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PERIOD **END OF MANDATE**
2023 **REPORT**
2025 **SECTION FOR THE SINGLE**
MARKET, PRODUCTION
AND CONSUMPTION

DIRECTORATE C – LEGISLATIVE
WORK

PRESIDENT: SANDRA PARTHIE

Introduction

There is hardly an area more central to European integration than the internal market. It stands for the four freedoms of the EU – the free movement of people, goods, services and capital – like nothing else. It is the basis for Europe’s economic prosperity and social welfare. Thus, working to improve it, fostering its completion and fighting against its fragmentation provide the opportunity to have a real impact on crucial policies.

The EESC’s Internal Market section addresses the production side – conditions for companies and employers, large and small, and conditions for workers and employees in many different sectors. It also addresses the consumption side, i.e. the situation of consumers in Europe, who have the best protections in the world.

Over the last 2.5 years we have published many opinions and proposed good ideas for

- improving the competitiveness of our economy, e.g. making use of digital solutions,*
- helping MSMEs to navigate a complex European regulatory agenda, and*
- cutting red tape without cutting workers’ rights or environmental protections.*

We have looked into the possibilities of AI, promoted social economy approaches, underlined the importance of having a coordinated European industrial policy instead of separate national ones, and highlighted the contributions of companies to innovation and research, as well as the need for and importance of skilled workers, which are one of Europe’s key resources.

We have established good working relationships with the other EU institutions, and increased the section’s and the EESC’s impact in the Council’s working parties and in the relevant committees in the European Parliament.

A personal highlight for me was our close involvement in the work of Enrico Letta on his Single Market Report.

It has been a tremendous honour to chair the section over the past 2.5 years. I am eternally grateful to the team of the INT Secretariat, for their commitment, advice, support, good humour and dedication. I have enormous appreciation for the active work of the INT members, and for their interest and engagement in delivering good opinions and raising our visibility vis-à-vis Members of the European Parliament and among stakeholders not only in Brussels but also at national level.

Sandra Parthie

President of the INT section

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For a digital and green single market

The 2023-2025 term of office was marked by a strong and consistent focus on the single market, with approximately 20 opinions adopted on related topics. 2023 was a particularly significant year, as it marked the **30th anniversary of the single market**. To contribute to this milestone, the section adopted a number of opinions, most notably on [The Single Market at 30](#), drawn up at the request of the Swedish Presidency.

This momentum continued in 2024 with the publication of two major strategic reports by **Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi on the future of the single market**. The section actively contributed to the preparation of the Letta report, through an [exploratory opinion](#) requested by the Belgian Presidency. Enrico Letta participated in the public hearing linked to this opinion and later joined the plenary session during its adoption.

The importance of this work was acknowledged by **high-level guests** who regularly took part in INT section meetings, including MEP Anna Cavazzini, Chair of the European Parliament's Internal Market Committee, Kerstin Jorna, Director-General of DG GROW, and Elisabeth Werner, Deputy Secretary-General of the European Commission. Following the publication of Mario Draghi's report, the section produced a [dedicated opinion assessing both reports](#). These efforts, along with numerous meetings with Commission officials, helped to shape the major Single Market Strategy unveiled in spring 2025.

An essential part of guiding policymakers is bringing in different perspectives that reflecting the concerns and priorities of civil society organisations. The **single market and efforts to complete it were therefore examined** throughout the term. Notable examples include an opinion on [Potential challenges for the European single market arising from the future enlargement of the Union](#), an opinion on the [fight against counterfeiting](#), a focused contribution on [the services sector](#) requested by the Polish Presidency, and an own-initiative opinion on [Corruption in public procurement and its impact on the internal market](#). More recently, the section contributed to the package of own-initiative opinions [addressing the cost-of-living crisis](#). An additional angle was explored in the opinion on the [economic dimension of the Rule of Law](#), emphasising how the rule of law underpins the effective operation of the single market.

Following in the footsteps of the 2025 Single Market Strategy, the EESC focused on the importance of enforcement to ensure a well-functioning and fair single market, in its opinion on [strengthening enforcement of Single Market Rules](#). In addition, in view of the relevance and timeliness of the topic of defence, the section drew up an [opinion](#) that takes into account the single-market-specific angle of defence policy.

