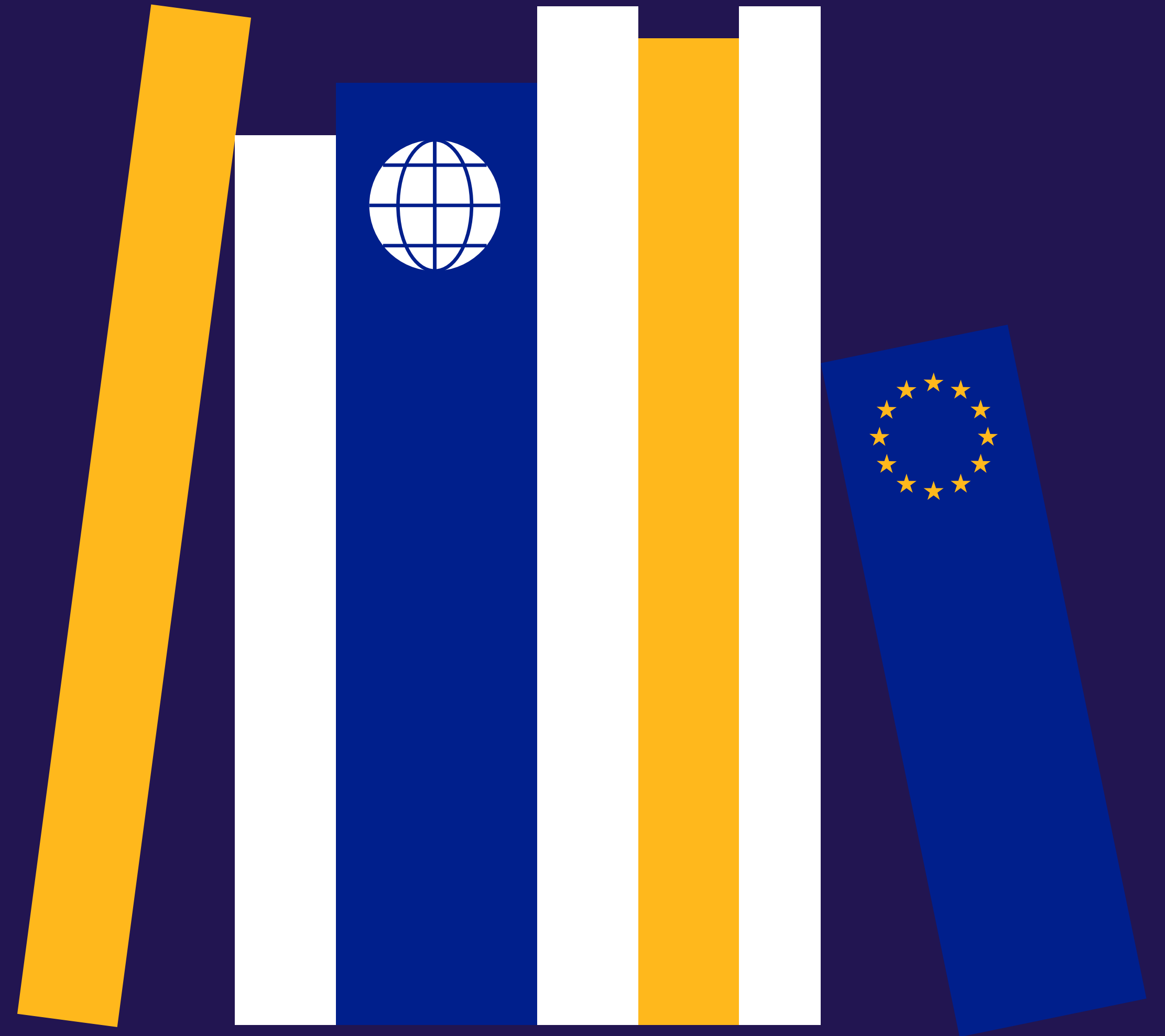


Winter 2026

Ibec International Focus



Contents

Editorial	2	Policy desks	10
Roadmap to reality	2	Shaping the circular economy act	10
EU affairs	3	Influencing the quality jobs act at the tripartite social summit	11
Policy outlook	4	Sectoral highlights	12
Regulatory simplification and beyond	5	Biopharmachem Ireland: unlocking growth capital for european biotech	12
Shared prosperity: the European engine driving Ireland’s economic edge	6	Retail Ireland: implementing EU packaging and labelling rules	13
International affairs	7	Contact the EU and international policy team	14
Driving European resilience	7		
Promoting trade openness	8		

