC



FLUXYS BELGIUM



GASUNIE



HEIDELBERG MATERIALS



HOLCIM BELGIUM



LHOIST



LINKLATERS



NORTH SEA PORT



PORT OF ANTWERP-BRUGES



PORT OF ROTTERDAM



PROXIMUS



RWE GENERATION SE



SHELL



SIBELCO



TOTAL RAFFINADERIJ ANTWERPEN



VITO



VNCI



VOKA



VOPAK