

20
25

ANNUAL MEETING

REPORT



EUROPEAN
BUSINESS
ORGANISATION
WORLDWIDE NETWORK

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	_____	03
Executive Summary	_____	04
Agenda 2025	_____	05
Day 1	_____	07
Day 2	_____	21
Day 3	_____	30
Day 4	_____	38
Day 5	_____	46
Conclusion	_____	53

Acknowledgement

Together,
we move
forward
with
renewed
purpose

The EBO Worldwide Network (EBOWN) extends its heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to the success of the 2025 Annual General Meeting.

We sincerely thank the EBOWN Board (2025–2026) for its leadership, vision, and unwavering commitment to strengthening the global voice of European business. Your strategic guidance continues to drive the network's growth, relevance, and influence in EU external action.

Our deep gratitude also goes to our visiting guests from the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Parliament, EU Delegations, and EU business support institutions. Your presence and engagement throughout the week enriched the dialogue, and your openness to cooperation reaffirmed our shared ambition for a more competitive, outward-facing Europe.

To the EBOWN membership across more than 45 countries, thank you for your field-based expertise, dynamic contributions to discussions, and commitment to raising the standard of European business representation globally. Your efforts make the network what it is today.

Finally, warm appreciation goes to the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) for their tireless coordination, detailed preparation, and seamless contribution to the programme. Your dedication and professionalism have consistently supported our mission, ensuring that each session advanced our shared goals in the interest of EU business abroad.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the EBO Worldwide Network (EBOWN), held from 2 to 6 June in Brussels, convened more than 45 representatives from European business organisations operating in over 58 non-EU countries. This high-level gathering reinforced EBOWN's role as a strategic bridge between the EU's external economic priorities and private-sector realities on the ground.

Throughout the sessions, discussions reflected the EU's evolving global agenda—anchored in competitiveness, sustainable trade, and the Global Gateway. EBOWN's contributions centred on four major pillars: enhancing EU private-sector engagement abroad, mainstreaming EBOWN membership in Team Europe structures, aligning with new regulatory instruments (OMNIBUS, CS3D, CBAM, etc.), and scaling EBOWN support to SMEs and EU investors navigating third markets.

Key engagements with senior Commission representatives (DG GROW, DG TRADE, DG INTPA, and the Cabinet of EVP Séjourné) highlighted the urgent need to institutionalise EBOs into project design, early market diagnostics, and Gateway programming. Thematic deep dives explored new tools such as the Competitiveness Compass, IP Helpdesk, EFSD+ matchmaking, and sustainability-driven investment standards.

The network's operational progress was also showcased—nine new EBOs were welcomed, updated governance and digital tools were introduced, and strategic papers were presented (on CS3D, Gateway cooperation, and sentiment tracking). A strong call emerged for clarity on engagement protocols, predictable coordination with EU Delegations, and access to instruments and visibility pipelines.

The week closed with a unified resolve: EBOWN stands ready to act as Europe's business intelligence arm in third markets, a trusted partner for EU institutions, and a co-architect of the EU's global economic footprint.

AGENDA

01

Agenda Items

2nd June

- 09:00–09:30: Welcome & Opening Remarks
- 09:30–10:30: EBO Board Reports & Executive Director's Report
- 11:00–12:30: Presentation of EBO Projects & Advocacy Tools
- 14:00–15:00: Introduction of New EBOs
- 15:00–16:00: Best Practice Workshop – IP Helpdesk
 - Option 1: Engaging the EU Institutions
 - Option 2: Engaging the Global Gateway

02

Agenda Items

3rd June

- 09:00–10:00: Roundtable on European Commission's New Policy Priorities with Frederic Van Zinnicq Bergmann
- 10:00–10:45: Discussion on Competitiveness Compass & Critical Raw Materials – Carsten Schierenbeck & Carl-Christian Kuehl
- 10:45–11:30: Global Gateway Implementation & EBOWN Support – Isabel Emerson, DG INTPA & Alexandre Darras, DG ENEST
- 11:45–12:30: Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships – Denis Redonnet, DG TRADE
- 14:00–17:00: EBOWN Regional Meetings – Preparation for EU Institutional Roundtables

03

Agenda Items

4th June

- 10:00–11:00: Meeting with Estelle Göger & Dragoş Tudorache (Cabinet of EVP Stéphane Séjourné)
- 14:30–15:00: EEN Updates – Open Invitation for INPs with Christos Skouras, DG GROW
- 15:30–17:30: Regional Roundtables with EU Institutions – Breakout Sessions with Policy Officers & Country Desks

AGENDA

04

Agenda Items

5th June

- 10:30–11:15: Meeting with Lucie Sestakova, Head of Cabinet to Commissioner Jozef Síkela
- 11:45–12:45: Meeting with Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf Region
- 14:00–15:00: Meeting with Trade Promotion Europe – Francis Baert, Anne Lanigan & Flavie Guerin
- 15:15–16:15: Discussion on CS3D & Simplification Omnibus – DG JUST & DG INTPA
- 16:15–17:30: Discussion with International Trade Centre – Elodie Robin, Trade Market Intelligence

05

Agenda Items

6th June

- 09:00–10:00: Discussion with Eleonora Catella, BusinessEurope & Pascal Kerneis, European Services Forum
- 10:00–11:00: Discussion on EU Business Support Measures – EFSD+, 360° Support & Matchmaking Projects with DG INTPA & DG ENEST
- 11:00–12:00: Meeting with EuroChambres – Dominic Boucsein, Head of International Trade and Foreign Policy
- 13:00–14:00: Reports of Regional Meetings – Moderated by Nele Cornelis
- 14:00–15:00: EBOWN General Assembly
- 15:00–15:30: Wrap-Up & Close of Meeting - Closing Remarks by Outi Slotboom, Director, DG GROW

DAY 1

5 Key Takeaways

Empowering EU Competitiveness: Real-Time Intelligence, Strategic Advocacy, and Global Expansion

1. EBOWN is a pivotal enabler of EU competitiveness through real-time intelligence, SME support, and structured advocacy in third markets.
2. Institutionalisation and visibility are essential—DG GROW affirms support for stronger EBOWN role in external cooperation.
3. Regional coordination and peer learning are unlocking best practices, particularly through tools like the Business Sentiment Survey and CS3D advocacy papers.
4. Network expansion is strategic, with new EBOs entering critical markets like Saudi Arabia, India, and the U.S. identified as a next priority.
5. Governance, financial stability, and inclusivity remain central to EBOWN's credibility and future success.



**Global Reach,
European Impact –
Uniting EBOs for a
Competitive
Europe**

The EBOWN Annual Meeting 2025 opened with strategic reflections on the role of European Business Organisations (EBOs) in boosting EU external competitiveness. Funded by DG GROW, the event brought together key stakeholders to discuss EBOWN's contribution to trade enablement, economic diplomacy, and structured advocacy across global markets.

Opening Speeches

- Sophie Müller (DG GROW) underscored the urgency of securing industrial sovereignty, promoting value-based economic engagement, and strengthening EBOWN–EU collaboration.
- Jason Collins (Chair, EBOWN) called for deeper coordination, improved metrics for impact, and greater strategic alignment with EU priorities.

Key Reports and Updates

- **Regional Coordination (Nele Cornelis):** EBOWN's global expansion continues, with strong regional dynamism, the launch of a Business Sentiment Report, and firm integrity standards for new members.
- **Advocacy (Adam Dunnett):** Emphasis on collective voice and strategic policy input, including CS3D position papers and engagement tools like the Government Relations Academy.
- **Secretary General (Geraldine Smeets):** Celebrated EBOWN's credibility and push for institutional visibility, while flagging challenges in project inclusion due to EBOs' non-EU registration.
- **Treasury & Governance (Florian Gottein):** Financial sustainability improved; constitutional reform is underway to modernise the governance framework.
- **Capacity Development (Cathy Murphy):** Workshops delivered across CS3D, SME support, and peer learning. Call for feedback and increased peer-led sessions.
- **Network Enlargement (Freddie Hoeglund):** Nine new EBOs joined in 2024–25. Strategic focus now on the U.S., GCC, Kenya, and Pakistan.
- **Visibility (Edwige Bibilary):** Stronger LinkedIn and website presence, with renewed push for timely content contributions and visibility toolkit rollout.
- **SME Internationalisation (John Braeckeveldt):** EBOs positioned as key enablers of market intelligence and local support. Advocacy is needed for fair EU business treatment abroad.
- **Executive Director's Report (Helen de Mel):** Presented robust delivery across key pillars—cooperation, diplomacy, SME support, visibility—and highlighted 59 active EBOs with growing institutional engagement and project success.

DG GROW Reflections and Q&A

DG GROW welcomed practical insights from the field. Core concerns included:

- Simplification of reporting burdens (e.g. CSRD).
- Funding gaps for SME-specific services post-events.
- Lack of EU preference in externally funded procurement.

DG GROW reiterated support for EBOs and pledged to reinforce their role in future programming and project design.

EBO-Led Project Highlights Key initiatives presented included:

- CS3D Position Paper (EBO China)
- Business Sentiment Survey (EBO Singapore)
- Global Gateway Cooperation Paper (EBO Rwanda)
- Family Friendly Alliance (EBO Taiwan and EBO Korea)
- Government Relations Academy (EBO Russia)

New EBOs Introduced

EBOs from Venezuela, Mozambique, Uzbekistan, India, Bangladesh, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Guyana, and Kenya joined the network—extending EBOWN's reach into strategically important markets.

Workshops and Breakouts

Final sessions addressed EBO strategies for:

- Engaging EU institutions (led by EBO Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan)
- Operationalising the Global Gateway (led by EBO Ivory Coast, Trinidad & Tobago, Philippines)

1. Opening Remarks

The EBOWN Annual Meeting 2025 opened with a high-level welcome and introduction session centred on the strategic theme: “How can EBOs drive European competitiveness?” The session was hosted and generously funded by the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW), reaffirming the European Commission’s commitment to deepening partnerships with European Business Organisations (EBOs) across global markets.

Welcome address by host Ms Sophie Müller, Head of Unit, International Value Chains, DG GROW

Sophie Müller framed the meeting within the context of Europe’s broader geopolitical and economic imperatives. She emphasised the EU’s urgent need to bolster external competitiveness, particularly in the face of shifting global trade patterns, strategic dependencies, and rising protectionism. Her intervention focused on five core areas:

- **Industrial Sovereignty:** Müller reiterated the need for Europe to secure and diversify critical value chains—particularly in raw materials, advanced manufacturing, and digital technologies—by working with trusted external partners, including EBOs.
- **Business Intelligence:** EBOs were acknowledged as indispensable “antennas” that provide real-time, on-the-ground intelligence about local business environments, investment bottlenecks, and emerging market opportunities.
- **Trade and Investment Enablement:** She called for EBOs to proactively support the EU’s external trade and investment agenda, particularly in translating trade agreements into real-world business outcomes and in supporting SMEs’ global expansion.
- **Value-Based Advocacy:** Müller emphasised the importance of promoting a values-based economic model abroad—one grounded in openness, sustainability, and high standards—and tasked EBOs with defending these principles in external markets.
- **Partnership with the Commission:** She stressed the importance of structured, two-way engagement between EBOs and EU institutions, particularly in shaping policy, informing funding instruments, and building resilient industrial alliances globally.

Welcome note and Chairs Report

Jason Collins, Chair of EBOWN, responded by expressing appreciation for the earlier strategic framing provided by Sophie Müller. He underscored the importance of the discussions planned for the week and highlighted how the meeting builds on a clear, shared agenda to strengthen collaboration across the EBO network. A central priority, he noted, has been to create structured pathways for working more effectively together, especially in contrast to the pre-COVID years, where fragmentation and lack of visibility among EBOs hindered cooperation. Today, there is strong visibility across members and clarity on both capabilities and challenges, allowing the network to move with more purpose and coherence. Key points included:

- **Network Impact:** He highlighted how the EBO Worldwide Network is becoming a vital tool for European competitiveness by enabling local-level business support, policy intelligence, and private sector mobilisation in third markets.
- **Board Leadership:** Collins acknowledged the efforts of board members in leading critical portfolios—from SME internationalisation and EU-funded projects to governance, communications, and regional engagement—with tangible results.
- **Strategic Alignment:** He called for even greater alignment between EBOWN activities and EU industrial and trade priorities, positioning EBOs not just as implementers but as co-creators of Europe’s external competitiveness strategies.
- **Future Vision:** Looking ahead, Collins stressed the need for deeper coordination, scalable best practices, and shared metrics to measure impact—particularly in supporting EU SMEs, fostering industrial partnerships, and contributing to Team Europe initiatives.