Roadmap to reality

Six months on from the EU institutions’ joint commitment to strengthening competitiveness with tangible policy results, on 15 October the Presidents of the European Parliament and Commission, and Irish Presidency, noted “steady progress” on the One Europe, One Market Roadmap.

In the context of the geopolitical challenges we face and their knock-on impacts on businesses and citizens, the Irish Presidency must act now to make the roadmap a reality to bolster European resilience and competitiveness. While high-level political commitments are welcome and promising, businesses have yet to feel material relief to challenging cost pressures.

For business, this means addressing the “Terrible Ten” Single Market barriers, avoiding regulatory gold-plating and driving simplification, reducing energy costs and enhancing energy security, and strengthening resilience while avoiding harmful protectionism.

Before considering any new legislative action, this means demonstrating that there is a genuine regulatory gap which cannot be addressed through better implementation, guidance or enforcement.

With two defining months remaining in Ireland’s EU Presidency, delivering progress and agreements on the host of current files will be how success is measured. Recognition of Europe’s urgent competitiveness challenge is positive but stable and future-proof legislation requires quality policymaking.

Such policymaking should be guided by “simplification by design,” embedding simplicity, coherence, and ease of implementation and enforcement from the outset.

Impact will be demonstrated by what remains when the Presidency ends. The strategic goals of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap should be embedded as norms in future policymaking to ensure a tangible impact that outlasts the Presidency.

EU affairs

Policy outlook

At the midpoint of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made her State of the European Union 2026 address.

This address acts as a precursor to the annual Commission Work Programme, which outlines the full legislative agenda for the year ahead and is due to be published in early November. Combined with the **October European Council conclusions**, the EU has set out clear indications of the direction of travel for the rest of the year and into 2027.

For Irish businesses, the Commission's thematic focus on resilience, autonomy, security and defence sets a defining tone. The Commission underlined "kickstarting the European economy" as the number one priority for Member States and the EU institutions while competitiveness priorities constitute roughly 15% of the European Council conclusions amid an array of geopolitical topics including Ukraine, the Middle East, Defence and Security, and Enlargement.

Both institutions converge on delivering the One Europe, One Market Roadmap to bolster competitiveness, avoiding regulatory gold-plating and reducing administrative burdens. This push to reach agreement on complex files like the EU Inc and the Industrial Accelerator Act by year-end underscores the exceptionally compressed timeline facing the Irish Presidency. Despite the positive intentions to move quickly, significant files such as the Industrial Accelerator Act must not compromise on quality.

On trade, the Commission highlighted its push for market diversification citing the EU's 80 active Free Trade Agreements and proposed to make Canada the EU's first-ever "associate member" to deepen industrial and technological integration.

Strikingly, there was no direct mention of the US or strengthening the transatlantic economy. Regarding security, the Commission's proposed Emergency Security Council and European Corporation on Critical Raw Materials closely aligns with the European Council's strong emphasis on countering hybrid attacks and securing strategic supply chains.

Crucially, while President von der Leyen's remarks focused heavily on the long-term energy transition and grid deployment, the European Council conclusions adopted a more immediate focus on mitigating exceptionally high energy prices, including reviewing the Emissions Trading System (ETS) impacts. Both institutions agree that reducing the EU's energy dependence is a prerequisite for Europe's economic competitiveness.

