



EVENT REPORT

# IDEASLAB 2025

3-4 March 2025, The Square

Mont des Arts, 1000 Brussels, Belgium



IdeasLab 2025, the annual event dedicated to EU policy discussions, was organized by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), a well-established and independent think tank in Europe. The Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), a long-time collaborator of CEPS, supported the event as a sponsor once again.

The gathering took place at The Square in Brussels on March 3-4, 2025. IdeasLab 2025 proved to be a highly engaging event, bringing together 160 speakers and more than 800 participants. Over the two-day gathering, the EMEA booth attracted significant interest, with over 100 visitors learning about the Association's initiatives, publications, and ongoing projects.





## DAY 1- March 3<sup>rd</sup>

### Stock-take Session - The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Where the EU Stands Today

#### Speakers:

- Rusbeh Hashemian, EMEA CTO, PwC Germany
- James Kanagasooriam, Chief Research Officer, Focaldata
- Outi Slotboom, Director of Strategy and Economic Analysis at DG GROW, European Commission Daniel Gros, Director of the Institute for European Policymaking, Bocconi University
- Tinatin Akhvlediani, Research Fellow in the EU Foreign Policy Unit, CEPS (Moderator)

This session provided an overview of the EU's economic, technological, and political landscape, using insights from PwC's CEO survey, public opinion data, and macroeconomic trends. Speakers emphasized the overestimation of AI's short-term impact and underestimation of its long-term implications. Discussions also revealed that while AI and climate transitions are critical business drivers, regulatory constraints continue to pose challenges. There was a notable concern that green investments remain largely regulatory-driven rather than business-driven, making their sustainability uncertain unless companies begin to see tangible benefits.

Additionally, the session explored the broader challenges EU companies face in adapting to digital transformation. European businesses, despite recognizing the need for innovation, are slower in embracing software and AI compared to their US counterparts, often due to high failure costs in the EU. CEOs identified geopolitical instability as a primary concern, highlighting the complex regulatory environment as both a key driver of progress and a significant barrier to adaptation. The discussion concluded by emphasizing the necessity of regulatory reforms that balance innovation with compliance, ensuring the EU remains globally competitive.



## The EU in the Post-2024 World

### Speakers:

- Andrés Rodríguez Pose, Princesa de Asturias Chair and Professor of Economic Geography, London School of Economics (LSE)
- Enrico Letta, Dean, School of Politics, Economics & Global Affairs, IE University; President of the Jaques Delors Institute
- Laura D. Tyson, Distinguished Professor, Haas School of Business, University of California
- Marta Kos, Commissioner for Enlargement, European Commission Karel Lannoo, CEO, CEPS (Moderator)
- Steven Blockmans, Associate Senior Research Fellow, CEPS (Moderator)
- Andrea Renda, Director of Research, CEPS (Moderator) Tinatin Akhvlediani, Research Fellow in the EU Foreign Policy Unit, CEPS (Moderator)
- Pierre-Alexandre Balland, Chief Data Scientist, CEPS (Moderator)

The discussion focused on the future of European integration, highlighting economic, institutional, and security challenges that the EU must address to remain competitive and cohesive. Key points included the need for a more integrated single market, reforms in decision-making processes, and a stronger geopolitical stance. The fragmentation of financial services, banking, and telecommunications within the EU was identified as a major obstacle to economic growth, making European companies less competitive on the global stage. Cross-border mergers and financial harmonization were proposed as essential steps toward creating a more resilient European economy.

Institutional inefficiencies were another major concern, particularly the misconception that unanimity is required for all key decisions. While some legislative areas necessitate unanimity, many can be decided by a qualified majority. However, member states often hesitate to act if a minority opposes a measure, leading to delays and policy stagnation. Reforming decision-making mechanisms to allow for greater flexibility, especially through the expanded use of qualified majority voting, was suggested as a way to enhance governance and efficiency.

Security and defence were also identified as critical priorities, particularly in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Beyond military concerns, security was linked to economic resilience, energy independence, and technological advancement. Strengthening the European defence industry through joint investments was emphasized as a means to create high-skilled jobs and foster innovation. European enlargement, particularly the potential accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans, was framed as both a strategic necessity and a financial challenge.

A phased approach to EU membership was suggested, allowing candidate countries gradual access to European markets before full integration.

The discussion also addressed economic disparities within the EU, which fuel political fragmentation and Euroscepticism.

Many regions suffering from long-term stagnation feel disconnected from European progress, driving support for populist movements. Targeted investments in struggling regions, along with policies promoting long-term economic growth, were proposed to bridge these divides. Additionally, the EU's strategic independence from the U.S. was discussed, with calls for stronger transatlantic ties in areas like climate policy and education while ensuring Europe can act as a global leader.