2. Board Reports

Regional Coordination

Next, Nele Cornelis, Deputy Chair and Board Member for Regional Coordination, presented a compelling overview of the EBO Worldwide Network's evolving regional architecture. Framing her remarks around growth, collaboration, and strategic impact, she highlighted how regional clusters have become essential engines of connectivity, advocacy, and intelligence within the EBOWN structure. Her intervention focused on five core areas:

- **Network Expansion and Leadership Integration:** Cornelis highlighted the expanding global footprint of the network, welcoming new Executive Directors from EBOs in a.o. Malaysia, Laos, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Mongolia, and Tanzania. She emphasised the importance of early integration, viewing the onboarding of new leaders as a crucial step in aligning them with the network's principles, operations, and strategic direction.
- **Collaborative Intelligence Gathering:** The launch of the Business Sentiment Report, co-developed across six regional clusters, was positioned as a landmark achievement. This dynamic, updatable tool consolidates market insights, member feedback, and advocacy themes. Cornelis thanked Gigi for her outstanding support in drafting the document and stressed its value in reinforcing the network's voice as a unified, data-informed platform for EU economic diplomacy.
- **Regional Dynamism and Engagement:** Cornelis highlighted a surge in high-impact activities across all clusters:
 - **Africa Despite regional challenges,** African EBOs strengthened cooperation and EU engagement. Highlights include the Zanzibar–EU Business Forum (Tanzania), CSR programme expansion (Côte d'Ivoire), and strong self-sustaining activity in Senegal. Ghana hosted dialogues with presidential candidates, while Mali rebranded and celebrated its 25th anniversary. Rwanda concluded its EU grant and deepened stakeholder engagement, and Benin hosted a culinary showcase with "Top Chef 2025".
 - **ASEAN ASEAN EBOs** remained highly active, with 4 regional meetings, including one in Phnom Penh. The ASEAN Sustainability Summit aligned green priorities, while multiple countries launched impactful white books. ESG highlights include sustainability awards and summits across the region. Singapore and Vietnam led EU outreach missions to Brussels. Laos and Indonesia deepened regulatory dialogue, while EBO Singapore held its first-ever European Career Connect Week.
 - **East Asia & Pacific** Three regional meetings were held, with plans for quarterly calls. Australia hosted over 50 roundtables and welcomed senior EU envoys. China organised a luncheon with EU Commissioner Šefčovič, and Japan hosted major economic and digital events. Korea marked the EU Digital Trade Agreement and held sustainability awards. EBO Mongolia was active in national policy planning, and Macau focused on improving local business conditions.
 - **South Asia & Middle East EBOWN** expanded into Bangladesh, India, and Saudi Arabia, with Bahrain in progress. High-level meetings with DG INTPA and EBO India/Nepal focused on cooperation. EBO Nepal hosted 21 EU ambassadors, sectoral roundtables, and government engagement, reflecting rising strategic relevance in the region.
 - **Americas & Caribbean EBOs** in the region strengthened engagement with 3 regional meetings and the launch of a WhatsApp group. Key updates include the EU-Mercosur political deal, Canada joining Horizon Europe, and the EU-Chile interim agreement. EBO Venezuela joined the network, with Guyana in progress. Country highlights: Brazil hosted COP30 talks; Canada held its EU Business Forum; Chile promoted its advanced agreement; Trinidad launched CONNECT 2025 and expanded sustainability awards; Venezuela supported private-sector recovery efforts.
 - **Europe & Eastern Partnership** Despite ongoing geopolitical pressures, EBOs focused on business resilience, EU alignment, and regional sustainability. EBO Belarus joined the network. Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia coordinated efforts on sanctions and conflict navigation, while Moldova and Georgia worked on trade facilitation. Regional forums addressed the EU Green Deal and CSDDD. EBO Uzbekistan advanced EU–Central Asia ties, and Mongolia promoted sustainable finance.
- **Values-Driven Membership Growth:** She also reaffirmed the network's rigorous criteria for admitting new members. Only not-for-profit, advocacy-driven organisations closely aligned with EU Delegations and active in the Team Europe approach are eligible. She stressed that network integrity depends on maintaining high standards, citing examples where applications were declined following due diligence checks.
- **Strategic Coordination and Resilience:** In closing, Cornelis emphasised the importance of regional coordination in amplifying EBOWN's global influence. The clusters have become critical hubs of strategic engagement, information sharing, and collective action. She reaffirmed that the strength of EBOWN lies in its regional diversity, proactive collaboration, and the voluntary leadership that drives its work forward.

Advocacy

Following the Regional report, Deputy Chair Adam Dunnett delivered a reflective report that captured the essence of the EBO Worldwide Network's collaborative identity and its enduring commitment to European business advocacy. Framing his remarks around the power of shared purpose and collective effort, Dunnett emphasised the strategic value of the network and its members. His intervention focused on four core areas:

- **Advocacy and Engagement:** Dunnett highlighted the network's growing capacity to influence policy through coordinated engagement. The production of the annual report and a series of position papers reflected the network's deepening role in shaping EU business narratives abroad. He underscored that the success of these initiatives rests on the network's shared mission—to serve as a trusted voice for European companies in third-country markets.
- **Strengthening the Network's Value Proposition:** At the heart of Dunnett's report was a strong belief in the value of peer-to-peer learning. He stressed the importance of connecting across regions, exchanging insights, and supporting each other's work, especially for new EBOs joining the network. The strength of the organisation, he emphasised, lies in its ability to harness the diversity of its members into a unified, strategic platform.
- **Strategic Use of the Annual Meeting:** Dunnett described the annual meeting as a cornerstone of the network's strategic agenda. More than a formal gathering, it serves as a vital space for collaboration, capacity-building, and trust-building. It enables new members to integrate seamlessly, encourages open dialogue around shared challenges, and fosters a deeper understanding of the geopolitical and operational landscape faced by European businesses globally.
- **Recognition and Collective Spirit:** In a personal and appreciative tone, Dunnett acknowledged the tireless efforts of the Board in planning and delivering the meeting. He thanked his colleagues for their commitment and highlighted the importance of recognising the behind-the-scenes work that sustains the network. Above all, he celebrated the collective spirit that defines EBOWN—an organisation built not just on structures, but on a shared belief in the value of working together for the greater good of European businesses worldwide.

Secretary General's Report

The Secretary General Geraldine Smeets made reflections on the evolution, strength, and future direction of the EBO Worldwide Network. Framing her remarks around the collective progress of the network and the trust it has earned globally, she highlighted the value of local impact, institutional credibility, and the importance of visibility in EU cooperation frameworks. Her intervention focused on five core areas:

- **Network Growth and Relevance:** She opened by reflecting on the network's transformation—from a small group of 13 chambers to a vibrant, expanding global platform. This growth results from strong local EBO performance, driving demand among EU Delegations for expansion into new countries. The rising recognition of EBOs as credible actors, especially in new markets, highlights their increasing strategic value.
- **Shared Purpose and Organisational Alignment:** The Secretary General highlighted that all EBOs share a mission to support European businesses and contribute to local development. Despite national differences, their bylaws reflect this dual goal, reinforcing the network's credibility.
- **Institutional Recognition and Visibility:** She echoed Sophie Müller's point that EBOs should become more institutionalised partners in the EU's external economic framework. The Secretary General highlighted the rising importance of EBOWN meetings, both physical and virtual, in increasing the network's influence with new members.
- **Project Engagement and Expert Representation:** Drawing on her experience with EU projects, particularly the EU Business Forum Facilities, she outlined the challenges EBOs face in project implementation, such as underpayment, misaligned expectations, and attempts to bypass local expertise. She emphasised defending the role of EBOs and their experts in EU-funded consortia, ensuring they are valued as equal partners.
- **A Distinctive Brussels-Based Network:** Smeets reaffirmed that EBOWN is unique as the only Brussels-based association representing third-country markets through an active presence. She encouraged members to take pride in this and to highlight their relevance in EU initiatives. Her closing remarks emphasised that no other network connects Brussels and global markets in such an impactful, operational way, and this should be communicated confidently.

In essence, her report was a call urging members to recognise the power of their work, the significance of their visibility, and the network's unique capacity to link European values with real-world market engagement.

Strategic Reflections with DG GROW

- **Alignment with EU Priorities:** EBOs welcomed the growing link between the network and EU strategies like Global Gateway, especially through the Business Advisory Group. This process helps identify where EU investments can best support European businesses abroad.
- **Early Involvement in Projects:** Members stressed the need to be consulted at the design stage of EU-funded projects and to be allowed to actively participate in delivery, not just as observers.
- **Legal and Operational Barriers:** A key challenge remains that EBOs are legally registered outside the EU, which can limit access to project funding and roles, despite their European mission.
- **Call for Member Feedback:** Delegates encouraged members to share their experiences with EU projects to help identify practical barriers and improve future engagement.
- **Need for Structured Dialogue:** Continued engagement with DG GROW and EU institutions is essential to ensure EBOs are both recognised and empowered as key partners in external cooperation.

DG GROW feedback post session

- **Need for Strategic Impact in EU-Funded Projects:** Sophie Müller emphasised that EU investments, especially under Global Gateway, must be strategically placed in areas where they can deliver the most impact and leverage European capabilities effectively.
- **Importance of EBO Feedback on Project Experience:** She encouraged more feedback from EBOs on their experiences with EU-funded projects to help optimise project design and delivery mechanisms, ensuring that they better reflect local realities.
- **Value of EBOs in Project Design and Participation:** Müller acknowledged the importance of consulting EBOs not only during the design phase but also potentially involving them in project implementation, highlighting their relevance and insight in local markets.
- **Legal and Structural Barriers Remain:** She openly recognised the legal and operational difficulties EBOs face when participating in EU-funded projects, particularly due to their non-EU registration status, despite being European in mission and orientation.
- **Continued Commitment from DG GROW:** Müller reiterated DG GROW's support for ensuring EBOs are seen as serious stakeholders in the EU's external economic agenda and included more systematically in the programming and delivery of cooperation instruments.



Treasurer and Governance Report

Florian Gottein, Treasurer of EBOWN, delivered a focused update on the network's financial health and governance reform. He highlighted the importance of collective responsibility in maintaining institutional sustainability and compliance. His intervention centred on four key areas:

- **Membership Fee Collection and Financial Stability:** Florian stressed the importance of keeping EBOWN's finances stable, noting his recent efforts to collect outstanding membership fees from nearly 20 members. He encouraged timely payments, as these remain essential to sustaining operations. He expressed optimism that EBOWN's participation in EU-funded projects would soon begin to diversify income streams, reducing reliance on membership contributions.
- **Project-Based Revenue Generation:** He reaffirmed the network's push to grow project-based funding, with support from Geraldine, Helen, and Freddie. As EBOs become more involved in externally financed initiatives, Gottein emphasised the need to strengthen internal financial processes to responsibly manage increased budgets and reporting obligations.
- **Constitution and By-Laws Modernisation:** Florian reported progress on the long-overdue revision of EBOWN's Constitution, drafted in a different legal and operational era. A Governance Task Force—supported by Freddie and Helen—worked with a Belgian law firm to align the framework with updated legal requirements and the network's expanded membership of nearly 60 organisations.
- **Next Steps in Governance Reform:** Members were informed that the revised Constitution has been circulated and would be presented for endorsement. Once adopted, the by-laws will be updated accordingly. Work is also ongoing to optimise financial operations, including coordination with the network's bank, an unexpectedly complex process in Brussels.

In closing, Florian reminded members to expect 2026 membership invoices and thanked everyone for their continued support. His report underscored that while advocacy remains central, strong financial and governance foundations are critical to the network's future effectiveness.

Capacity Development

Board member Cathy Murphy, delivered a focused update on EBOWN's capacity development portfolio, emphasising the importance of peer learning, practical support, and network-wide inclusivity. Her report centred around three strategic themes:

- **Purpose of the Capacity-Building Role:** Murphy outlined the core objectives of her role: first, to foster a culture of knowledge sharing that strengthens overall performance and coherence across the network; second, to identify common operational challenges faced by EBOs and respond with tailored tools and learning sessions; and third, to ensure that smaller and newer EBOs are not left behind, particularly by improving their understanding of EU institutions and programs. This work aims to create a more informed, equitable, and effective community of European business organisations.
- **Workshops and Activities Delivered:** Over the past year, the capacity development portfolio delivered a range of virtual and in-person workshops. Notable sessions included a webinar on CS3D-informed trade decisions delivered in partnership with the International Trade Centre (ITC), and a session on crafting impactful position papers, co-led with EBO Georgia. Additional highlights included a December briefing with DG Trade on the new European Commission setup, an SME-focused training with the ECIP Helpdesk, and a session on compliance strategies under the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), led by fellow board member Adam. At the current meeting, three new workshops were scheduled, including breakouts and an in-depth SME session with ECIP.
- **Call for Feedback and Peer Involvement:** She urged EBOs to suggest workshop topics for upcoming periods and invited experienced members to lead sessions, aiming to showcase internal expertise. Members were encouraged to connect during the week to help create a member-driven learning agenda.

In closing, Murphy reinforced that the strength of EBOWN lies in its members' willingness to share, support, and grow together. The capacity development stream, she noted, is designed to ensure that no EBO is left behind—and that the collective experience of the network becomes a powerful asset for all.

Network Enlargement

Board member Freddie Hoeglund, presented an overview of EBOWN's network expansion efforts, highlighting the importance of strategic outreach and responsiveness to emerging opportunities. His remarks focused on three core areas:

- **Approach to Network Expansion:** Hoeglund outlined the process for establishing new EBOs, beginning with outreach to EU Delegations and local European business communities in target markets. Where momentum exists, he engages in briefings to encourage formal EBO creation—often supported initially by Commission funding, with the long-term aim of financial self-sufficiency. He encouraged members to alert him to promising markets or informal business groups that could evolve into formal EBOs.
- **Continued Growth and New Members:** EBOWN has grown steadily from its 13 founding members in 2011 to 59 active EBOs today. In the past year alone, nine new EBOs joined the network, including Mozambique, Liberia, Uzbekistan (2024), and India, Bangladesh, Belarus, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, and Guyana (2025). An introductory session was planned for new members to share more about their work.
- **Strategic Regional Priorities:** The GCC region remains a key focus, with Saudi Arabia now formally part of the network and progress continuing in Bahrain. Other active development efforts are underway in Kenya, Serbia, and Pakistan. A notable absence remains the United States, where no formal EBO currently exists at the federal level. Freddie called for support in reaching out to the delegation in Washington, noting that representation in the U.S. is increasingly important given the global relevance of U.S.-EU business relations.

Hoeglund acknowledged Smeets for her meticulous screening of new member applications, Helen for leading early-stage engagements with EU Delegations and prospective EBOs, and the EBO Coordinator for consistent follow-up and administrative coordination. He praised the collective effort behind the successful enlargement and reinforced its strategic value for the network. In conclusion, Freddie emphasised that network enlargement not only increases EBOWN's reach but strengthens its collective advocacy voice, ensuring EU businesses are represented in key global markets.

Strategic Reflections with DG GROW

Sophie Müller shared strategic reflections on the future of EBOWN's expansion, with a particular focus on the United States. She highlighted institutional gaps and practical steps to strengthen representation. Key points included:

- **Need for a Balanced European Voice in the U.S:** Müller agreed on the urgency of establishing a broader EU business voice in the U.S., noting that current national or sectoral actors often reflect fragmented interests, leaving a gap in comprehensive advocacy.
- **Opportunity for Engagement with DG GROW:** She proposed connecting with the EU Delegation in Washington, where a new officer will start in September. Even without a formal EBO, Müller encouraged launching regular dialogue platforms to represent EU business views.
- **Addressing U.S. Regulatory Barriers:** Müller noted the lack of structured feedback from EU businesses on issues like public procurement and state-level regulation, which hampers DG GROW's role in forums like the WTO TBT Committee.
- **Prioritising the U.S. in 2025–26:** She endorsed the U.S. as a strategic priority, calling for efforts to establish or coordinate an EBO presence. Her message reinforced the need for institutional visibility in key markets and strong membership onboarding practices.

Her remarks positioned the U.S. as a critical next frontier for EBOWN, requiring both strategic advocacy and operational readiness.

Visibility

Board member Edwige Bibilary, presented a concise update on EBOWN's visibility efforts, highlighting both external outreach and internal coordination. Her remarks focused on improving communication flow, strengthening digital presence, and enhancing the network's profile within EU institutions. Key takeaways include:

- **Two Dimensions of Visibility:** Bibilary outlined two key forms of visibility: external visibility, primarily through newsletters, LinkedIn, and the website; and internal visibility, through improved communication and content-sharing among members. She noted that four newsletters were circulated this year, but called for more timely input from EBOs to improve content accuracy and relevance.
- **Call for Timely Content Contributions:** She emphasised the need for members to share updates, even short summaries or highlights, regularly. Without input, the communications team resorts to mining EBO websites—an inefficient process that may miss what's most important locally. She thanked Helen and the EBO Coordinator for their support and encouraged all EBOs to submit material directly to them.
- **Website and Digital Tools:** Bibilary highlighted improvements to the EBOWN website, including updated member profiles and a growing section on regional impact. The aim is to better reflect the network's scope and demonstrate its role in delivering tangible outcomes in partner markets. A new visibility toolkit will also help new EBOs learn from established ones.
- **Increased Recognition from EU Institutions:** She noted that visibility efforts are starting to pay off, with increased recognition of EBOWN within the European Commission, greater inclusion in coordination efforts, and more frequent references to EBOWN's activities in institutional communication.