There is much alignment in the high-level goals of the Commission and the European Council conclusions, while the former presents a longer-term emphasis on resilience, the latter prioritises immediate policy action on competitiveness. As an honest broker, Ireland must leverage the remainder of its Presidency to ensure these converging agendas deliver practical legislation that genuinely enhances enterprise competitiveness across Europe.

EU affairs

Regulatory simplification and beyond

A stable, predictable and coherent regulatory framework facilitates competitiveness and enables investment and growth.

Irish businesses operate across a fragmented legislative landscape where uncoordinated national gold-plating inflates compliance expenses and disrupts cross-border supply chains. Although Ibec welcomes the simplification agenda and the European Commission's commitment to reduce regulatory burden by 25% by 2029, our members are yet to feel these measures making a difference on the ground.

The net cumulative impact of this legislation, much of which has not yet been fully implemented across the EU, has been assessed by Denmark and Cyprus during their Presidencies.

The two presented reports compiling the costs and benefits of all Commission proposals that had not yet been adopted, based on of the Commission's available Impact Assessments. The Irish Presidency has confirmed their intention to continue this work, and are expected to produce an update in December, which is anticipated to effectively demonstrate the cumulative cost burden facing European businesses.

For Irish businesses, this cumulative regulatory burden is fundamentally a Single Market access issue; diverging national requirements fragment the Single Market, inflate compliance costs and complicate cross-border supply chains.

To counter this fragmentation, Ibec has intensified advocacy across Dublin and Brussels. In our submission to the Commission's consultation on gold-plating, Ibec provided cross-sectoral case studies demonstrating where national divergence fragments the Single Market.

“This cumulative regulatory burden is fundamentally a Single Market access issue.”

Co-hosting a high-level event with BusinessEurope titled **“One Europe, One Market Roadmap: Are we close?”**, Ibec highlighted the gold-plating issue for Irish business directly to Peter Burke T.D., Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Declan Hughes, Secretary General of the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, Bertrand L'Hullier, Head of Cabinet for the European Commission Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, Stéphane Séjourné, and relevant officials from the EU institutions.

Furthermore, as part of the B9+ Alliance of business federations, Ibec authored joint policy recommendations advocating for a targeted Digital Omnibus that embeds ‘simplification by design’, safeguards trade secrets, preserves legitimate interest processing for AI models, and streamlines incident reporting into single-entry portals.

Anchored by the themes of Competitiveness, Security, and Values, and guided by the One Europe, One Market Roadmap, the Irish Presidency has committed to decisive progress on regulatory simplification. Translating this high-level political ambition into a streamlined regulatory framework requires dismantling national gold-plating, securing cross-institutional buy-in, and installing solid governance structures to take action on Single Market integration across Member States and the EU institutions.

Shared prosperity:

The European engine driving Ireland's economic edge

Ireland's economic growth has often been framed around geographic or physical capital factors. However, our real competitive edge lies in our relationship capital.

As Ireland leads the Presidency of the Council of the EU, Ibec launched original research quantifying this advantage. **"Shared Prosperity: The European Engine Driving Ireland's Economic Edge"** explores how this strategic partnership transforms Ireland into a resilient, high-value international hub. Ireland has capitalised on the Single Market of 450 million consumers across the European Union, and these gains are clearly on display in the Irish economy. This first-of-its-kind report revealed the immense impact of European enterprise on the Irish economy.

Ireland's strength relies on shared prosperity: Approximately 280,000 workers employed by European firms in Ireland generate a €16 billion annual payroll. At the time of the last Census, around 258,000 European workers were employed in the Irish labour market, comprising roughly 10% of the total workforce: 5.2% from the EU and 5% from UK and European neighbours. The firms employing these workers power local communities and demonstrate the interconnectivity and

mobility of European labour markets. Ireland is deeply embedded within the EU Single Market, the wider European Economic Area, and the Eurozone, alongside enduring economic ties with our closest neighbours.