The **digital transition remained a central priority**, particularly through the work of the section's [Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market \(DSMO\)](#). The Observatory conducted a [study on generative AI](#), building on the exploratory opinion [General-purpose AI: way forward after the AI Act](#) that it had drawn up at the request of the European Commission. The results of this work were presented to the Council's Working Party on Telecommunications and Information Society. This focus on the digital transition was further reinforced by the section's comprehensive [evaluation of the Digital Europe Programme](#). This work included fact-finding missions to Poland, Germany and Malta, and contributed directly to the European Commission's broader evaluation of the programme. Finally, the digitalisation of the EU regulatory framework was addressed in an opinion on the use of the [Internal Market Information System for the declaration of posting of workers](#). This opinion followed the new format for opinions linked to legislative proposals, including the submission of concrete recommendations that were subsequently integrated into the amendments to the European Parliament's draft report. In this context, the section also adopted an own-initiative opinion on the interdependence between AI applications and liberal professions services, which highlights the need for trustworthy AI, legal clarity and fair access to digital infrastructures.

Competitiveness, sustainable industrial policy and open strategic autonomy

During the 2023–2025 term, the INT section actively contributed to shaping a coherent and forward-looking European industrial policy, focusing on three key dimensions: competitiveness, sustainability, and open strategic autonomy. A central pillar of this work has been the **transition toward a carbon-neutral industrial base**. The INT section contributed to the development of the [Green Deal Industrial Plan](#), launched in February 2023, which aims to boost the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and support the green transition. This opinion was presented at the Council's Working Party on Competitiveness and therefore fed into its deliberations. In parallel, the [Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform \(STEP\)](#) represented a significant effort to strengthen Europe's technological sovereignty by mobilising investment in critical technologies.

The need for a [long-term competitiveness strategy](#) has been a recurring theme in the section's work, highlighting the importance of a coherent policy framework to **keep Europe economically competitive while advancing its climate and digital goals**. The section provided a targeted opinion on [competitiveness and industry](#) at the request of the Spanish Presidency, reinforcing its engagement with policy priorities at EU level. An own-initiative opinion explored the [role of sustainability as a long-term driver of competitiveness in the tourism sector](#), highlighting how environmentally responsible practices can enhance the sector's resilience and global appeal.

The section contributed to reflections on **open strategic autonomy** through an [opinion requested by the Danish Presidency](#), exploring how resilient and diversified value chains can underpin the EU's strategic and economic independence. Energy security and affordability were highlighted in an opinion requested by the Polish Presidency on [the future of EU industry in the face of high energy prices](#). Annual reports on EU competition policy ([Report on Competition Policy 2022](#), [Report on Competition Policy 2023](#)) allowed the section to assess the broader regulatory landscape and its impact on industry, businesses, workers and consumers.

The importance of this extensive work was demonstrated through the participation of INT rapporteurs in several editions of the **Commission's EU Industry Days**, where they presented the section's positions. The section's input has also played a significant role in the **Commission's Industrial Forum**, where two EESC members hold observer status, ensuring that the views of organised civil society are duly represented.

Given the **central role of research and innovation in driving economic growth and competitiveness**, the INT section has been actively engaged in shaping a more integrated and forward-looking European R&I policy. At the request of the Hungarian Presidency, the section drew up an opinion examining [how to close the EU's innovation gap](#). In parallel, it produced an own-initiative opinion to feed into the upcoming [European Research Area \(ERA\) Act](#), focusing on realising the free movement of knowledge by improving cross-border cooperation and research integration. This work was complemented by INT members' regular observer participation in the ERA Forum.

Responding to a request from the Belgian Presidency, the section looked into how to [introduce an Innovation Stress Test](#) for evaluating new EU legislation and policy initiatives, offering practical recommendations that were reflected in the May 2024 Competitiveness Council conclusions. The section further contributed to the growing debate on [research security](#), highlighting the need to balance openness with strategic safeguards. In May 2024, the section co-organised, together with the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, the [Innovation campus workshop on Artificial Intelligence in R&D and knowledge valorisation](#), sharing [key takeaways](#) with principal stakeholders to foster dialogue and collaboration.