In concluding, members were asked to share examples of events, publications, and best practices to help build a unified, professional image. Bibilary concluded by reminding everyone that visibility is a shared responsibility, and consistent updates are key to reinforcing EBOWN's reputation and relevance.

SME Internationalisation

Board member John Braeckeveldt, delivered an enthusiastic and insightful update on his portfolio focused on SME internationalisation and networking. Framing his remarks around the real-world needs of European companies abroad, he highlighted both strategic gaps and opportunities. His intervention focused on four core areas:

- **Supporting EU Business Decision-Making Abroad:** Braeckeveldt emphasised that one of the core roles of EBOs is to advise and support European companies and investors in making informed, context-aware decisions in third markets. He noted that EBOs serve as the local expertise, often missing in EU internationalisation support structures.
- **Addressing Structural Gaps:** Referencing an EU-wide study on SME internationalisation, Braeckeveldt highlighted the identified gap in local business knowledge and support. He stressed that EBOs are already filling this gap and should be further integrated into EU frameworks like the Enterprise Europe Network and Global Gateway.
- **Strengthening Advocacy through Position Papers:** He called for greater effort to develop EBO-led position papers that advocate for fair competition for European companies operating under EU legislation in third markets. These papers can help ensure that EU firms are protected from unfair practices and regulatory inconsistencies.

Quoting a diplomat, Braeckeveldt described the EU as a “big ship” that takes time to turn, but moves fast once aligned. He expressed confidence that the shift is underway and that EBOs are at the forefront of a new, powerful phase of EU external economic engagement. He closed by reaffirming pride in the network's role in supporting European competitiveness globally.

2. Executive Director's Report

EBOWN Executive Director, Helen de Mel presented a comprehensive annual overview, reflecting the operational, strategic, and institutional achievements of the EBO Worldwide Network across 2024–2025. Her report highlighted performance against priority areas, regional engagement, governance improvements, and the outlook for 2025–2026. Key themes included:

- **Strategic Priorities and Key Deliverables:** Helen structured the year's success around five strategic pillars: cooperation, economic diplomacy, SME support, visibility, and Global Gateway alignment. Key deliverables included the Sustainability Summit, Tanzania SME Forum, SME trainings in Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and trade inputs from Mongolia. Visibility efforts were strengthened through four newsletters, a revamped website, and country-led initiatives like the Philippines Sustainability Awards.
- **Global Gateway & Africa-EBO Alignment:** Helen highlighted ongoing work under the EU, Africa Business Forum Facility, aiming to bring African EBOs up to par with those in ASEAN through surveys, capacity building, and alignment with sectoral advocacy standards. EBOWN also participated in the Business Advisory Group and events with the ECA-DFI platform.
- **Network Expansion and Institutional Growth:** The network welcomed nine new EBOs—its largest annual expansion. A core output was the development of a unified EBO concept and service model to support onboarding in new markets like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Pakistan, and Kenya, with more in the pipeline (e.g., Serbia and Guinea).
- **Policy, Advocacy, and Institutional Engagement:** Helen reported strong advocacy performance, including papers on CS3D, the Multiannual Financial Framework, and engagement with DG INTPA and DG GROW. She noted the need to deepen links with DG Trade, especially at the network level.
- **Governance and Financial Health:** Thanks to Treasurer Florian's efforts, 100% of membership fees were collected, and the network recorded a €919 surplus. EBOWN also secured its first project-based revenue, and operational mechanisms were improved, including the updated Constitution and bylaws.
- **Knowledge Tools and Onboarding:** Key tools launched included the Regional Business Sentiment Report, a digital onboarding toolkit, and an intranet-based resource hub. Helen urged EBOs to utilise these materials and maintain regular communication with EU Delegations.
- **Regional Coordination and Best Practice Sharing:** Helen celebrated a rise in EBO-to-EBO dialogue, stronger coordination in South Asia, and flagship forums in Zanzibar, Chile, and ASEAN. Emerging markets like Pakistan and India are expected to shift regional dynamics, potentially overtaking China in network scale by 2045.
- **Communications and Outreach:** The EBOWN contact database has grown to 1,400 EU stakeholders. Helen encouraged members to tap into this network via the EBOWN Secretariat, especially to strengthen Brussels-level visibility and stakeholder engagement.
- **Outlook for 2025–2026:** Helen concluded with forward-looking priorities:
 - I. Institutionalising EBOWN within EU external action
 - II. Strengthening SME internationalisation support
 - III. Expanding advocacy, visibility, and capacity-building
 - IV. Broadening the revenue base to support a more robust Secretariat.

Her closing message was clear: EBOWN is evolving into a strategic interface for the EU's global business engagement, and now is the time to consolidate, professionalise, and grow.

Strategic Reflections with DG GROW

The post-session exchange between EOWN members and DG GROW offered a valuable opportunity to surface practical concerns from the field and clarify the Commission's evolving positions on regulatory simplification, project funding, and EU preference in public procurement. The dialogue covered three central themes:

1. Regulatory Simplification and Competitiveness Framework

DG GROW confirmed that under the EU's competitiveness agenda, multiple simplification packages are underway.

- The first targeted sustainability reporting requirements—including CSRD and forced labour disclosures—aiming to reduce duplication and streamline processes.
- The second, introduced last week, is SME-focused, proposing exemptions for small and mid-cap companies and introducing digital-only reporting obligations (e.g., for packaging rules).
- A third package, due this summer, will address environmental legislation.

Müller emphasised that these efforts are part of a structured legislative clean-up, including mapping duplications and pushing back on last-minute additions made during Council-Parliament negotiations. A full press kit and supporting documents are available for network dissemination.

2. EOWN Input: Funding Gaps in SME Internationalisation Support

EOWN members raised concerns that following EU-funded trade and investment seminars, companies often seek in-depth market research, which currently lacks financial support.

One EBO explained they fund such seminars themselves, but face challenges when SMEs later require custom market data, typically financed by national agencies like ICEX (Spain). They recommended that DG GROW consider enabling co-financed follow-up services under the EU's SME internationalisation strategy.

3. Procurement of EU Expertise and Equipment in EU-Funded Projects

Another major concern highlighted by EBOs was the lack of preference for EU expertise and equipment in EU-funded projects implemented via government contracts in third countries. They noted it is common to see projects funded by the EU sourcing goods from non-EU suppliers—notably China—due to the absence of binding preference policies.

Müller acknowledged the sensitivity of the EU preference debate. She confirmed that last week's Market Strategy included a forward-looking initiative on public procurement, not only for internal markets but with potential "spill-over" into external cooperation. At the Competitiveness Council, only two Member States opposed introducing some form of European preference in public procurement. Müller reinforced the view that EU taxpayer-funded projects in third countries should not disproportionately benefit non-EU firms, especially those that are state-subsidised.

She noted that DG GROW and the EVP have raised this position with other services, including DG INTPA and the EIB, and are pressing for a stronger alignment between EU industrial policy and external funding mechanisms.

Müller thanked the EBOs for raising concrete, operational issues that often go unnoticed in Brussels but are crucial for policy refinement. She confirmed that feedback loops with the network—particularly on simplification impacts, SME support needs, and procurement inconsistencies—are vital and will inform future instruments and strategic dialogues.

4. EBO-led Project initiatives

Board member Adam Dunnett, EBO China led the session, highlighting the growing role of EBOs in shaping and contributing to EU-relevant policy and project-based work. Key initiatives included:

- **CS3D Position Paper:** Dunnett presented the network-wide position paper on the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D), which reflects EBOWN perspectives from multiple markets. The paper clarifies local implementation realities and calls for predictable, SME-sensitive compliance frameworks.
- **Surveys on Consultancies & the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF):** EBO China also led two targeted surveys: One mapping EBO experiences in working with EU-funded consultancies, highlighting procurement and inclusion gaps. Another gathering of EBOWN feedback on the EU's MFF, identifying barriers to network participation in funding mechanisms and underlining the need for greater consultation during project design phases.
- **Business Sentiment Survey:** Nele Cornelis (EBO Singapore) shared progress on the Business Sentiment Survey, which aggregates firm-level insights across regions. It provides an evidence base for EBO advocacy and feeds into broader competitiveness dialogues with EU institutions.
- **Global Gateway & Regional Cooperation Paper:** Johanna Sandberg (EBO Rwanda) introduced a position paper on Global Gateway and regional cooperation, with recommendations on how EBOs can be better integrated into Team Europe initiatives, particularly through their role in local value chain development and investment facilitation.
- **Family Friendly Alliance Initiative:** Freddie Hoeglund (EBO Taiwan) and Stefan Ernst (EBO Korea) jointly presented a new initiative promoting family-friendly workplace practices among European companies abroad. The project aims to position EU businesses as leaders in inclusive employment policies, aligned with social sustainability goals.
- **Government Relations Academy:** Tadzio Schilling (EBO Russia) introduced the Government Relations Academy, a peer-learning model designed to strengthen EBOs' ability to engage with public authorities and EU delegations. The initiative also seeks to formalise knowledge exchange on lobbying strategies and institutional engagement.

Dunnett emphasised that these initiatives reflect EBOWNs' growing strategic value, both as policy contributors and project partners. He called for continued input, peer support, and alignment across the network to position EBOWN as a trusted, policy-relevant actor within the EU's external action ecosystem.

5. Presentation of New EBOs

Board Member Freddie Hoeglund led the formal presentation of the newest members of the EBO Worldwide Network, highlighting the network's continued global expansion across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe. This session underscored the growing demand for unified EU business representation in emerging and complex markets.

- **EBO India – Sonia Prashar & Sanjay Dubari:** The Federation of European Business in India (FEBI) was established in 2023, backed by the EU Delegation and European embassies. With 130 members already, FEBI is shaping sectoral advocacy and pushing for a unified EU business voice amid renewed FTA negotiations. Sectoral committees have been launched in automotive and digital, with others underway. FEBI aims to position Europe as a high-value investment partner in India.
- **EBO Bangladesh – Nuria Lopez:** Launched in 2023, EBO Bangladesh, supported by the EU Delegation, is strengthening its institution and advocating against trade and investment barriers. It aims to boost European private sector visibility, grow membership, and enhance its voice amid rising competition from the U.S. and Asia.
- **EBO Belarus – Filip Vandenbroele:** EBO Belarus, established in 2020, serves as a vital link between European businesses and Belarusian stakeholders. Despite geopolitical challenges, it collaborates with the EU Delegation to promote networking and policy engagement.
- **EBO Saudi Arabia – Kristijonas Gedvilas:** European Chamber of Commerce in Saudi Arabia (ECCSA), founded in 2024, quickly grew to 45 members with strong political support. Recognised by Saudi and EU governments, it has sectoral committees in logistics and energy, with upcoming ones in ICT and healthcare, aiming to formalise EU business advocacy in the Gulf.
- **EBO Mozambique, Liberia, Venezuela, Uzbekistan.** These EBOs were acknowledged as new members, with EBO Uzbekistan notably recognised for its successful summit and regional leadership in Central Asia.

6. The IP Helpdesk – Good Practices from Around the Globe

Board Member Cathy Murphy, introduced the session as a follow-up to the February webinar, offering a deeper dive into IP protection tools and strategies available to European SMEs. The session featured experts from the EU IP Helpdesks in Latin America, India, China, and Southeast Asia, and focused on best practices, legal preparedness, and support services available to the EBO network.

- **Raising IP Awareness Among SMEs:** The session opened with a strong call to action: SMEs underestimate IP protection. With studies showing IP-owning firms double revenue per employee, the speakers emphasised the importance of early registration of trademarks, patents, designs, copyrights, trade secrets, and domain names to ensure competitiveness and market access.
- **Regional Insights and Best Practices:** Presenters from Latin America and India discussed SME risks like trademark hijacking, weak patents, and unenforceable licenses. Southeast Asia and China highlighted challenges such as first-to-file rules and the need for local language registration. The key message: IP enforcement begins before entering the market.
- **Enforcement and Strategic Preparation:** SMEs were advised to maintain well-organised documentation, prepare IP strategies 12 months before entering a new market, and leverage international treaties such as the Madrid System and Patent Cooperation Treaty. Speakers stressed that early mistakes in filings could undermine global protections.
- **EU Support Tools and Collaboration Opportunities:** The EU IP Helpdesk offer free, non-legal advisory services, webinars, publications, and training for SMEs, including country-specific risk assessments and pre-registration support. EBOs were encouraged to partner with the helpdesks to deliver SME training, especially in high-risk markets such as China and Latin America.
- **Judicial and Legal Capacity Challenges:** During Q&A, participants expressed concerns about weak IP enforcement in Africa and developing markets, citing slow courts and legal loopholes. Speakers noted EU efforts to train judges and improve IP law enforcement.

Murphy closed by encouraging EBOs to treat the IP Helpdesk as strategic partners. She highlighted the value of embedding IP training into capacity-building activities and urged members to connect during the networking session to explore custom collaborations that help shield SMEs with knowledge and tools from day one.

7. Best Practices & Strategic Engagement Breakouts

The final stretch of day one concluded with renewed momentum and practical exchanges that truly reflect the strength of the network. It began with the EOWN Best Practice Workshops organised by Board Member Cathy Murphy, which provided a grounded space for reflection, learning, and peer exchange on what works in building resilient, responsive organisations. Whether it was about board management, member engagement, or adapting to shifting donor landscapes, the session highlighted the practical intelligence embedded within our community.

Participants then divided into two breakout rooms, each tackling a key dimension of the shared mission.

- **In Breakout Session 1**, the session on Engaging the EU Institutions, led by Delphine Rousselet (EBO Vietnam), Stefan Ernst (EBO Korea), and Freddie Hoeglund (EBO Taiwan), with moderation by Cathy Murphy, focused on evolving our institutional relationships beyond access and towards true partnership. The discussion touched on coordination challenges, practical tools for visibility, and the importance of sustained, well-documented engagement. Members shared experiences navigating the Brussels machinery and emphasised alignment with EU priorities as essential to credibility.
- **In parallel, the session** on Engaging the Global Gateway, facilitated by Ophélie N'guessan and Florence Moreau (EBO Ivory Coast), Marie Louise Norton-Murray (EBO Trinidad & Tobago), and Florian Gottein (EBO Philippines) with moderation by Helen De Mel, brought forward dynamic regional reflections on how the Gateway can be made more tangible and inclusive. Key takeaways included the need for clearer entry points, project tracking tools, and stronger local consultation. The dialogue underscored the urgency to connect EU policy ambition with the operational realities EBOs face on the ground.