Demographic challenges, including ageing populations and migration, were recognized as crucial issues requiring balanced and inclusive policies. Ultimately, the discussion underscored that Europe stands at a crossroads, requiring decisive action, institutional reforms, and deeper integration to secure its future stability and influence.



## Affordable Energy Prices - A Conversation with Miguel Gil-Tertre

### Speakers:

- Miguel Gil-Tertre, Head of Cabinet, Executive Vice-President Ribera
- Christian Egenhofer, Associate Senior Research Fellow, CEPS (Moderator)

Ensuring affordable energy remains a critical priority for the EU's Clean Industrial Deal and industrial competitiveness. Miguel Gil-Tertre outlined the action plan drafted by his cabinet, focusing on renewable energy expansion, grid modernization, and reforms in electricity market design. He emphasized the importance of linking decarbonized electricity to industry to accelerate electrification, a sector where the EU lags behind global competitors such as China. The discussion also covered the transition away from fossil fuels, highlighting the necessity for diversified energy supply chains and financial market transparency in energy pricing.

The broader implications of Europe's energy policies was put in the spotlight, stressing the need to balance affordability with sustainability. Concerns were raised over the distributional effects of energy transitions, including the financial burdens imposed on businesses and consumers, and the significant amount of subsidies for the fossil fuels. The session concluded with an appeal for increased investment in green energy infrastructure, state aid consultations, and regulatory adjustments to ensure that electrification becomes a viable and cost-effective alternative across all industries.



## How Can the EU Creatively Engage with Emerging Middle Powers?

### Speakers:

- Enrico Letta, Dean, School of Politics, Economics & Global Affairs, IE University; President of the Jaques Delors Institute
- Rym Ayadi, Founder and President, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA)
- David Ringrose, Head of Division, Connectivity & Digital Transition, EEAS
- Cecilia Malmström, Senior Adviser, Covington
- John Zysman, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley
- Ilke Toygür, Director of the Global Policy Center, IE University (Moderator)

With the global political order becoming increasingly transactional, this session focused on how the EU can establish stronger partnerships with emerging middle powers. The speakers highlighted that the traditional reliance on the US for technological and financial leadership and on China for manufacturing leaving the role of creativity for Europe has created an imbalance. To address this, the EU must rethink its global engagement strategy and leverage its single market more effectively to build sustainable economic ties with key regions such as Latin America and ASEAN.

The panelists emphasized the importance of developing mutually beneficial trade agreements and diversifying partnerships beyond traditional Western alliances. There was also a discussion on the EU's role in financing sustainable projects in emerging economies through mechanisms such as risk-sharing models and public-private partnerships. The session concluded with a call for a more pragmatic, cooperative approach that aligns geopolitical interests with economic imperatives, ensuring long-term growth and stability.





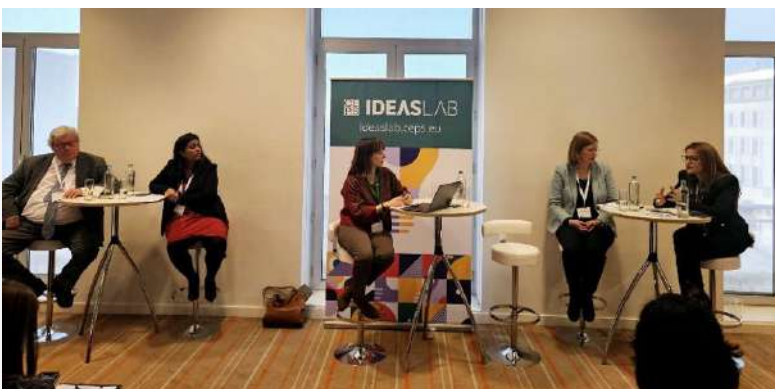
## Global Gateway 2.0 - A Moment of Truth

### Speakers:

- Rym Ayadi, Founder and President, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA)
- Louise van Schaik, Head of Unit EU & Global Affairs/ Senior Research Fellow, The Clingendael Institute
- Reinhard Bütikofer, Senior Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)
- Virginie Battu-Henriksson, Policy Officer, Directorate for Sustainable Development Policy and Coordination, DG INTPA, European Commission
- Ceren Ergenc, Research Fellow, CEPS (Moderator)

The evolution of the Global Gateway initiative was assessed in this session, with a focus on scaling it from an initial concept to a more impactful global strategy. The discussion highlighted the need for continuity while addressing inefficiencies that have limited its effectiveness. Speakers pointed out that while the initiative offers a paradigm shift in development and infrastructure partnerships, it must become more agile and competitive to counter growing influence from other global powers.

