The Benelux Business Roundtable calls for the Prime Ministers of the Benelux to enable the necessary conditions for a competitive, resilient and clean industry, the foundation of our welfare, beginning with the creation of a Benelux+[1] Energy Market

From Fragmentation to Scale - how the Benelux+ can lead the implementation of One Europe, One Market

The energy-intensive industry is foundational to many downstream manufacturing activities and by extension our economy as a whole. While the industry is under significant pressure, there is a clear consensus that outsourcing our industry to the rest of the world would create critical dependencies we cannot afford[2].

Europe's greatest competitive disadvantage within its own control is not a lack of technology, talent or industrial capability. It is fragmentation. Fragmentation raises costs, slows investment, weakens competitiveness and reduces resilience. Integration creates scale. In today's global economy, scale is a decisive competitive advantage.

About one year after the launch of the Clean Industrial Deal, on 19 March 2026, the 27 Heads of Government committed themselves to an ambitious objective: **One Europe, One Market**. By the end of 2027, Europe's Single Market should be deepened by removing barriers[3], improving regulatory coherence and strengthening competitiveness. A stronger, more integrated economy should fully activate the scale of a market of 450 million consumers to compete globally and secure our long-term prosperity[4].

Although various propsals and regulatory packages are underway[5], decision making takes time, requiring all 27 Member States to agree on every reform, and the delivery ultimately relies on national governments, regulators and grid operators. Pioneering with a Coalition of the Willing allows a subset of Member States to move forward together on

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[1] In the context of this note, the Benelux+ is defined as the Benelux and its neighboring regions North Rhine-Westphalia, Northern France and the Greater Region

[2] Draghi, The future of European competitiveness, Part B – In-depth analysis and recommendations, 2024, examples include: ensuring food security (fertilisers and pesticides), strategic autonomy in the defence sector, for the clean energy transition, and for the resilience of overall EU downstream activities in the current geopolitical context

[3] Cefic, Antwerp Declaration Monitoring Report, 2026, shows that internal market barriers impose costs equivalent to tariffs of approximately 65% for goods

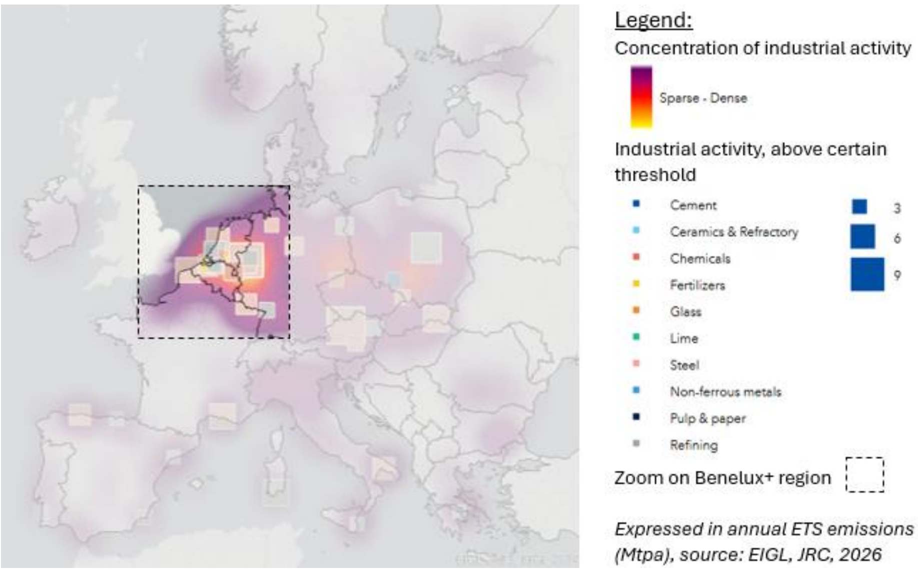
[4] European Commission, The Single Market Strategy

[5] European Commission, One Europe, One Market roadmap

strategic priorities[6]. Europe has often advanced through pioneers rather than unanimity. The Benelux Customs Union helped lay the foundations of the European Economic Community. Schengen began with a small group of countries before expanding across the continent. Moreover, the European Union explicitly recognizes the Benelux Union and allows its members to pursue deeper integration, provided it advances the objectives of the European Union[7].

Why pioneering in the Benelux+ region?

The Benelux economy represents approximately €1.9 trillion in GDP[8]. Its industrial base generates around €250 billion in annual gross value added[9] and provides about 1.4 million high-quality jobs[10]. Together with neighboring North Rhine-Westphalia, Northern France, and the Greater Region[11], it forms **one of the world's most concentrated and integrated industrial regions**, with globally leading ports[12], chemical clusters[13], logistics networks, knowledge centres, proximity to the North Sea and extensive energy infrastructure.