DAY 2

5 Key Takeaways

From Insight to Impact – EBOs Driving the EU's Global Competitiveness Agenda

1. Competitiveness is now the EU's central strategic imperative, linking prosperity, security, and resilience.
2. EBOs must embed into the policy implementation cycle, not just consultations—especially via ‘Have Your Say’ and mission letters.
3. The Clean Industrial Deal and Critical Raw Materi strategy demand stronger partnerships—EBOWN can bridge supply, diplomacy, and green markets.
4. Global Gateway must evolve from outreach to co-creation, with EBOWN integrated in planning, resourcing, and execution.
5. Trade policy is becoming more flexible and defensive—EBOWN intelligence is essential to maintain fair access and EU firm competitiveness abroad.

Shaping Europe's
Global Business
Voice

The day's consensus reaffirmed that the EU's external action must align competitiveness, regulatory coherence, and Global Gateway ambitions. EBOs were recognised as essential actors in:

- Delivering local insight.
- De-risking EU investments.
- Shaping clean, fair, and practical trade ecosystems

European Commission's Evolving Policy Priorities (2024–2029)

Frederic Van Zinnicq Bergmann (Secretariat-General) outlined the Commission's strategic shift towards competitiveness, resilience, and global partnerships. Key priorities include:

- Economic prosperity, security, green transition, rule of law, and EU enlargement.
- Regulatory simplification via three upcoming legislative packages.
- Emphasis on implementation and co-creation with stakeholders, urging EBOs to engage via platforms like 'Have Your Say', mission letters, and strategic dialogues.

EBO members stressed the need for:

- Greater inclusion in implementation phases.
- Clarity on procurement preferences and consistent application of EU rules abroad.

EU Competitiveness Compass & Clean Industrial Deal

Carsten Schierenbeck and Carl-Christian Kuehl (DG GROW) presented a transformative framework linking competitiveness with climate goals:

- Strategic pillars: Innovation (AI, biotech), clean industry, raw material autonomy.
- Enablers: Simplified regulation, SME competitiveness test, financing tools, skills development, and market coordination.
- The Clean Industrial Deal includes €19M for skills, Industrial Decarbonisation Bank plans, and sectoral strategies for steel, automotive, and bioeconomy.
- Critical Raw Materials (CRM) Strategy aims for 40% EU processing by 2030 and strategic partnerships with countries like Canada and Chile.

EBOs from Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa flagged CRM diplomacy gaps, CBAM implementation risks, and called for more EU industry champions.

Global Gateway and Private Sector Engagement

Isabel Emerson (DG INTPA) showcased the Global Gateway architecture and its business-facing mechanisms:

- BAG, Coalition of the Willing, and Team National structure collaborative entry points for EU business engagement.
- Business fora are vital catalysts but must shift from visibility to substantive co-design, including B2B matchmaking and technical visibility.
- Digital tools like the Global Gateway portal provide market info, contacts, pipelines, and financing support.

EBOs requested:

- Structured inclusion in forum planning.
- Recognition and funding for logistical and coordination roles.
- Integration of trade fairs and regional business forums.

Clean Trade, Strategic Industries & Trade Enforcement

Denis Redonnet (DG TRADE) stressed the need for “de-siloed” trade diplomacy amid rising global volatility:

- EU is modernising trade via FTAs and Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships (CTIPs).
- Key focus: Ensure that green regulation does not undermine competitiveness.
- EBOs are vital as feedback loops and local enforcement informants, particularly on non-tariff barriers, procurement distortions, and SME access.

Discussions called for:

- Clarifying FTA implementation.
- Balancing CS3D and CBAM with business realities.
- Public procurement rules favouring EU firms.

1. Roundtable Summary: European Commission's New Policy Priorities

Frederic Van Zinnicq Bergmann, Coordinator, Secretariat-General, European Commission, delivered a strategic overview of the European Commission's evolving political and policy agenda, outlining its vision for the 2024–2029 cycle and the implications for business. His intervention focused on the Commission's drive for competitiveness, simplification, and global influence, while inviting greater engagement from EBOWN in shaping implementation.

- **Strategic Shift Toward Competitiveness and Prosperity:** The next Commission's agenda centres on competitiveness within the 'Europe's Choice' narrative, emphasising economic resilience and productivity. Reports by Letta and Draghi advocate reindustrialising Europe to boost innovation, growth, and global standing. Simplifying regulations and supporting SMEs are key to this strategy.
- **Thematic Priorities for 2024–2029:** Van Zinnicq Bergmann outlined seven thematic priorities which will frame the Commission's next term:
 - **Economic Prosperity and Competitiveness:** Includes better market access, easier capital access for SMEs, and supportive regulations.
 - **Security and Defence:** Focus on strategic autonomy, European defense, and resilience to hybrid threats.
 - **Social Resilience:** Promoting inclusive growth and addressing labour market needs & skills gaps across the EU.
 - **Green Transition and Food Security:** Advancing the circular economy and decarbonisation while ensuring industrial competitiveness and supply chain stability.
 - **Democracy and Rule of Law:** Strengthening institutional integrity, democratic processes, and the rule of law within an expanded Union.
 - **Global Partnerships and Enlargement:** Preparing for future enlargement (e.g. Western Balkans, Ukraine), while strengthening strategic partnerships with India, the Mediterranean, Africa, and ASEAN.
 - **Implementation, Simplification, and Budgetary Efficiency:** Focus on delivery, reducing red tape, and realigning instruments for effective use of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and strategic investment vehicles.
- **Driving Simplification:** The Commission is reviewing its rules to ease business compliance, introducing two simplification packages: one for sustainability reporting and another for SME relief. A third package on environmental compliance is expected by summer. The review also aims to reduce reporting burdens caused by political compromises.
- **Leveraging the Commission Work Programme (CWP):** The Commission Work Programme translates political priorities into actions. Van Zinnicq Bergmann urged EBOs to track and engage with it, as it's key for influencing agenda-setting. The 2025 CWP has 51 new initiatives, including 11 on simplification. Annexe II lists "fitness checks" and evaluations, which are good opportunities for business input. He emphasised that better implementation, not just legislation, will be a major focus for the next Commission.
- **Geopolitical Context: Security, Trade, and Enlargement:** The EU is reforming its policies due to the Ukraine war, U.S. protectionism, and global competition. Its focus is on enlargement, external readiness, internal reforms, and increasing global influence through initiatives like Global Gateway and new partnerships in energy, digital, and clean tech sectors.
- **Engagement Opportunities for EBOs:** Van Zinnicq Bergmann encouraged EBOs to engage more proactively with the Commission. Several mechanisms exist:
 - **Mission Letters to Commissioners:** These set the expectation of stakeholder dialogue during implementation phases.
 - **'Have Your Say' Portal:** An early access platform where stakeholders can comment on planned initiatives.
 - **Strategic Dialogues:** Emerging formats that allow for informal engagement and structured policy feedback.

He emphasised that implementation is now a shared responsibility. EBOs can contribute not only through consultation but also in capacity-building, especially for EU companies in complex regulatory environments abroad.

The Commission's focus allows EBOs to act as trusted intermediaries between EU businesses and institutions, helping to create a more competitive Europe.

Strategic Reflections

EBO members raised several issues during the session:

- The difficulty of ensuring EU preference in procurement tied to EU-funded projects in third countries.
- Concerns about fragmented trade relationships with third markets favouring non-EU players;
- The need for consistent application of EU policy objectives through implementing partners (e.g. consultancies, DFIs, etc.);
- A call for clearer EU guidance and capacity-building support to help SMEs and MNCs navigate complex partner country regulations.

Van Zinnicq Bergmann acknowledged these concerns and reiterated that the next phase of EU policymaking will demand deeper cooperation with business stakeholders to ensure that legislative ambition translates into on-the-ground impact.

2. EU Competitiveness Compass and Critical Raw Materials

This session was presented by Carsten Schierenbeck (Strategy – Single Market & Industrial Policy) and Carl-Christian Kuehl (Raw Materials – Energy Intensive Industries). The European Union has been focusing on its competitiveness through the EU Competitiveness Compass, which highlights key priorities and policy shifts aimed at strengthening the bloc's economic resilience. In this context, it is essential to understand how these strategies are being reframed to adapt to changing global dynamics, ensuring sustained growth and innovation. Carsten outlined how the EU is responding to a dramatically shifting political and economic context. The new Competitiveness Compass is a response to recent crises—COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and global industrial competition—and reflects a renewed focus on industrial resilience, decarbonisation, and innovation. Although Ursula von der Leyen remains Commission President, shifts in European Parliament majorities and external crises have pushed competitiveness to the forefront.

• Three Strategic Pillars

- Innovation Gap Closure: Focus on AI, biotech, quantum computing, and space. Europe lags in global Value Chains (5%) compared to the US (50%) and China (40%).
- Decarbonisation & Competitiveness: A Clean Industrial Deal ties industrial competitiveness to the Green Deal.
- Reducing Dependencies: Especially in energy, materials, and technologies through stronger trade partnerships and resource strategies.

• Five Enablers

- Simplification: Acknowledging past burdens, new regulatory frameworks aim to ease compliance for SMEs (e.g. SME Competitiveness Test).
- Single Market Reform: Addressing the “terrible 10” barriers.
- Financing: A new EU Competitiveness Fund is in the pipeline.
- Skills & Labour: Focused support despite EU's limited competence in education policy.
- Coordination Mechanisms: Including a new Competitiveness Coordination Tool.

• Clean Industry Deal: Schierenbeck next presented on the Practical Implementation of the Clean Industry Deal. The Clean Industrial Deal targets both energy-intensive industries and leaders in cleantech. Six drivers structure the implementation:

- Affordable Energy: New action plans and permitting frameworks.
- Lead Markets: Green public procurement with resilience, sustainability, and EU-content criteria.
- Financing: Innovation Fund, InvestEU, and an upcoming Industrial Decarbonisation Bank.
- Access to Raw Materials & Circularity: To be addressed by Carl-Christian Kuehl.
- Skills Development: €19 million via Erasmus+.
- Global Trade and Partnerships: Leveraging Trade & Investment Agreements and Defence Instruments.

• Sectoral action plans are underway for automotive, steel/metals, chemicals, and the bioeconomy.

- **The Critical Raw Materials (CRM):** Next, Carl-Christian Kuehl explained that the CRM initiative aims to enhance supply security and support strategic projects within the European Union. According to speaker Carl-Christian Kuehl, by 2030, the objectives include sourcing at least 10% of CRM demand from domestic extraction, deriving 40% from EU processing, and recycling 25% within the EU. Additionally, the plan seeks to limit dependency on any single third country to a maximum of 65% for each material. Strategic Project Designation The EU has designated 47 strategic projects across extraction, processing, recycling, and substitution. Benefits include faster permitting and stronger political/financial backing. A parallel list for strategic projects in third countries is expected shortly.
- **Diplomacy and Partnerships:** The EU is expanding raw materials diplomacy, having signed CRM partnerships with Australia, Canada, Chile, Brazil, and more. Kuehl acknowledged gaps—e.g., with Saudi Arabia and the Dominican Republic—and welcomed further dialogue via EBOs.

This session underlined the EU's decisive pivot toward competitiveness, industrial sovereignty, and sustainability. While regulatory and financial tools are being aligned with business needs, the EU's strategic success will depend on its ability to build meaningful partnerships abroad. The involvement of EBOs is vital in promoting EU interests, de-risking investment, and shaping practical pathways for business engagement in clean industry and critical materials. The Commission reaffirmed its openness to input, citing mechanisms like the “Have Your Say” portal and mission letters mandating structured business dialogues with Commissioners.

Strategic Reflections

- **Business Perspective:** EBOs, particularly from China and Ukraine, highlighted how regulatory complexity and trade tensions are pushing companies to seek predictable and stable environments—Europe is becoming a top relocation choice.
- **SME & Net-Zero Funding:** Delegates called for clarity on grant mechanisms for carbon-neutral transitions.
- **C-BAM Concerns:** Ukraine and other non-EU producers raised concerns about cost burdens from the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (C-BAM).
- **CRM Diplomacy Gaps:** Saudi Arabia and Caribbean countries feel under-engaged by the EU despite their CRM potential.
- **Call for Financial Sector Champions:** South Africa raised the absence of EU-based champions akin to Glencore to lead global trading and mining investment.
- **Circularity & Green Premiums:** EBOs were urged to advocate for sustainable business practices and help develop “green lead markets.”

3. Priorities, Global Gateway Implementation, Business Fora, and EBOWN Support

Led by Isabel Emerson, Team Leader Public-Private Dialogue Support, DG INTPA, the session opened by affirming the European Commission's commitment to scaling the Global Gateway, emphasising the Team Europe approach as a structural principle. She framed EBOs as critical partners for DG INTPA's Private Sector Engagement and Employment Unit. The overarching objective is to promote investment and strengthen EU private sector engagement in partner countries, aligned with key priority areas such as energy, digital, transport, health, and climate.

- **Engagement Mechanisms: BAG, Coalition of the Willing, Team National**
 - **Business Advisory Group (BAG):** With 59 members and 10 observers, BAG works through sectoral sub-groups (e.g., climate, energy, transport) to provide private-sector-informed recommendations. It also addresses persistent concerns such as access to information and transparency in Global Gateway implementation.
 - **Coalition of the Willing:** Designed to coordinate the private sector, financial institutions, and EU Delegations for large-scale strategic projects. Projects cited include sargassum valorisation in Latin America, green shipping corridors in Africa, and the trans-Caspian transport corridor.
 - **Team National:** Encourages national governments to lead private sector project proposals, mobilise domestic tools (e.g. DFIs), and present them to DG INTPA. This “whole-of-government” approach is designed to align with EU geostrategic priorities and unlock blended financing, grants, and guarantees.
- **Business Fora as Catalysts:** Emerson emphasised the strategic role of EU-organised business fora as public-private engagement spaces that connect EU firms with local partners and officials. These fora foster dialogue, identify bottlenecks, and surface investment opportunities. A list of past and upcoming fora was shared, with sectors such as agriculture, energy, ITC, logistics, and mining highlighted. Delegations are encouraged to use these fora as part of their longer-term EU private sector engagement strategies.
- **Digital Tools and Access to Support:** Participants were directed to the [Global Gateway Opportunities portal](#) as a central hub for:
 - Project pipelines and sectors
 - Contact information for EU Delegations
 - Available EU private sector support tools
 - Guidance on EU DFIs and guarantee mechanisms
 - The EU toolbox includes technical assistance, 360° support packages, and market facilitation tools—many deployed at the country level by EU Delegations or implementing partners.
- **EBOWN Feedback and Recommendations:** During the open discussion, EBO representatives welcomed the detailed overview and acknowledged improvements in clarity and access to information. However, several recurring concerns emerged:
 - **Information Gap and Inclusion:** Many EBOs expressed a lack of awareness or involvement in Global Gateway initiatives and noted limited outreach by EU Delegations. EBO members called for a more systematic approach, advocating for earlier inclusion in business forum planning, project identification, and pipeline discussions.
 - **Business Forum Effectiveness:** Although business forums are politically high-profile, many EBOs flagged insufficient structure for B2B matchmaking, exhibitor inclusion, and local company participation. There were strong calls to move from ad-hoc consultation to co-design with EBOs, especially where EBOs mobilise member resources voluntarily.
 - **Recognition and Resource Support:** EBOs requested fairer visibility and recognition for their pro bono work, particularly in co-hosting events and mobilising companies. Funding for logistical coordination, visibility, and technical support remains an unresolved issue.
 - **Expanding Modalities of Engagement:** Calls were made to incorporate market-led events such as trade fairs and expos into the EU's strategic planning, with joint participation, technical expert panels, and political backing. Regional business forums were suggested to improve EU brand visibility and strengthen EU business voices across integrated markets.