A major challenge discussed was the complexity of EU funding requirements, which often make European projects less attractive to partner countries compared to alternatives from nations such as China. The panel explored ways to streamline bureaucracy and make EU-led investments more appealing. Additionally, the role of private-sector involvement was discussed, with an emphasis on de-risking investment in emerging markets. The session concluded with a call for a more strategic approach to positioning the EU as a global leader in connectivity and infrastructure development.



## The green swan: does Europe need a climate bad bank

### Speakers:

- Nicole Reynolds, Associate Research Fellow, CEPS
- Alissa Kleinnijenhuis, Visiting Assistant Professor of Finance, Cornell University
- Julia Symon, Head of Policy Research and Advocacy, Finance Watch
- Thomas Pogge, Leitner Professor of Philosophy and International Affairs, Yale University
- Judith Arnal, Associate Senior Researcher, CEPS (Moderator)

The discussion examined the idea of a climate bad bank as a strategy to manage financial risks linked to climate change and support the transition to a net-zero economy. By acquiring and phasing out high-risk fossil fuel assets before they lose value, such an institution could help stabilize financial markets while redirecting investment toward sustainable alternatives. However, participants stressed the need for careful planning to avoid unintended consequences, such as creating incentives that might encourage continued investment in polluting industries.

Economic and political challenges surrounding this approach were also debated, particularly concerns about how to balance fair compensation for fossil fuel asset holders with the need to accelerate decarbonization. Ensuring that financial institutions shift their focus toward green investments without reinforcing past unsustainable practices was seen as crucial. Additionally, broader regulatory measures would be necessary to prevent further expansion of fossil fuel projects while gradually winding down existing ones.



The conversation also touched on the global implications of such a policy, particularly whether international partners would align with similar measures. While stricter EU regulations could pose competitiveness concerns, achieving energy independence and leading the green transition were highlighted as long-term economic advantages. Ultimately, the discussion underscored that a climate bad bank

could be effective only if implemented as part of a broader, well-structured policy framework that integrates financial, regulatory, and energy transition strategies.



## DAY 2-March 4<sup>th</sup>

### Plenary - Can Europe Deliver on its Industrial Ambitions?

#### Speakers:

- David Zilberman, Professor, UC Berkeley
- Teresa Ribera, Executive Vice-President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, European Commission
- Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Honorary President, The Club of Rome & Executive Chair, Earth4All  
Ann Mettler, Vice President Europe, Breakthrough Energy
- Thomas Becker, Vice President Sustainability and Mobility Strategy, BMW Group  
Cinzia Alcidi, Senior Research Fellow, Head of the Economic Policy and Jobs & Skills Unit, CEPS (Moderator)

As the EU seeks to implement the Competitiveness Compass, this session examined the continent's ability to balance economic growth, industrial innovation, and environmental sustainability. Speakers agreed that regulation must be optimized to support innovation, with calls for a review of industrial policies that might be stifling progress. The urgency of enhancing the EU's industrial resilience was underscored, particularly in light of supply chain vulnerabilities and increasing global competition.



Panelists debated whether Europe’s industrial ambitions are being undermined by overregulation and complex compliance structures. On the other hand regulations are one particularity of Europe contributing to its strong institutional capacity and stability. The need for a resource productivity metric was highlighted, as well as the role of AI and digitalization in optimizing industrial processes. A strong consensus emerged on the necessity of a unified EU industrial strategy that integrates defense, energy, and digital policy to create a more competitive and secure industrial landscape while showing successful business cases for the green transition and putting to question excessive consumption as a role growth model.



## The Rise of the Far Right in the EU

### Speakers:

- Sanna Salo, Senior Research Fellow, Finnish Institute for International Affairs (FIIA)
- Nicolai von Ondarza, Head of Research Division EU/Europe, The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)
- Anthony Zacharzewski, President, The Democratic Society
- Sophia Russack, Researcher, CEPS (Moderator)

This session examined the growing influence of far-right parties across the EU, particularly their increasing role in national governments and EU institutions. Panelists explored how their participation in decision-making is shaping key policies, particularly regarding immigration, economic governance, and social spending. The discussion also assessed how mainstream parties are responding to this shift and whether existing political strategies remain effective in limiting far-right influence.

The session further analyzed the media's role in amplifying far-right narratives, particularly on immigration, and its impact on voter behavior. Concerns were raised about the long-term consequences of far-right normalization and its potential effects on EU unity and democratic values. The conversation concluded with a debate on how to engage citizens in constructive political discourse to counter misinformation and extreme rhetoric.