The Benelux+ region is one of the world's most concentrated and integrated industrial regions

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[6] Treaty on European Union, Article 20 established the legal framework for enhanced cooperation between EU Member States

[7] Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 350 provides the legal framework to the Benelux to serve as a laboratory for the EU

[8] Eurostat, 2025, Statistical classification NACE B-E Industry (except construction)

[9] Ibid

[10] Eurostat, 2024, Statistical classification NACE B-E Industry (except construction)

[11] The Greater Region brings together Lorraine in the French region of Grand Est, Wallonia, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Ostbelgien in Belgium, Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany, as well as the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

[12] Erasmus Centre for Urban, Port and Transport Economics, VUB, Value creation for Europe: a first study on the value creation for Europe's sustainable and competitive position by the combined ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp-Bruges, 2025

[13] DECHEMA, VITO/Energyville, The 3C-VaCS project: competitive chemical value chains in the Netherlands – Flanders – North Rhine-Westphalia chemical cluster, 2026

To drive industrial competitiveness and transformation, its energy-intensive industry requires energy in the broad sense of the word - covering electricity, natural gas, H2, CCS, and heat – that is competitive, decarbonized and reliably available, supported by infrastructure that evolves with the needs of the industry. Electricity grids, for example, need to unlock the integration of renewables and industrial electrification. In the Netherlands, grid capacity can accommodate less than 10% of renewables planned by 2030[14] and 14,000 companies are waiting for a grid connection, an issue which has also started to emerge in Belgium. For the Benelux, an optimal expansion of European interconnection capacity could reduce average electricity prices by around 10% by 2030 and another 10% by 2040[15]. The investments now required are simply too large for our countries to optimize separately. Financial resources are limited. Geographical space is limited. The choice is therefore straightforward: continue fragmenting scarce resources or combining them to create the scale needed to compete globally.

Despite cross-border connections, the energy systems on which industry depends remain largely governed nationally. The result is fragmented planning, duplicated investment, higher system costs and ultimately higher energy prices for industry. In no other part of Europe is the gap between an integrated industrial economy and fragmented energy governance more apparent—or the potential gains from integration greater. Recent analysis shows that **integrated infrastructure system planning** has the potential **direct benefit of around 2,5 to 3 billion EUR / yr for the Benelux region over the period 2030-50**[16] of which up to 1 billion EUR / yr via deeper electricity market integration by 2030[17]. These benefits directly translate into lower energy prices and higher system resilience, key enabling conditions for its industrial ecosystem. Complemented by EU and Member State level competitiveness measures, these future-proof energy systems can act as a catalyst for industrial transformation, unlocking the necessary industrial investments into clean production technologies, such as industrial electrification, carbon capture storage and utilization (CCSU), circularity, etc. giving the Benelux a unique opportunity to pioneer Europe's industrial platform for tomorrow's clean economy.

Few public policy initiatives can simultaneously lower energy costs, reduce investment needs, strengthen security of supply and improve industrial competitiveness. A Benelux+ Energy Market can achieve all four.

The continued fragmentation of the Benelux energy market is no longer merely an inefficiency; it is a strategic opportunity that we can no longer afford to leave unrealized.

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[14] EMBER, Crossed-wires: grid capacity could block EU energy security, 2026
[15] JRC, The interconnection needs of the European electricity system: investigations for 2030 and 2040 using METIS, 2025
[16] Deloitte estimate, based on Agora Energiewende, Integrated Infrastructure Planning and 2050 Climate Neutrality: Deriving Future-Proof European Energy Infrastructures, 2026
[17] European Commission, Electricity market design, 2026

Why moving first?

The Benelux is not immune to competitive pressure and global dynamics. One of the most impacted industries is the chemicals industry. In the Benelux, the industry faces a structural capacity contraction of -6,8 Mt[18]. The cost of not moving is high, where plant closures could have significant knock-on effects because of strong interdependencies in value chains[19]. Similar trends can be observed in other energy-intensive industries, such as the steel industry, faced with dumping of overcapacity.

Every year that market integration is delayed means another year of higher energy costs, duplicated investment and lost industrial competitiveness. By integrating ahead of wider European harmonization, the Benelux can realize these benefits earlier and strengthen its position as Europe's most attractive industrial region. The availability of an integrated and efficient energy system is a key decision factor for industrial companies navigating their investment portfolio across Europe.

A successful Benelux+ Energy Market would also provide Europe with a proven model for wider implementation. Rather than waiting for all Member States to move together, Europe can build upon a regional solution that has already demonstrated its economic value.

Our ask

We therefore call upon the Prime Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, at their next Benelux Summit, to launch a Benelux+ Competitiveness Initiative as the first regional implementation of the European Council's objective of One Europe, One Market.

Its first flagship project should be the creation of a fully integrated **Benelux+ Energy Market**, accompanied by a joint roadmap for cross-border infrastructure, permitting, strategic industrial investment, and developed in close partnership with North Rhine-Westphalia and Northern France.

Such a decision would not simply strengthen the competitiveness of North-West Europe's industrial heartland. It would demonstrate how Europe can translate political ambition into practical implementation.

The European Council has defined the destination.

The Benelux+ can demonstrate how to make it happen.

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[18] Cefic, European Chemical Closures & Investments Radar 2022-2025, 2026
[19] DECHEMA, VITO/Energyville, The 3C-VaCS project: competitive chemical value chains in the Netherlands – Flanders – North Rhine-Westphalia chemical cluster, 2026