The session emphasised the importance of the Global Gateway and EU business fora to boost European competitiveness and investment abroad. EBOs are vital but faces communication and resource gaps. To maximise EU private sector potential, better collaboration, co-design, and visibility for EBOs are needed.

4. EU's Evolving Trade Policy and Strategic Engagement

Denis Redonnet, Deputy Director-General & Chief Trade Enforcement Officer, DG TRADE opened the session by reflecting on the profound shifts currently reshaping global trade. He emphasised the challenges created by the United States' unilateral trade actions, which are impacting long-established international norms. This, he noted, is not merely a bilateral EU-US concern, but one with global ramifications, risking trade diversion and volatility. In response, the EU is pursuing stabilising dialogues with the US while simultaneously preparing counter measures and enhancing surveillance mechanisms to monitor potential import surges and ensure fair competition for EU industry.

- **Expanding and Modernising EU Trade Policy:** In parallel, the EU is actively accelerating the negotiation of new Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), particularly in South and Southeast Asia, including India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. Redonnet underscored the importance of using FTAs to provide economic certainty in a shifting global environment. He also highlighted the EU's move toward more flexible, sectoral arrangements such as Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships (CTIPs) and Digital Trade Agreements to foster integration where comprehensive FTAs may not be feasible.
- **Balancing Green Regulation and Market Access:** A recurring theme was the EU's commitment to green regulatory objectives—CS3D, CBAM, deforestation regulation, and others—balanced with a pragmatic need for regulatory simplification and implementation feasibility. Redonnet emphasised that while these regulations serve important public interests, their impact on global supply chains and the private sector must be considered. The Commission is exploring ways to reduce complexity and avoid overburdening companies, while still upholding sustainability goals.
- **EU Business Advocacy and Trade Policy Execution:** He welcomed the EBO Worldwide Network's role as both advocate and feedback channel. He encouraged EBOs to report implementation challenges from their regions and flagged the importance of close coordination with EU Delegations, national embassies, and Trade Promotion Organisations (TPOs). Redonnet stressed the value of practical, real-time intelligence from businesses to ensure EU trade policy remains responsive and relevant on the ground.
- **Engagement with Strategic Regions:** Key interventions came from EBOs in India, Korea, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Topics included progress on FTAs, implementation gaps, procurement distortions, and the competitiveness of EU green industries—especially in offshore wind and renewable energy sectors. The loss of market share to Chinese competitors was raised multiple times, prompting Redonnet to advocate for stronger public policy support for EU firms in strategic green technology sectors.

In closing, Redonnet emphasised the need to “de-silo” EU external engagement: aligning trade, regulatory cooperation, development assistance, and Global Gateway investments into a coherent value proposition. He acknowledged the EU's reputation as a fair, rules-based partner, and called for deeper collaboration with EBOs to strengthen that proposition.

Strategic Reflections

During the session, EBOWN representatives engaged Denis Redonnet in a constructive and forward-looking dialogue focused on trade enforcement, regulatory complexity, and strategic competitiveness. The following themes emerged as central points of discussion:

- **FTA Implementation and Market Access Barriers**

- EBO India and EBO Korea flagged implementation gaps in existing trade agreements, including non-tariff barriers and procedural delays.
- Redonnet emphasised the need for more structured follow-up mechanisms post-FTA ratification to ensure commitments are effectively applied on the ground.
- He also reiterated the EU's intention to use CTIPs (Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships) as a flexible complement to formal FTAs.

- **Regulatory Complexity and Green Transition**

- Several EBOs (notably from Singapore, Philippines, and Saudi Arabia) raised concerns about the complexity of new EU regulations such as the CS3D, CBAM, and deforestation rules.
- EBOs urged clearer guidance, longer lead times, and proportional implementation to prevent disincentives for EU SMEs and exporters abroad.
- Redonnet acknowledged these concerns and reiterated that the Commission is actively pursuing regulatory simplification while maintaining policy objectives.

- **Procurement and Strategic Industries**

- EBO Saudi Arabia and EBO Ukraine questioned the lack of European preference in EU-funded international procurement, especially in sectors like renewables and infrastructure.
- Redonnet confirmed that public procurement preferences are under active review, particularly to prevent unfair competition from heavily subsidised non-EU actors (e.g., in offshore wind or electrolyzers).
- He also recognised the need to better align EU trade and industrial policy to defend and grow strategic sectors.

- **Trade Enforcement and EBO Intelligence**

- Multiple EBOs highlighted their role in identifying localised enforcement issues, from customs bottlenecks to unfair technical standards.
- Redonnet invited EBOs to channel actionable intelligence through EU Delegations and national embassies, affirming that DG TRADE relies on in-market input to guide enforcement priorities.

- **Regional Priorities and Coordination**

- EBOs in ASEAN, South Asia, and the Gulf requested greater EU alignment between trade policy, Global Gateway investments, and local regulatory cooperation.
- Redonnet reinforced the importance of a coherent external EU value proposition, integrating trade, investment, and green diplomacy.

- **Closing Consensus**

Redonnet and the EBOs agreed on the urgent need to:

- Strengthen coordination between Brussels and the field.
- Defend EU competitiveness in green and strategic sectors.
- Simplify and clarify the rollout of new trade-related regulations.
- Ensure EBO feedback directly informs EU policy implementation and enforcement.

DAY 3

5 Key Takeaways

From Brussels to Business: Pragmatism, Partnerships, and Platforms

1. The EU is entering a phase of policy pragmatism—implementation and competitiveness now lead the agenda.
2. CTIPs and fast-tracked FTAs are reshaping the trade landscape, with EBOs encouraged to contribute directly to design.
3. EEN is now more accessible to EBOs, but participation hinges on delivery capacity without EU funding.
4. EBOs across regions demand earlier and deeper inclusion in shaping EU external economic programming.
5. Brussels recognises EBOs as indispensable actors, but must back this with structured engagement and operational support.

**Positioning EBOs
as Frontline
Enablers of the
EU's Global
Economic Reset**

A Pragmatic Shift in EU External Action – EVP Séjourné’s Cabinet Speaks

Estelle Göger and Dragoş Tudorache (Cabinet of EVP Stéphane Séjourné) outlined a strategic realignment of the EU’s external economic policy:

- Less ideology, more implementation: Geopolitical disruption, trade tension, and EU competitiveness imperatives demand feasible, realistic execution of sustainability and trade goals.
- Two defining trade-offs:
 - Openness vs. Strategic Autonomy
 - Single Market Deepening vs. External Vigilance

Tudorache introduced three operational approaches:

- Fast-tracked, flexible FTAs (India, Indonesia)
- CTIPs – Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships: Bundling trade, CRMs, procurement, and regulatory cooperation
- EBO Involvement: EBOs urged to submit feedback proactively to shape these new instruments.

EBO Regional Insights: Grounding Strategy in Reality

EBOs from Africa, Latin America, and Asia voiced key challenges:

- Africa: Lack of DG GROW presence, uneven consultation on CBAM and sustainability rules
- Latin America: Regulatory clarity gaps and need for direct EU engagement
- Asia: Shrinking EU influence compared to Korea/China; urged more visible EU economic diplomacy

Cabinet commitments included:

- EBO inclusion in EU Industry Days
- Participation in EVP Séjourné missions
- Feeding EBO insights into Global Gateway and MFF 2028–2034

The Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) – Open to EBOs

Christos Skouras (DG GROW) presented the newly simplified, open “expression of interest” model for joining the Enterprise Europe Network:

- Open to business support organisations (not companies)
- No funding or fees, but no financial support either
- EU Delegation letter required
- Must show delivery capacity & measurable impact

Current INPs include Chile, Nigeria, Taiwan, Japan, USA, etc.

Priority outreach targets for 2024–2026: Australia, Morocco, Indonesia, Kenya, Egypt, Philippines, Saudi Arabia.

EBO feedback raised concerns over:

- Lack of funding for service delivery
- Perceived preference for national chambers
- Burdensome expectations without proportional support

Strategic Outlook: From Feedback to Influence

Göger and Tudorache reaffirmed a Commission-wide shift towards:

- Regulatory realism (e.g. CBAM and CS3D recalibration)
- Strategic bundling of tools across trade, sustainability, and investment
- Business feedback loops from actors like EBOWN, to guide real-world implementation

EBOWN Recommendations for Future Engagement

- Earlier consultation: EBOs must be included at the design—not execution—stage.
- Clearer protocols: Better coordination between Brussels, Delegations, and in-market EBOs is needed.
- Strategic visibility: Leverage EEN and Global Gateway platforms to raise EBO profiles and amplify SME support.
- Funding dilemma: Future EBO-EU engagement must reconcile high delivery expectations with resource constraints.

1. A Pragmatic Shift in the Commission's Mandate

At EBOWN's invitation, Estelle Göger and Dragoş Tudorache from the Cabinet of Executive Vice President Stéphane Séjourné met with the Network during the Annual Global event Meeting. Estelle Göger opened the discussion by outlining the evolving strategic direction of the Commission under EVP Stéphane Séjourné. She emphasised a decisive shift towards pragmatic policy implementation, especially in trade and industrial policy, while maintaining the EU's core sustainability goals. This new realism is driven by geopolitical disruptions (notably in the U.S. and China), electoral changes in the European Parliament, and the imperative of safeguarding EU competitiveness. Göger stressed that the Commission aims to avoid overregulation and ensure decarbonisation targets are met in a feasible, economically viable manner.

- **Two trade-offs now define EU external action:**
 - Openness vs. Strategic Autonomy – Remaining open to global trade while introducing preference criteria for resilience and security.
 - Internal Market Integration vs. Border Vigilance – Deepening the Single Market while strengthening external trade defences, including better market surveillance and customs checks.
- **Trade & Investment Instruments:** New Tools, Faster Action, Dragoş Tudorache expanded on this pragmatic orientation by highlighting three key approaches:
- **Accelerated FTAs:** Negotiations with countries like India and Indonesia will be fast-tracked, potentially through more modular and flexible agreements, foregoing some traditional “red lines.”
- **CTIPs – Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships:** These are emerging as an alternative framework to traditional FTAs, combining trade, critical raw materials, value chain cooperation, and Global Gateway projects. South Africa is being piloted as the first case study.
- **Flexible Bundling of Interests:** CTIPs will bundle public procurement, market access, value chain co-development, and regulatory barriers into a single framework, driven by “mutually beneficial agendas.” EBOs were encouraged to proactively feed in business priorities and bottlenecks to inform this design.
- **EBO Contributions:** A Call for Early and Deeper Engagement. The EBOWN delegation emphasised the unique value EBOs provide:
 - Ground-level business insight in over 60 third-country markets.
 - Close coordination with EU delegations and member state chambers.
 - Decades-long experience engaging national leadership and ministries.
 - However, concerns were raised that EBOs are often overlooked in early-stage EU initiatives (e.g., Global Gateway forums), only contacted later by Brussels-based consultancies who lack local knowledge or budget to partner meaningfully. Delegates asked for earlier inclusion in design processes to support more credible, effective implementation.

Several EBOs shared regional insights:

- **Africa:** A desire for deeper local consultation in EU policy design (e.g., CBAM, deforestation), concern over competitiveness erosion, and the need for more DG GROW officers in-country.
- **Latin America:** Highlighted the gap in regulatory guidance for EU companies; suggested restoring DG GROW representation to bridge this.
- **Asia:** Emphasis on Europe's waning presence versus China and Korea, calling for greater EU-led investment facilitation and visibility in frontier markets like Bangladesh.

Commission Responses: Concrete Acknowledgements & Future Steps

Göger and Tudorache acknowledged the strength of the EBOWN network and committed to several points:

- Including EBOs in future EU Industry Days.
- Ensuring business engagement in EVP Séjourné's upcoming missions.
- Raising the issue of staffing (e.g., DG GROW presence) in Latin America with EEAS.
- Factoring EBO intelligence into the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal and Global Gateway project design.

They also noted that the Commission is exploring EU-wide export credit mechanisms and a potential “Competitiveness Fund” to better link internal and external instruments.

2. Open Invitation: Join the Enterprise Europe Network

Christos Skouras, Policy Officer, DG GROW, introduced the Enterprise Europe Network's (EEN) Open Invitation for International Network Partners (INPs), which now operates under a simplified, continuous "expression of interest" process. This initiative replaces the previous, more bureaucratic application system. The call is open to all public or private business support organisations globally (excluding individual companies), aiming to enhance outreach and collaboration between EU and non-EU business ecosystems.

- **Eligibility and Process:** To join, candidate organisations the candidate organisation must meet the following criteria
 - Demonstrate a pivotal role in their local ecosystem.
 - Have a proven track record of successfully supporting businesses.
 - Be financially stable and operationally structured.
- **Secure a letter** of support from the EU Delegation in their country.
 - Applications are reviewed without deadlines; however, expressions of interest must be submitted at least one year before the end of the current programmatic period (December 2027).
- **Operational Conditions**
 - INPs are not funded by the EU but also incur no joining fees (with minimal exceptions for event-related registrations).
 - They are expected to offer core EEN services and may form consortia to meet service delivery requirements.
 - Crucially, they must be able to show results achieved in cooperation with existing EU-based EEN partners.
- **Recent & Target Countries:** Approved INPs from the first batch include Chile, Colombia, Japan, Nigeria, USA (Florida & Ohio), Switzerland, and Taiwan. Additional expressions have come from Canada, Georgia, India, Tunisia, and Vietnam. Priority outreach countries for 2024–2026 include Australia, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, South Africa, Egypt, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia, among others.