Finally, **strategic foresight** has remained a priority. As highlighted in the section's work, informed and forward-looking policy-making is essential for strengthening the EU's resilience and ensuring that industry can adapt to global changes. The INT section contributed to the foresight dimension through its [Strategic Foresight Report 2023](#).

Socially and environmentally responsible businesses

The INT section has consistently played an active role in **shaping SME policy**, paying particular attention to access to finance, and support for digitalisation and the green transition. Recognising their vital role in the European economy, the section has repeatedly called for

targeted investment to [strengthen SMEs' financial resilience](#) and support them in managing [evolving business responsibilities](#). The section also strongly emphasised the uptake of digital tools to help SMEs grow and remain competitive, and reduce reporting burdens. These issues were central to the opinion requested by the Polish Presidency on [SME competitiveness](#), which was presented in the Council Working Party. In relation to environmental responsibility, the section prepared a specific opinion on the [recalibration of the EU Green Deal](#), proposing measures to streamline its implementation and flagging up overlapping or conflicting provisions.

In 2024, the European Commission unveiled a key initiative – the [SME Relief Package](#) – aimed at placing SMEs at the core of EU legislation and strategies. This package included [a revision of the Late Payments Directive](#), addressing a persistent challenge for SMEs across the Union. The rapporteurs for these opinions were invited to present their work at the **annual SME Assembly**, the EU's most important event for SMEs, organised by the Commission in cooperation with the rotating Council Presidency.

The INT section continued its strong engagement in the social economy sector, working to increase recognition of its contribution to Europe's socioeconomic development and prosperity. The section actively supported the implementation of the **Social Economy Action Plan** and contributed to the debate through a dedicated opinion on the development of [framework conditions for the sector](#). Further efforts included facilitating [cross-border activities of non-profit associations](#), promoting the role of the [social economy in combatting poverty and social exclusion](#), as requested by the Belgian Presidency, and highlighting the [potential of public procurement as a tool for supporting social economy actors](#). The section drew on the insights in the Letta report and provided recommendations on [aligning support for social economy entities with State aid rules](#).

In 2023, the section's work was show-cased at a major Social Economy Congress organised by the Spanish Presidency in San Sebastián, highlighting its commitment to promoting the social economy as a people-centred and inclusive model. On this occasion, the EESC signed the [San Sebastián Manifesto](#). In 2024, the EESC's work on the social economy received further attention during the Social Economy Conference in Liège, organised by the Belgian Presidency. Moreover, in 2025 the EESC was one of the co-organisers of the Commission conference dedicated to the International Year of Cooperatives.

The INT section, together with NAT, continued to co-host the [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#) (ECESP), a joint initiative with the European Commission that fosters dialogue and collaboration across sectors. Highlights included the 2024 Annual Conference with the World Circular Economy Forum and the 2025 Stakeholder Dialogue and Green Week, which helped keep circular economy policies high on the EU agenda and gave the ECESP

greater influence at EU and international levels. The platform represents a best-practice example for cooperation between the EESC and the European Commission.

A modern and responsible consumer policy

Consumer protection and the promotion of **sustainable consumption and production patterns** remain key priorities for the section. At the start of the term, two major opinions were adopted on [green claims](#) and [the right to repair](#). The section successfully engaged with co-legislators to convey the perspective of organised civil society and influenced the legislative process. In particular, the Right to Repair opinion received extensive media coverage and strong social media attention, helping to raise public awareness of consumers' rights in product durability and reparability. The section also contributed to the [final evaluation of the Consumer Programme \(2014–2020\)](#), providing recommendations from civil society organisations gathered during fact-finding missions in Portugal, Latvia, France, Bulgaria and Ireland.

In the **digital environment**, the section addressed the [impact of advertising and influencer marketing on consumers](#) in an opinion requested by the Spanish Presidency of the Council. This work included a public hearing and a debate with high-level representatives from the Presidency. Additionally, the [interaction between digital and green transitions and their impact on consumers](#) was further examined, in an opinion that was also selected to undergo the EESC youth test. In a more horizontal context, the section addressed the [challenges posed by the surge in low-value parcels from third-country online platforms](#), highlighting concerns about customs enforcement, product safety, consumer protection and unfair competition.