## Are green jobs great jobs? How to ensure quality jobs in the green transition

### Speakers:

- Achim Schmillen, Lead Economist and Program Leader for Human Development for the EU Member States, The World Bank
- Barbara Gerstenberger, Head of Working Life Unit, Eurofound
- Francesco Corti, Member of Cabinet of EVP Roxana Mînzatu, European Commission
- Jonathan Cornah, Policy Officer, European Federation of Building and Woodworkers
- Alexandre Ounnas, Research Fellow, CEPS (Moderator)

The session explored the relationship between the green transition and job quality, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that newly created jobs in sustainable sectors provide decent working conditions. A key framework for assessing job quality was presented, outlining seven dimensions—physical environment, social environment, work conditions, skills development, working time, job security, and earnings. It was noted that while poor-quality jobs are relatively easy to identify, defining a “good” job is more complex, as it often depends on individual perceptions and trade-offs between different job quality dimensions. No job is ever perfect, but the goal should be to ensure that work remains healthy, motivating, and conducive to learning.

Regarding green jobs, the discussion categorized them into three main types: new and emerging jobs, which currently represent a small share of the labour market; enhanced skill jobs, requiring upskilling but offering greater opportunities; and increased demand for traditionally strained jobs, where working conditions may be more challenging. A concern discussed was the impact of subcontracting, particularly in sectors like construction, which play a key role in the green transition. When multiple subcontractors are involved, job quality often deteriorates, leading to weaker worker protections, lower wages, and heightened health and safety risks. The discussion emphasized the need for stronger regulations and enforcement mechanisms to prevent exploitative practices and ensure that the green transition fosters a fair and sustainable labor market. Additionally, speakers underscored the role of the private sector in co-creating solutions, given that businesses are the largest providers of employment. Their insights and experience in the labour market should be actively considered in shaping policies that support quality job creation.



## AI for All - Fairness and Regulation in AI

### Speakers:

- Magdalena Bochnak, Young Thinker, CEPS
- Robert Praas, Data Scientist, CEPS
- Arthur Dyevre, Professor, KU Leuven Karen Melchior, Senior Adviser, CEPS
- Berta Mizsei, Researcher, CEPS (Moderator)

Speakers highlighted the increasing role of AI in various societal domains and the associated risks of bias and inequality. Discussions centered on the need for AI bias audits, transparency measures, and stronger ethical guidelines to ensure fair and accountable AI development. There was consensus that regulatory frameworks should strike a balance between encouraging innovation and protecting fundamental rights.

Panelists also debated how AI literacy and public engagement could be enhanced to foster trust in AI technologies. They emphasized the importance of inclusive datasets, diverse research teams, and continuous evaluation to mitigate bias. The session concluded with recommendations for policymakers to prioritize fairness in AI regulations while fostering a robust and competitive AI ecosystem in Europe.



## Plenary session- Exploring Europe's Digital Future

**Speakers:** Henna, Maria, Eva, Marietje, Gary

- Gary Marcus, Professor of Psychology and Neural Science, New York University
- Eva Maydell, Member of the European Parliament (EPP)
- Marietje Schaake, International Policy Director, Stanford University
- Henna Virkkunen, Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, European Commission
- Maria Leptin, President, European Research Council
- Andrea Renda, Director of Research, CEPS (Moderator)

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to reshape industries and societies, the EU finds itself at a critical juncture in defining its digital future. This session delved into Europe's position in the global AI race, addressing the need for technological sovereignty, responsible regulation, and strategic investments. It was emphasized that while AI is crucial for economic growth and democracy, Europe remains dependent on external technologies, particularly from the US and China. She highlighted ongoing EU initiatives such as AI factories, semiconductor investments, and quantum computing advancements aimed at positioning Europe as a leader in AI innovation. The challenge, however, lies in fostering domestic innovation while ensuring fair competition and reducing regulatory barriers that hinder growth.

Moreover the complexities of AI governance was discussed, stressing the importance of interdisciplinary research, open competition, and maintaining a balance between regulation and innovation. The session also explored concerns over AI's rapid evolution and the risk of over-reliance on external technology providers. The growing power of tech companies and the EU's responsibility to enforce regulations that protect sovereignty and democratic values was highlighted. Speakers underscored the ethical concerns surrounding AI, warning that the current trajectory risks creating unregulated, overly powerful yet imperfect systems that could undermine transparency, human rights and put nations under higher risk of cyber attacks. The discussion concluded with a strong call for Europe to lead in AI regulation, not only by fostering technological growth but also by setting global standards for ethical AI implementation.







[Link to IdeasLab 2025 highlights video](#)