The EEN's open invitation marks a strategic shift to simplify access for international partners while maintaining high service expectations. While it offers substantial long-term value through connectivity and visibility within the EU ecosystem, the lack of funding remains a barrier for many potential EBO applicants. Several EBOs welcomed the simplified process but sought clearer pathways to participate and leverage the platform without institutional bias or resource constraints. Follow-up is anticipated via additional technical sessions and targeted bilateral support.

Strategic Reflections

- **Key Points Raised by EBOs:**
 - Past application processes were deemed overly burdensome and disincentivised participation, particularly where competition with national chambers existed.
 - Some EBOs queried the tangible benefits of being an official INP, given that they already support EU businesses informally.
 - Clarifications were requested on whether services could be charged and on the obligations placed on INPs (e.g. responding to all EU inquiries).
 - EBOs in Africa highlighted challenges in response capacity due to the high volume of requests and questioned the feasibility given the lack of funding.
 - Interest was expressed in allowing cross-country EBO consortia (e.g. pan-African), but this was indicated as not currently possible.
- **Clarifications from Christos Skouras:**
 - The system is now drastically simplified and accessible via EU Survey.
 - While funding is not available, joining EEN offers immense access to EU companies and advisors, matchmaking platforms, and sector-specific expertise.
 - INPs are expected to deliver services without charging EU companies, except in minor, specified instances.
 - No preference is given to national chambers; success is based on capacity, not institutional identity.
 - Country-specific sensitivities (e.g. Armenia, Nigeria) were acknowledged, and EEN is open to bilateral resolution with genuinely committed applicants.
 - Further technical Q&A will be accommodated in a dedicated Webex session.

3. Regional Meetings

A series of regional meetings brought together EBOWN members in the African region and key EU institutional counterparts to address shared priorities, explore sector-specific opportunities, and tackle pressing challenges. These sessions provided a platform for targeted dialogue, fostering closer coordination between business networks and EU stakeholders, and shaping strategic approaches to trade, investment, and sustainable growth across diverse regions.

Africa

- African EBOs engaged with EU partners from DG INTPA and DG GROW to address key priorities for enhancing the role of European-linked businesses in Africa. Discussions covered strengthening global competitiveness, expanding public–private dialogue, mobilising EU tools under the Global Gateway, and improving coordination between EU institutions, Delegations, and business support actors. African EBOs stressed their role as intermediaries, the need for sustained institutional support, challenges in accessing Global Gateway funding, and opportunities to deepen connections with the EU–Africa Business Forum, Team Europe Initiatives, and Delegation programming.
- The Africa EBO Diagnostic Study was also introduced, designed to assess structures, services, and capacity needs; inform targeted support; strengthen advocacy and trade promotion; and improve engagement in EU–Africa cooperation.
- Building on the discussions, participants agreed to hold an online follow-up dialogue in Q4 2025 involving DG INTPA, DG GROW, EU Delegations in Africa, and interested African EBOs. The session will focus on improving coordination, addressing collaboration bottlenecks, clarifying EBO engagement in Global Gateway implementation, and establishing a regular engagement format between EU actors and African EBOs. Co-facilitated by the EBOWN Secretariat and the Africa Coordinator, the dialogue will aim to translate the meeting’s momentum into sustained, strategic collaboration.
- Key EU institutional counterparts in the meeting:
 - **DG INTPA** - Directorate-General for International Partnerships
 - **DG GROW** - Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

Americas & Caribbean

- The Americas & Caribbean Regional Group held two strategic roundtables: one with DG TRADE and another with DG INTPA.
- The DG TRADE session brought together EBOs and European Commission representatives where discussions focused on opportunities for deeper cooperation, regional perspectives in light of U.S. tariffs and geopolitical shifts, and the need for streamlined coordination for fast, effective responses. Positive progress on the EU–MERCOSUR Agreement was also noted; once concluded, it would connect nearly the entire Latin American region to the EU through trade agreements or Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).
- The DG INTPA roundtable brought together EBOs to discuss Global Gateway pipeline developments and the EBOs’ role in identifying and mobilising the European private sector to bring projects in third markets forward. The discussion also addressed the upcoming CELAC–EU Business Forum in November 2025, with EBOs requesting that the Americas & Caribbean Regional Group be included in all private sector initiatives and kept closely informed of progress. Additionally, participants explored the possibility of establishing a joint EU–Americas Business Forum to further strengthen regional cooperation and private sector engagement.
- Key EU institutional counterparts in the meeting:
 - **DG INTPA** - Directorate-General for International Partnerships
 - **DG TRADE** - Directorate-General for Trade

ASEAN

- The ASEAN regional cluster held a productive meeting with ASEANCham-EU on Tuesday, 3 June. The discussions resulted in several concrete cooperation decisions, including the establishment of cross-communication channels between the organisations, joint participation in webinars, and the sharing of contact details of ASEAN companies doing business in Europe.

3. Regional Meetings (Cont...)

ASEAN

- Additionally, ASEANCham-EU was invited to use ASEAN-related content from the EBOWN newsletter in its own publications, fostering stronger regional visibility and information exchange. This meeting marked a significant step towards closer collaboration between ASEAN and European business networks.
- On Wednesday, 4 June, the EBOWN ASEAN cluster met with key representatives from the European Commission. Discussions were held with DG TRADE and DG GROW. The conversation explored trade, investment, and growth opportunities between ASEAN and Europe, as well as avenues for policy alignment and support.
- Following this, the delegation met with DG CNECT to focus on digital connectivity, innovation, and potential synergies in the technology sector. Both meetings provided valuable insights and reinforced the EU's interest in deepening engagement with ASEAN business communities.
- Key EU institutional counterparts in the meeting:
 - **DG INTPA** - Directorate-General for International Partnerships
 - **DG GROW** - Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
 - **DG TRADE** - Directorate-General for Trade
 - **DG ECHO** - Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
 - **DG CNECT** - Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology

East Asia & Pacific

- The EBOWN East Asia & Pacific region held discussions with officials from DG TRADE and DG GROW, on key challenges and future competitive industries, aiming to enhance cooperation with the European Commission (EC).
- Among the common challenges identified were uncertainties surrounding U.S. tariffs and issues related to the interpretation and implementation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). Region-specific concerns included regulatory systems, demographic shifts, and infrastructure and data quality.
- In terms of future competitive sectors, participants highlighted a broad range of industries reflecting each region's development priorities. Notably, the most frequently mentioned sectors were those related to the energy transition—such as geothermal, offshore, and onshore wind power—along with food and beverage, wine and spirits, digital services, and fisheries. Other sectors discussed included aerospace and defence, life sciences and biosciences, healthcare, and aviation.
- Potential strategic partners mentioned in this context included Airbus, Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP), RWE, Vestas, EDF Renewables, TotalEnergies, Siemens, Merck, Sartorius, and Orano Group.
- Key EU institutional counterparts in the meeting:
 - **DG GROW** - Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
 - **DG TRADE** - Directorate-General for Trade

Europe & Eastern Partnership

- Commission and EEAS representatives actively participated in the working group. The exchange of insights, policy updates, and shared business challenges fostered deeper mutual understanding and reinforced the importance of continued cooperation across the Eastern Partnership and Central Asia regions.
- In addition to economic topics, discussions addressed pressing challenges currently affecting the region. These included the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, the evolving sanctions regime on Russia and its broader implications, as well as the tense and complex relations between Armenia and some of its neighbouring countries. The exchanges underscored that peace, dialogue, and stability are the cornerstones of sustainable economic development and regional prosperity.
- EBOs raised serious concerns regarding the current difficulties faced by Armenian business representatives and tourists in obtaining Schengen visas. Limited appointment availability at EU embassies and lengthy processing times have become significant obstacles, making it increasingly challenging for legitimate travellers to access the European Union.

3. Regional Meetings (Cont...)

Europe & Eastern Partnership

- These administrative hurdles are not only causing frustration but also creating tangible barriers to deepening EU–Armenia economic cooperation, trade, and people-to-people connectivity. For the Armenian business community in particular, the inability to travel efficiently for meetings, trade fairs, and investment opportunities undermines efforts to foster closer ties with European counterparts.
- It is expected that this issue will be addressed through improved procedures, increased appointment availability, and stronger dialogue with consular services. Easing EU visa access would signal partnership and strengthen EU–Armenia ties. The session highlighted resilience amid geopolitical uncertainty, the private sector's role in economic continuity, and the value of shared experiences for coordinated action. The commitment of EU institutions and business groups to a secure, stable, and prosperous environment was welcomed, with peace and stability placed at the core of future joint efforts.
- Key EU institutional counterparts in the meeting:
 - **DG TRADE** - Directorate-General for Trade
 - **DG ENEST** - Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood
 - **EEAS** - European External Action Service Armenia
 - **EEAS** - European External Action Service Belarus
 - **EEAS** - European External Action Service Georgia
 - **EEAS** - European External Action Service Russia
 - **EEAS** - European External Action Service Ukraine

South Asia & Middle East

- The South Asia and Middle East regional meeting focused on strengthening cooperation between EBOs and EU officials representing DG INTPA, DG GROW, DG TRADE, and DG MENA, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities for European companies. Representatives from Nepal, India, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh shared insights into their local markets, stressing the importance of a unified European business voice and the adoption of more strategic approaches to international trade.
- The EBO business sentiment survey carried out in the region revealed significant challenges in EU–EBO collaboration, with only 45% deeming coordination effective. Barriers include weak enforcement of agreements, limited IP protection, regulatory inconsistencies, and infrastructure gaps. Respondents called for strategic alignment, improved communication, digital platforms, and more inclusive policy development. They emphasised the need for targeted support for EBOs in South Asia and the Middle East.
- Discussions covered several priorities, including creating digital platforms for business intelligence, providing financial support to both new and existing EBOs to drive EU business competitiveness in the region, and developing strategies to compete with global players such as China and Japan. Participants suggested concrete solutions such as holding regional meetings, organising sector-specific webinars, and creating roadmaps for critical raw material (CRM) partnerships. A notable highlight was the CRM project presented by the European Chamber of Commerce in Saudi Arabia.
- Overall, the aim is to boost European business presence in these regions, overcome investment hurdles, and strengthen collaboration between EU institutions and local business organisations.
- Key EU institutional counterparts in the meeting:
 - **DG INTPA** - Directorate-General for International Partnerships
 - **DG GROW** - Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
 - **DG TRADE** - Directorate-General for Trade
 - **DG MENA** - Directorate-General for Middle East and North Africa (EU External Action)

DAY 4

5 Key Takeaways

Bridging Vision and Action in Europe's Global Economic Engagement

1. EBOs are central to scaling the Global Gateway, but require formal roles, early inclusion, and dedicated support.
2. EU–GCC ties are entering an operational phase—EBOs in the Gulf are now strategic agents of economic diplomacy.
3. The CS3D Omnibus package is a positive step, but field-based EBOs must be consulted—not sidelined.
4. TPE–EBOWN collaboration offers a unified EU business voice, with potential for joint visibility and programming.
5. ITC tools are powerful assets for SME support, and should be better integrated into EBO operations and EU Delegation planning. Competitiveness is now the EU's central strategic imperative, linking prosperity, security, and resilience.

**From Policy to
Projects: EBOs as
Strategic
Gateways**

Cabinet-Level Priorities and Global Gateway Mainstreaming

Lucie Sestakova (Head of Cabinet to Commissioner Jozef Sikela) outlined the Commission's priorities:

Scaling the Global Gateway, managing migration, reviewing UN funding efficiency, and preparing for constrained MFF negotiations. She emphasised EBOWN as a pivotal actor in project mobilisation, local intelligence, and EU business visibility. A digital one-stop platform and clearer Team Europe access are in the pipeline. Key follow-ups include a 30-day triage mechanism, a new Team Nationals protocol, and an autumn working session with EBOWN.

Operationalising EU–GCC Economic Diplomacy

Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf, presented a game-changing vision:

- Formalised EU Chambers in the Gulf (e.g., Saudi Arabia) are milestones for economic diplomacy.
- The EU will pivot to bilateral FTAs, starting with the UAE, and launch new Strategic Partnership Agreements with GCC countries in 2025.
- IMEC and CRM diplomacy are top EU priorities—Di Maio called on EBOs to contribute investable projects and facilitate private sector consortia.

EBO Saudi Arabia proposed a cross-regional EBOWN summit in Riyadh, endorsed by Di Maio.

CS3D Simplification & Omnibus Review

Ralf Sauer (DG JUST) and Jean-Paul Heerschap (DG INTPA) unveiled a refocused CS3D via the Omnibus package:

- Tiered due diligence, revised sanctions, and adjusted termination clauses.
- Enhanced stakeholder engagement, simplified reporting, and rebalanced enforcement tools.

EBOs welcomed the recalibration but raised concerns about:

- Lack of consultation, with consultancies taking lead over EBOs in local rollouts.
- Need for standardised Brussels–Delegation–EBO protocols to avoid communication breakdowns.

TPE–EBOWN Strategic Synergies

Trade Promotion Europe (TPE), presented by Vasso Kyrkou and Flavie Guerin, proposed structured cooperation with EBOWN on:

- Joint advocacy, business forums, visibility, and SME internationalisation.
- Pilot projects were discussed for Bangladesh and Rwanda.

EBOWN will nominate a liaison to TPE working groups and explore a shared trade calendar.

Unlocking Market Intelligence with ITC Tools

Elodie Robin (ITC) introduced global tools like the Trade Map, Export Potential Map, and Sustainability Map.

EBOs appreciated their value but noted gaps in data freshness and local relevance.

Next steps include:

- Regional training and co-branded intelligence reports
- Integration of ITC tools into EBO-led advocacy and investment promotion strategies

1. Priorities of International Partnership

Lucie Sestakova, Head of Cabinet to Commissioner Jozef Síkela emphasised the critical role of the private sector in delivering the Global Gateway's ambition to scale from pilot to permanent. She acknowledged the strategic value of EBOWN as a bridge between EU policy goals and practical business engagement across partner countries. The meeting reaffirmed the Commission's appreciation for the EBOWN as a grassroots intelligence source and policy multiplier on the ground. Key Priorities and context from the Cabinet, the Cabinet is finalising its strategic agenda around four major priorities:

- **Scaling the Global Gateway** – Improving project pipelines, inter-agency coordination, and Member State engagement via “Team Europe” structures and “Team Nationals” to streamline offers from the EU.
- **Migration** – With growing geopolitical risks, the external dimension of migration is an urgent priority, particularly returns and reintegration.
- **UN Funding Efficiency** – A review of EU funding to UN agencies is underway to ensure leaner, more effective use of ODA amidst tighter budgets.
- **Next MFF Negotiations** – Defending Global Gateway budget lines will be challenging, given that 20–25% of the next MFF will be pre-committed to debt repayments.