The section continued to organise its traditional **Consumer Day**, which it has held every year since 1999. The 2023 edition focused on [Consumers in the Digital World: Safeguarding Youth and Enforcing Laws](#) while the 2024 event, linked to the EESC's work on the Blue Deal, addressed [water challenges from the consumer perspective](#). Following the 2023 event, the section produced a [Call for Action](#), which was shared with key stakeholders. INT members also actively participated in the Commission's flagship Consumer Summit, further contributing to shaping EU consumer policy.

Interinstitutional echo

During the 2023–2025 term of office, the INT section maintained close cooperation with the European Commission, strengthened its ties with the European Parliament's IMCO committee, and stepped up its engagement with various Council working parties. These interinstitutional activities were an essential part of **ensuring follow-up to the section's opinions and enhancing their visibility and impact**.

*The **European Commission remained a regular and active partner.** Commission representatives frequently took part in study group meetings, hearings and public events. Senior officials also engaged directly with the section, including Elisabeth Werner (Deputy Secretary-General), Kerstin Jorna (Director-General, DG GROW), Nils Behrndt (Deputy Director-General, DG JUST), Ben Smulders (Deputy Director-General, DG COMP) and Hubert Gambas (Deputy Director-General, DG GROW). These exchanges enabled the section to communicate its positions to Commission representatives ahead of new initiatives, or to provide feedback and contribute to the debate once the Commission's proposals had been published. INT members also contributed to key Commission events, such as the EU Industry Days and SME Assembly. Several EESC members continued their work as observers in Commission-led structures, including the Expert Group on Social Economy and Social Enterprises (GECES), the Fit for Future Platform, the European Research Area Forum, and the Industrial Forum.*

*Cooperation with the Council was further strengthened through regular presentations of opinions in various working party meetings. Between 2023 and 2025, INT rapporteurs presented their recommendations at 13 such meetings, including the Working Parties on Consumers, Industry and Growth, Telecommunications and Information Society, Agenda 2030, and Audiovisual and Media. **This engagement helped shape the Council's deliberations** and, in one case, led to the formal inclusion of the EESC's recommendations in the Competitiveness Council conclusions. Informal exchanges were also key: the section hosted several working breakfasts and lunches to engage directly with ambassadors. Highlights included a discussion with the Slovak, Austrian and Czech ambassadors on digital transformation and artificial intelligence, and a lunch debate on the future of the Single Market with representatives from the informal Council group Friends of the Single Market.*

*The section also maintained a **strong working relationship with the European Parliament**, particularly with the IMCO committee. INT rapporteurs met with their EP counterparts regularly to share the positions of organised civil society as reflected in the opinions. The secretariats of both bodies held a joint meeting to discuss priorities and foster closer cooperation. INT opinions were presented not only in IMCO, but also in other committees such as ENVI and TRAN. The new structure of EESC opinions, with clear and actionable recommendations, facilitated their use in parliamentary work, including as input for amendments to draft reports. Through these channels, the INT section ensured that the voice of organised civil society was heard and taken into account across the EU's legislative process.*

Communication achievements

*Throughout the 2023–2025 term, the INT section's communication efforts covered a broad range of activities. The section's **work and opinions were regularly promoted through its webpages and on social media**, including via its dedicated X account. INT section meetings were livestreamed, with agendas and brief previews promoted on X by the section president.*

To raise public awareness about the section's contribution to EU policymaking, a brochure entitled [INT section contributions to EU policies](#) was published on the EESC website in 2024.

INT opinions selected for media coverage received visibility on the EESC's main website and were featured in prominent media outlets such as Politico, Euractiv, Toute l'Europe (France), and various national-level press channels.

The section also organised **numerous public and expert hearings to engage civil society in the EU legislative process**. These events featured high-level speakers, including Mario Monti, Senator of the Italian Republic and former Commissioner for the Internal Market, and Enrico Letta, former Prime Minister of Italy and author of the High-Level Report on the Future of the Single Market. In addition, INT members were regularly invited to speak at external events hosted by other institutions and organisations.

Each year, during the **EESC's Open Days** which attract thousands of visitors, the INT section hosted a dedicated stand to showcase its work and impact. Activities included interactive quizzes on relevant EU policy areas, video presentations, and games aimed at raising awareness about the circular economy and ways to reduce environmental impact, supporting the EESC's EMAS environmental objectives.