Sestakova and her team also emphasised that creating “one-stop” visibility for the private sector is high on their agenda. The meeting reaffirmed a shared commitment to deeper cooperation between the European Commission and EBOs under Global Gateway. A follow-up session in autumn will operationalise many of the promising concepts discussed.

Strategic Reflections

- **EBO Contributions and Priority Needs.** Throughout the discussion, EBO representatives made targeted interventions, underscoring the importance of systematising their role within the Global Gateway implementation. Four recurring themes emerged:
 - **Early Involvement:** EBOs called for structured participation at the design stage of Commissioner missions and project pipelines, rather than late-stage consultations.
 - **Engagement Clarity:** A formalised process is needed to guide how EBOs interact with EU Delegations, Team Nationals, and implementing partners in-country.
 - **Operational Roadmap:** A shared “protocol” or operational framework would help EBOWN members align consistently with Global Gateway objectives and actions.
 - **Recognition as Intermediaries:** EBOs stressed their function as critical institutional partners—particularly in contexts where no bilateral EU business chambers or strong embassies exist.
- **Regional Case Highlights:**

Several EBOs showcased practical ideas with regional insights:

 - Moldova and Vietnam align with Global Gateway via EU task forces and processes.
 - Chile lacks clear engagement channels.
 - The Philippines values early communication.
 - Africa calls for better regional coordination.
- **Pending Actions and Next Steps:**
 - The Cabinet will publish its strategic priorities before summer and hold a follow-up video conference in September to deepen dialogue with EBOWN.
 - A 30-day triage mechanism will be trialled to respond quickly to project proposals, providing clear green, yellow, or red assessments.
 - Draft guidelines for Team Nationals are being prepared to enhance consistency and visibility across Member State platforms.
 - Additionally, a new digital landing page is in development to centralise Global Gateway information and improve access for EU business stakeholders.
- **Strategic Observations and Forward Outlook:**
 - The shared need to integrate EBOs into the EU's external economic framework, such as the Global Gateway.
 - A more institutionalised communication protocol and knowledge-sharing system is needed to position EBOs as proactive project partners, not ad hoc contributors.
 - As the Global Gateway transitions from pilot to scale-up, EBOs' field-tested insight, credibility, and convening power will be essential to converting EU ambitions into actionable and investable outcomes.

2. Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf Region

The insightful session, Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf Region and former Deputy Prime Minister of Italy, focused on deepening EU-GCC economic relations, operationalising the Global Gateway in the Gulf, and positioning EBOs as vital partners in implementing EU external trade, investment, and connectivity strategies across the region.

- **Strategic Role of EBOs in the Gulf:** Di Maio highlighted the political and economic significance of establishing the first-ever European Chamber of Commerce in the Gulf (Saudi Arabia), noting it as both a business and diplomatic milestone. Di Maio affirmed support for the next EBO opening in Bahrain and acknowledged EBOs as vital enablers for translating European economic language into Gulf market realities.
- **Shift in EU-GCC Trade Strategy:** After 35 years of stalled EU-GCC trade negotiations, the EU will pivot from regional to bilateral FTAs, starting with the UAE. Saudi Arabia and others may follow. He also announced a new Strategic Partnership Agreement mandate (from September 2025) for investment, skills, and tech cooperation with each GCC country, accelerating processes through simplified parliamentary channels.
- **Global Gateway & Connectivity:** Initiatives emphasised the importance of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) as a strategic infrastructure initiative for goods, energy, and data, further encouraging private sector projects to support its development. He also noted Saudi Arabia's \$40B commitment and the EU's readiness to allocate substantial funds, calling for EBO collaboration on project pipelines.
- **Critical Raw Materials (CRM) Engagement:** Encouraged deeper EU-Saudi cooperation on CRMs through the upcoming Strategic Partnership Agreements, especially given Saudi Arabia's leadership in forming a "raw materials OPEC". Recognised EBO efforts to initiate private sector dialogue on CRM, offering support in aligning initiatives with EU strategy.
- **Security, Stability, and Economic Diplomacy:** There was additional emphasis on how Gulf countries are shifting from ideological foreign policy to economic diplomacy, with regional stability being essential for attracting investment. Di Maio's five-priority mandate includes: trade and investment, Renewables, Regional Security, People-to-People Exchange, and Institutional Partnerships.
- **GCC as a Global Investment Hub:** He further noted the shift in Gulf sovereign funds (especially Saudi PIF) towards domestic investment, with Europe offering technology and skills rather than capital. He emphasised the Gulf's growing geopolitical weight through economic influence in Africa, Asia, and strategic mediation roles globally.

The meeting marked a new phase of operational EU-GCC economic diplomacy. EBOs were recognised as essential actors in delivering on trade, investment, and strategic cooperation, particularly as the EU seeks to balance geopolitical realities with commercial ambition.

Strategic Reflections

- **Recognition and Endorsement**
 - EBO Saudi Arabia praised Di Maio's leadership and the symbolic value of the EU Chamber in Riyadh, stressing that it facilitates policy-level access for European firms.
 - Proposed holding a cross-regional EBO meeting in Riyadh, merging Middle East, South Asia, and African clusters—Di Maio endorsed the initiative and offered his office's support.
- **CRM Cooperation**
 - EBO Saudi Arabia highlighted gaps in the EU CRM Act's inclusion of Saudi Arabia and proposed a private-sector-led engagement with Saudi mining authorities. Di Maio suggested integrating this into the Strategic Partnership Agreement structure.
- **Project Pipeline for IMEC**
 - Multiple EBOs (India, Mozambique, Argentina) supported a triangulation strategy (EU-GCC-Africa/Asia), proposing to submit investable project lists to Di Maio's office.
 - Di Maio confirmed his office is ready to review submissions and test the model through a pilot in East Africa with UAE support.

Strategic Reflections (Cont...)

- **Bureaucracy and Responsiveness**

- EBOs raised concerns about EU bureaucratic rigidity and slow responsiveness in fast-moving environments.
- Di Maio acknowledged this challenge, describing the EU as a “miracle” of consensus and committed to pushing for the implementation of Mario Draghi’s competitiveness report.

- **Gaza Reconstruction**

- In Gaza, Di Maio confirmed the EU’s role as the largest donor, noted discussions with Arab partners on reconstruction plans excluding Hamas, and underlined the need for a secure environment before business engagement.

- **Pending Actions**

- EU Finalisation of Strategic Partnership Agreement mandates are expected by September 2025.
- Active support from Di Maio’s office for
 - Cross-regional EBO meeting in Riyadh
 - Submission of investable projects aligned with IMEC and CRM priorities
 - Ongoing dialogue with Gulf states on free trade agreements (starting with UAE).

- **Opportunities for EBOWN**

- Triangular Cooperation in the context of Global Gateway.
- Positioning EBOs as trusted gateways for EU economic diplomacy in the Gulf.
- Developing CRM and connectivity project consortia with Gulf and African actors.
- Advancing proposals for Global Gateway financing linked to IMEC and CRM.

3. Trade Promotions Europe

Vice President Francis Baert introduced Trade Promotions Europe (TPE) as a pan-European platform designed to enhance cooperation among national TPOs. He was accompanied by regional director Anne Lannigan. The alliance seeks to serve as a unified voice for trade and investment promotion organisations, supporting EU policy coherence and reinforcing the global competitiveness of EU businesses. She stressed that TPE’s ambition is to promote cross-border collaboration, including with networks such as EBOWN.

- **Strategic Pillars of Cooperation:** Secretary General Flavie Guerin outlined TPE’s strategic objectives, including:

- Advocacy: A common European voice on trade promotion in Brussels.
- Knowledge Sharing: Regular working groups and peer learning sessions.
- Visibility: Joint presence at international events and platforms.
- Internationalisation Support: Helping EU SMEs expand globally, with a special focus on female entrepreneurship and sustainability.

- **TPE-EBOWN Synergies Identified:** The session reinforced natural complementarities between TPE and EBOWN:

- EBOWN offers local expertise and in-market intelligence.
- TPE brings political visibility and policy leverage within the EU.
- Both sides agreed on the need to align efforts, particularly on SME outreach, policy dialogues, and promoting the EU Global Gateway.

- **Post-Presentation Discussion with EBOs:**

- Several EBOs welcomed the idea of closer coordination and called for a more structured channel for joint programming.
- EBO Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia flagged the value of TPE engagement in third countries where national TPO presence is limited or absent.
- EBO Singapore and Rwanda suggested pilot collaborations through business forums or delegations.

- **Key Follow-Up Matters:**

- Agreement to explore the design of a joint pilot initiative between EBOWN and TPE in 1–2 priority countries.
- Proposal to create a shared calendar of major trade missions and EU events for better synchronisation.
- EBOWN will nominate a liaison to participate in TPE working groups to build regular dialogue.

4. Context and Rationale for the Omnibus Package

Ralf Sauer (DG JUST) & Jean-Paul Heerschap presented on the context and rationale for the Omnibus Package. Ralf Sauer opened with a contextual overview of the evolving regulatory and geopolitical landscape, which prompted the European Commission's decision to propose amendments to the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D) via an Omnibus legislative package. This package is framed as a simplification and burden-reduction initiative—not a deregulation—aiming to make due diligence more proportionate and feasible for companies while preserving core sustainability objectives.

- **Key Legislative Changes Proposed:** The amendments primarily target several core aspects of the CS3D:
 - Identification Obligations: Shift from systematic proactive due diligence on all tiers to a more reactive model, focusing on Tier 1 business partners and triggering further review only based on substantiated concerns.
 - Sanctions Regime: Removal of the 5% turnover cap on fines to avoid misinterpretation and scrapping the EU-level liability regime in favour of national legal frameworks.
 - Suspension vs. Termination Clause: The obligation to terminate business relationships in cases of unresolvable serious human rights or environmental impacts is replaced with a duty to suspend until the issue is addressed.
 - Reporting and Monitoring Adjustments: Proposed adjustments to climate transition plan obligations, stakeholder engagement, and a more focused annual reassessment process.
 - Timeline and Status: The Commission adopted the proposal in February 2024, but both the Council and European Parliament are still developing their negotiation mandates. Entry into force timelines have been pushed back (e.g., from 2027 to 2028), and implementation guidelines are expected to be developed once the legislative process concludes.
- **DG INTPA's Complementary Measures & Tools:** Jean-Paul Heerschap detailed DG INTPA's parallel work to support implementation, particularly in third countries:
 - Due Diligence Navigator: A digital platform aggregating support tools and guidance, including training initiatives, standards mapping (in collaboration with ITC and ILO), and checklists to support SMEs and governments.
 - Capacity Building: Ongoing technical assistance with partner governments and stakeholders to align with EU expectations, notably in high-risk sectors and region.

Strategic Reflections

- **EBOs Acknowledgement and Support:** EBOWN members welcomed the Commission's recalibration of CS3D, especially the shift to a more realistic tiered identification model. There was strong consensus that these steps enhance the directive's viability for companies and partner country stakeholders alike.
- **Key EBO Concerns Raised:**
 - Communication Gaps: Many EBOs had not been briefed by EU Delegations on the Omnibus package or previous CS3D drafts. The lack of proactive outreach from EU actors has left local stakeholders poorly informed, despite the high regulatory impact.
 - Consultancy-Led Rollouts: EBOs expressed frustration over being sidelined while consultancies were contracted to conduct private sector outreach—without consulting or crediting EBOs as the on-ground business support partners.
 - Missed Opportunities for Engagement: While examples like EBO Japan's collaboration were appreciated, members from Moldova, Cambodia, and Singapore shared how local realities and regulatory harmonisation efforts could have been better leveraged had EU communication been earlier and clearer.
- **Strategic Observations:**
 - EBOs are eager to be constructive partners in CS3D rollout, provided they are meaningfully engaged.
 - There is a need for a standardised protocol to coordinate messaging between Brussels, EU Delegations, and EBOs on regulatory initiatives.
 - Simplification is broadly welcomed, but EBOs stressed the importance of translating legislative intent into practical, clear, and context-sensitive implementation tools—especially in third countries with complex business environments.

5. Discussion on the ITC Trade Tools

Elodie Robin, Market Analyst, Trade Market Intelligence, introduced the International Trade Centre (ITC) as a joint UN–WTO agency dedicated to SME internationalisation and inclusive trade. Her presentation focused on the core intelligence services and digital tools available to support market access and regulatory transparency for EU and global businesses. Key platforms introduced included:

- **Trade Map:** Provides trade flow statistics (imports/exports) by country and product.
- **Market Access Map:** Offers tariff and non-tariff measure insights, including applied rates and regulatory requirements.
- **Export Potential Map:** Identifies priority sectors and markets with growth potential for a specific country.
- **Rules of Origin Facilitator:** A comprehensive tool aligned with over 370 trade agreements.
- **Sustainability Map:** Helps companies navigate voluntary standards and sustainability certifications.
- **SheTrades Hub:** Supports women-led enterprises globally.

Elodie emphasised that all tools are free, available in multiple languages, and customisable for trade promotion organisations and chambers to use directly with businesses.

Strategic Reflections

EBOs welcomed the depth and accessibility of the ITC tools and acknowledged their high utility for business intelligence, advocacy, and SME support. Several EBOs expressed interest in:

- Receiving tailored training to enhance the in-country use and visibility of ITC tools.
- Establishing direct collaboration for co-branded business intelligence or market insight reports.
- Integrating ITC data into national or regional business sentiment surveys and investment promotion strategies.
- **Concerns were raised regarding:**
 - **Data Freshness & Local Relevance:** Some EBOs noted lag in data updates or incomplete information for less-covered economies.
 - **Limited Awareness:** Many local SMEs and EBO members are unaware of these resources despite their value.
- **Strategic Observations**
 - ITC tools align well with EBOs' roles in trade facilitation, investment promotion, and SME advisory.
 - Proactive onboarding and branding support from ITC could strengthen EBOs' service offer.
 - There is an opportunity for Team Europe actors to formally integrate ITC intelligence into joint market diagnostics and EU Delegation trade planning.
- **Follow-Up**
 - TC offered to conduct regional or national capacity-building webinars tailored to EBOs.
 - EBOs proposed deeper engagement on market access mapping in the context of Global Gateway pipelines.
 - Potential collaboration on "intelligence partnership pilots" with EBOs in ASEAN, Africa, and Latin America was suggested.

DAY 5

5 Key Takeaways

From Policy to Performance: Making Competitiveness Work Globally

1. EU trade policy must move from ambition to access, with FTAs, DTAs, and services agreements fast-tracked and enforceable.

2. Blended finance and guarantees under EFSD+ need localisation, transparency, and co-branding, with EBOs embedded in project scoping.

3. EBOs are indispensable to intelligence gathering, SME support, and policy interface—but require structured, institutionalised engagement.

4. Intermediated lending and SME definitions must reflect on-the-ground realities, not EU-centric metrics.

5. Competitiveness will only be achieved if regulatory reforms, financial tools, and trade instruments are aligned and responsive to business needs.

**Empowering EU
Business
Worldwide
through
Intelligence,
Access, and
Influence**

Trade Policy, Services Liberalisation, and Real Simplification

Business Europe and the European Services Forum (ESF) provided strategic perspectives on restoring EU competitiveness:

- Business Europe called for accelerated FTAs (e.g., Mercosur, India, Mexico), true simplification (CSRD, taxonomy, permitting), and better trade balance with the U.S.
- ESF highlighted the €1.5T EU services export sector and the lack of enforceable FTAs for top markets.
- Concerns were raised about the legal vagueness and limited market access in emerging tools like Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships (CTIPs) and Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreements (SIFAs).
- Both organisations urged the inclusion of green finance, data flows, and enforceable commitments in all trade instruments.

EBOs echoed:

- The need to clarify post-FTA support and taxation issues.
- Greater recognition of EBOs in services promotion and deal implementation.

EFSD+ and Global Gateway Financial Tools

DG INTPA unpacked the architecture of EU's blended finance and guarantee tools under EFSD+ (€40B in unfunded guarantees):

- Project-Oriented Guarantees: For large infrastructure with de-risking for private capital.
- Impact & Equity Funds: Focus on innovation, green tech, and frontier SMEs.
- Intermediated Lending: Channelled through local banks for MSME access.

EBO Feedback:

- Limited visibility of EU-branded funding on the ground.
- Procurement timelines and SME definitions need better localisation.
- Urged co-design and transparency in project pipeline development.

DG INTPA Commitments:

- Publish Delegation focal points for Global Gateway.
- Launch updated guarantee/project visibility platform.
- Explore cooperation with export credit agencies for enhanced risk coverage.

Business Intelligence and Supply Chain Resilience – DG GROW Outlook

Outi Slotboom (DG GROW) presented the new “Business Analysis and Supply Chains” directorate:

- Welcomed EBO support for the European Business Sentiment Report.
- Emphasised EBOs’ role as a policy interface, intelligence channel, and SME support partner.
- Announced plans to integrate third-country competitiveness insights into the Single Market and Competitiveness Report.

EBO Proposals:

- Structured data-sharing model with DG GROW.
- Formal recognition of EBOs’ intelligence contributions in future competitiveness frameworks.

EBOs and the Global Competitiveness Architecture

Across the day, EBOs underlined:

- Procurement access and market readiness gaps.
- SME support is inconsistent in intermediated lending schemes.
- Slower disbursement and bureaucratic lag compared to global competitors like China.

The message: EBOs are ready to localise EU ambition—but need earlier inclusion, visibility, and meaningful engagement across all financial and trade instruments.

Converging on Strategic Alignment: Trade, Investment & Intelligence

The session reinforced convergence between EU trade diversification, blended finance deployment, and intelligence-driven competitiveness.

The role of EBOs—as trusted intermediaries, market connectors, and SME champions—was repeatedly acknowledged as essential to operationalising Global Gateway, CTIPs, and business support reforms.

1. Discussion with Business Europe and European Service Forum

The session offered high-level insights into the evolving EU trade and competitiveness agenda, with a focus on trade policy, regulatory simplification, services exports, and partnerships with third countries. Eleonora Catella (BusinessEurope) emphasised the urgent need for real simplification and regulatory coherence. Business Europe's priorities outlined:

- **Geopolitical context & trade asymmetries**
 - The EU–US trade relationship remains structurally imbalanced, with over 70% of EU exports subject to duties vs. near-zero duties for US imports into the EU.
 - The current political climate (e.g. potential second Trump administration) poses risks to existing agreements and coordination, including sanctions alignment.
- **FTAs and trade diversification**
 - Urged faster ratification of key FTAs (e.g. Mercosur, Mexico, India, Australia).
 - Recognised ASEAN engagement as a priority, with Indonesia being the most advanced.
- **Simplification and competitiveness**
 - Business Europe is actively contributing to the ongoing EU regulatory simplification (omnibus) exercises.
 - Emphasised real reduction of burdens—not cosmetic reforms—especially around sustainability and financial reporting obligations (e.g. CSRD, taxonomy, CSDDD).
 - Recognised the need for stable energy prices and faster permitting processes to support industrial competitiveness.

Pascal Kerneis from European Services Forum provided a detailed analysis of international services trade dynamics, calling for stronger market access tools and digitally enabled trade frameworks.

- **The growing weight of EU services trade**
 - EU exported €1.5 trillion in services in 2024 with a €200 billion surplus.
 - Services now dominate trade, especially digital services and “other business services” (e.g. R&D, consultancy, technical testing).
- **Call for deeper market access**
 - Only 6 of the EU's top 25 services trading partners are covered by deep FTAs.
 - Strong push for new FTAs and digital trade agreements (DTAs) with countries like Canada, Peru, Costa Rica, and Colombia.
- **Concerns on new EU trade instruments**
 - Raised strategic concerns on new trade tools like CTIPs (Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships) and SIFAs (Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreements).
 - Warned that these are unclear in legal effect, often lack market access components, and may miss opportunities to secure enforceable commitments.
 - Advocated integrating green finance, environmental services, and data flow provisions into such instruments.
- **Services liberalisation in Africa**
 - Highlighted the missed opportunity in African EPAs, which largely exclude services.
 - Encouraged African partners to demand market access in SIFAs and push for legal guarantees, not just facilitation.

The session highlighted the growing convergence between EU trade policy, services liberalisation, and the competitiveness agenda. Both BusinessEurope and ESF reinforced that legal certainty, market access, and realistic regulatory frameworks are essential to keeping European businesses competitive globally. For EBOs, the message was clear: engage early, amplify feedback from markets, and help shape EU external economic relations from the ground up.

Strategic Reflections

- EBOs urged clarity on how competitiveness-focused deregulation translates concretely on the ground.
- Concerns have been raised regarding taxation policies (e.g., on intra-company services) and the coordination of EBO support in this area.
- African EBOs voiced frustration with the EU's double standards: pushing for energy security via the US/Qatar while limiting African gas dialogues under green conditionalities.
- Desire for stronger EU promotion of services exports and recognition of EBOs as key allies in post-FTA implementation.

2. EU Business Support Measures – EFSD+ Matchmaking Projects, 360° Support Tools

The session focused on unpacking how EU blended finance instruments and guarantee mechanisms—particularly under the EFSD+ architecture—can better support European businesses operating in partner countries. Speakers from DG INTPA presented both the structure and initial deployments of Global Gateway-linked tools, with particular emphasis on the €40 billion in unfunded guarantees and blended instruments designed to leverage €135 billion in investments. Three categories of financial tools were detailed:

- **Project-Oriented Guarantees** aimed at large infrastructure and connectivity projects. Project-oriented guarantees are central to de-risking large-scale infrastructure and connectivity projects, such as renewable energy generation, transport corridors, and digital infrastructure. These guarantees are provided to development finance institutions (DFIs) and multilateral development banks (MDBs), covering risks like political instability, regulatory shifts, or non-payment. By absorbing a share of potential losses, the EU mobilises greater volumes of private capital into high-impact projects that otherwise may not proceed due to risk constraints.
- **Impact and Equity Funds** stimulate access to capital for high-risk ventures. Impact Equity Funds are structured to unlock capital for high-risk, high-impact ventures, especially in green tech, innovation, digitalisation, and SMEs. These funds use EU seed capital or first-loss positions to attract institutional and private investors. A key focus is on early-stage enterprises in frontier markets that struggle to secure financing. These funds are increasingly aligned with EU policy priorities on climate, health, and digital transformation, with mechanisms in place to track both financial return and development impact.
- **Intermediated Lending** targeting MSMEs via local banks and financial intermediaries. The “360° Support” model was illustrated through corridor-based investment approaches (e.g. the Lobito Corridor), which integrate hard infrastructure, SME financing, and digital connectivity synergistically. provides liquidity to SMEs via local financial institutions. While this broadens access to finance at scale, EBOs raised concerns about opacity in fund distribution and limited visibility for EU-branded financing—calling for clearer channels of collaboration and feedback loops.

Together, these instruments form the financial backbone of Global Gateway's private sector strategy, enabling high-impact investments in challenging markets. EBOs underscored the need for greater transparency and co-branding in delivery. Continued alignment between EU financial tools and business intelligence on the ground will be key to unlocking scalable, inclusive growth.

Strategic Reflections

EBOs raised several strategic concerns and proposals:

- **Procurement Access & Market Readiness:** European companies seek clearer timelines and pathways for entering the project pipeline. EBOs also request earlier and more consistent involvement in tender planning and strategy development.
- **Value-Based Competition:** EBOs supported the emphasis on values and due diligence, but cautioned that these strengths need to be matched by better visibility and timely access to procurement information to compete effectively with Chinese or non-EU bidders.

Strategic Reflections (Cont...)

- **Intermediated Lending Concerns:** Concerns were raised about European SMEs not fully accessing concessional terms through local banks, often due to limited incentives or transparency. DG INTPA affirmed its dedication to improved oversight and clearer criteria enforcement.
- **SME Definitions & Local Fit:** EBOs encouraged the EU to apply host-country SME definitions to ensure relevance and inclusion.
- **Speed and Flexibility:** Concerns were voiced over slow disbursement and complex procedures, especially compared to China's Belt and Road Initiative. DG INTPA acknowledged this and noted an internal simplification process is underway.
- **EBOWN recommendations**
 - A systemic approach is needed to better embed EU private sector actors in project design, not just delivery.
 - EBOs are well-positioned to help localise Global Gateway implementation, provided there is institutional access, early information, and recognition of their facilitative role.
 - Future success of the Global Gateway will depend on the EU's ability to translate strategic ambition into practical, responsive, and inclusive financing tools tailored to business realities on the ground.
- **Follow-Up and Pending Matters**
 - DG INTPA is committed to finalising a list of focal points in EU Delegations responsible for Global Gateway implementation, to be shared with the EBOWN network.
 - An updated website listing EFSD+ guarantee instruments and projects will be used to improve visibility for the private sector.
 - EBOs were encouraged to work closely with EU Delegations and DFIs to identify entry points into projects and participate in early scoping.
 - There is ongoing work to explore collaboration between the EU and export credit agencies for additional insurance and risk mitigation tools.

4. Advancing Business Intelligence and Global Market Integration

Outi Slotboom Director, Supply Chains and Business Analysis, DG GROW underscored the European Commission's evolving focus on competitiveness and the strategic importance of resilient supply chains in a shifting geopolitical landscape. In her address to the EBO Worldwide Network, she highlighted the Commission's restructuring to better analyse business dynamics globally, notably through the reorientation of her directorate into "Business Analysis and Supply Chains."

She emphasised the value of the new European Business Sentiment Report, which EBOs have contributed to, as a tool for gauging regulatory environments and competitiveness in third countries. The Commission is eager to expand collaboration with EBOs across three key areas:

- Business Intelligence – Gathering insights on regulatory conditions, market trends, and competition outside the EU.
- Operational Support – Enhancing direct support to EU businesses, especially SMEs, navigating complex environments abroad.
- Policy Interface – Leveraging EBOs as effective interlocutors between local ecosystems and EU institutions.

Slotboom also highlighted the Single Market and Competitiveness Report, which will include external competitiveness indicators and welcomed the idea of integrating EBO data. She concluded by affirming the Commission's intent to deepen structured engagement with the network, recognising its frontline intelligence and field-based expertise

Strategic Reflections

EBOs expressed readiness to support DG GROW's new intelligence and policy interface ambitions and proposed structured channels for recurring feedback. The importance of consistent data sharing, enhanced visibility of EBOs' contributions, and a formal mechanism for integrating third-country insights into EU competitiveness frameworks were echoed across the network.

5. Concluding Session

The closing session of the Annual General Assembly of the EBO Worldwide Network (EBOWN) offered both reflection and direction as members concluded five days of intensive exchange. Led by the EBOWN Board, the session recapped key insights from thematic discussions on competitiveness, the Global Gateway, CS3D, EU trade policy, and business support instruments. It underscored the critical role EBOs play in translating EU priorities into local impact, especially in markets with limited institutional presence.

Appreciation was extended to all new members and board contributors, with a special acknowledgement of the Secretariat's efforts in curating a forward-looking agenda. Members endorsed calls for deeper institutional visibility, operational clarity on Global Gateway involvement, and the development of a shared communications and intelligence framework across the network.

Looking ahead, the Board announced follow-up actions including a September engagement with the Commission on strategic priorities, and a proposed framework for EBO engagement with EU Delegations. The meeting reaffirmed EBOWN's growing credibility and impact while recognising the need for continued professionalism, alignment, and resource support to meet rising expectations. The Assembly closed with a renewed collective commitment: to speak with one voice and act as Europe's trusted partner in the world's most complex markets.

Conclusion

The 2025 Annual General Assembly of the EBO Worldwide Network (EBOWN) marked a pivotal milestone in the network's evolution, delivering not only rich exchanges with EU institutions but also a sharpened strategic lens for global competitiveness and private-sector empowerment. Over five intensive days, EBOWN demonstrated its growing weight as a trusted intermediary between European business and EU external action, and as a critical actor in the implementation of the Global Gateway, trade policy, and sustainable investment agendas.

Throughout the sessions, it became clear that the EU is entering a new phase of external engagement—one that must be anchored in structured public–private collaboration. EBOs affirmed their unique added value: grounded market intelligence, long-standing relationships with local stakeholders, and the capacity to mobilise and represent European business interests in third countries. In turn, EU institutions acknowledged this role and issued concrete commitments to increase EBO integration in project pipelines, policy formulation, and institutional coordination.

The collective outcome of this AGM is not simply a list of deliverables but a renewed consensus: the time has come to formalise EBO participation as a strategic component of the EU's external competitiveness architecture. From CS3D compliance and FX repatriation to clean trade partnerships, industrial supply chains, and business support instruments, EBOs are no longer peripheral—they are essential.

Next Steps:

- A structured VTC follow-up in September with the Cabinet of EVP Séjourné to operationalise Global Gateway integration and triage mechanisms.
- A 30-day “go/no-go/yellow” process for project submissions to be piloted across selected markets.
- Finalisation and dissemination of guidelines for Team Nationals and EBO–EU Delegation engagement.
- Continued onboarding of new EBOs and expansion into strategic regions, including the Gulf, South Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- Development of sector-specific advocacy dashboards and EBO contribution frameworks tied to EU policy instruments and market access priorities.

We leave Brussels with purpose—and with momentum. The work ahead is significant, but so too is the collective strength of this global network. Let us seize the opportunity together.

Contact

EBO Worldwide Network ASBL
C/o BusinessEurope, International
Department
Avenue Cortenburgh 168,
Brussels, 1000
Belgium

www.eboworldwide.eu
info@eboworldwide.eu
[@ebown](#)