In cooperation with the NAT section, the INT section continued to coordinate the **European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (ECESP)**, a joint initiative with the European Commission. During the term, one high-level stakeholder dialogue and two annual conferences were organised. The platform's Coordination Group held around 17 #EUCircularTalks webinars. In 2024 alone, the platform's website attracted over 290 000 visitors, featured more than 800 best practices and 67 circular economy strategies, and maintained a Knowledge Centre with over 550 publications.

Perspective/outlook

In a world increasingly shaped by geopolitical instability, economic fragmentation and technological disruption, the European Union is facing growing pressure to secure its strategic interests while remaining faithful to its democratic values. Citizens, businesses and workers alike expect the EU to deliver effective responses that ensure prosperity, resilience and fairness. Against this backdrop, the **single market remains the EU's greatest strategic asset**, a driver of economic strength, social cohesion and global influence. Ensuring its continued relevance and legitimacy will require bold action, a renewed sense of purpose, and smart policymaking that puts people and the planet at the centre.

Given the current geopolitical situation, a focus on defence and especially the defence industry, e.g. on the procurement of products, the coordination of production or the topic of dual-use, should be considered as a priority for the section's work programme over the coming years.

The future MFF will influence much of the political debate over the next two years. With the Competitiveness Fund, an important new instrument has been introduced and the section should be involved in shaping its set-up and use.

Reinforcing the single market, preventing its fragmentation, and adapting it to today's challenges must remain a central priority for the INT section. This includes addressing its digital and green dimensions and their impact on competitiveness, innovation and social cohesion. Artificial intelligence in particular calls for a distinctive, human-centric EU approach that balances trust and innovation. The section, and particularly its Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market, will continue working with institutional actors and other stakeholders to support a fair and forward-looking digital transition. Europe's competitiveness and resilience also depend on improving cross-border conditions, strategic public procurement and stronger value chains. Promoting responsible business models will remain essential for building a more sustainable economy. Promoting European businesses and their products and solutions will be essential for remaining a relevant economic force.

Entrepreneurship is an underdeveloped area in Europe. While SMEs are often, rightly, heralded as a pillar of the economy, framework conditions for founders and entrepreneurs are not favourable. High compliance demands for instance, even before production or service provision can start, are deterrents. The INT section's work should therefore keep the promotion of entrepreneurship high on the agenda.

*Consumer protection, the circular economy and the social economy are key pillars of the section's agenda. **Stronger consumer rights and enforcement** are essential to promote trust, especially in fast-changing and increasingly globalised markets. **Advancing the circular economy** will help reduce resource dependencies and accelerate the green transition. At the same time, the section will continue to **highlight the role of the social economy** as a transformative force within the single market, contributing to cohesion, fairness and inclusion. The work of the INT section will remain firmly anchored in the EESC's socio-economic values. This includes a genuine socio-economic dialogue to find balanced responses to the challenges of the labour market.*

*Looking ahead, the section will **maintain a strong focus on impact**. This includes following up more on its opinions and ensuring that they are relevant to policy debates at EU level. The section's priorities must also guide the choice of own-initiative opinions and the design of events. Cross-cutting themes such as digitalisation, sustainability or competitiveness will continue to shape the section's work and cooperation with other EESC sections. The section's Observatory will play a key role in driving strategic reflection, while closer coordination with institutional partners will help strengthen the visibility and effectiveness of the section's work.*

Appendix I – Key statistics

	As of 26 April 2023	2024	Until 20 September 2025	Total
Section meetings	6	8	7	21
Section bureau meetings	7	9	8	24
Meetings in Brussels	7	9	7	23
Meetings outside Brussels	0	0	1	1
Study group meetings	57	45	28	130
Permanent study group meetings	0	0	0	0
Observatory meetings	2	3	2	7
Opinions	30	27	26	83
Referrals	20	13	7	40
Exploratory opinions	5	6	7	18
Own-initiative opinions	5	6	12	23
Information reports	0	2	0	2
Studies	0	0	1	1
Fact-finding missions	0	10	0	10
Conferences and hearings organised by the Section	11	8	7	26
Participation of members in meetings/events/conferences	34	69	43	146
Meetings between EESC/EP rapporteurs and Section/EP Committee presidents	12	7	4	23