Over the past five decades Ireland has embraced investment and trade with other markets, including the US. On average, European companies alone invest €4.5 billion in physical capital annually. Investment in physical infrastructure such as transport, energy and connectivity not only improve the lives of citizens in Ireland but also lays the foundations for businesses all sizes to grow and develop here. These investments have been crucial as relationships with trusted partners have catalysed Ireland's evolution from an agrarian economy into a high-value international hub for sectors such as finance, technology, life sciences, food and drink, and research and innovation.

In September, Ibec launched this first-of-its-kind study with Minister for European Affairs Thomas Byrne in the Irish Film Institute in Temple Bar. The event included an industry panel including member companies who provided case studies for the report including Ericsson, Danone, and Schneider Electric. The message from the panellists and from Ibec was clear: Ireland's strength relies on shared prosperity.

Ireland's strength relies on shared prosperity.

International affairs

Driving European resilience

Security and defence are fundamental pillars of European competitiveness and strategic resilience.

Central to Ibec's vision is the principle that a competitive enterprise base is the primary prerequisite for a resilient state. Rather than viewing security solely through a military lens, Ibec advocates for a whole-of-society approach where economic readiness, critical infrastructure protection, such as transatlantic subsea cables, energy networks, transport systems, and cybersecurity are treated as core components of national and European competitiveness.

Unlocking capital for defence and dual-use innovation remains critical. Ibec emphasises the rapid integration of civilian technology, adapting cutting-edge capabilities from sectors like AI, biotech, cloud computing, space, and advanced manufacturing directly into modern security architectures.

Echoing Ibec's priorities, CEO Danny McCoy, in his capacity as Chair of BusinessEurope's Defence and Security Task Force, contributed to the development of BusinessEurope's paper, "Position on a European Readiness, Preparedness and Defence Strategy". The paper highlights the need to fully integrate security and defence considerations into Europe's long-term competitiveness and growth agenda. It calls for a transition from reactive crisis responses toward a proactive preparedness model grounded in permanent, structured public-private cooperation between EU institutions, national authorities, and the business community.

By scaling Europe's defence industrial base, supported by SMEs, streamlined procurement, aligned standards, and mechanisms like the European Competitiveness Fund, defence spending can serve as a powerful economic engine. The paper further highlights the necessity of an integrated defence single market and strengthened international cooperation that reinforces NATO through balanced burden-sharing.

Demonstrating Ibec's active leadership in driving this policy agenda forward, Danny McCoy chaired a high-level European event on 23 September titled "Security, resilience and competitiveness: Europe's industrial agenda for a new geopolitical era".

The forum brought together senior policymakers and industry leaders to explore how Europe can expand its defence industrial capacity while generating broader economic spillovers. Featuring keynotes from Admiral Seán Clancy, Chairman of the EU Military Committee, and Andrius Kubilius, EU Commissioner for Defence and Space, the event highlighted Ibec's influence at the intersection of enterprise policy and European defence. Through proactive advocacy and transatlantic leadership, Ibec continues to demonstrate that a resilient, secure Europe and a competitive business ecosystem are intrinsically linked.

International affairs

Promoting trade openness

As the global trading environment faces heightened geopolitical volatility and escalating protectionism, Ibec maintains that open, rules-based trade and active market diversification remain fundamental to Irish enterprise resilience and broader European competitiveness.

EU trade policy must strike a precise balance between economic security and international openness to safeguard competitiveness without drifting into harmful protectionism. While speaking in Paris as Chair of Business at OECD's Trade Committee, Ibec's Principal Policy Advisor for Global Affairs, Pat Ivory, underscored the importance of enhanced trade policy cooperation, facilitation and traceability during discussions on trade developments and critical mineral supply chains. Maintaining strong and stable relationships with existing trading partners is equally important.

The recent BusinessEurope US Network meeting, hosted at the Ibec Brussels office featured an exchange with Rufino Hurtado, Senior Trade Representative at the US Mission to the European Union, on shared transatlantic business priorities and offered an important opportunity to deepen the transatlantic partnership.

The Industrial Accelerator Act (IAA) risks embedding protectionist principles in EU legislation that clash with the EU's WTO compliance, potentially triggering retaliatory protectionist measures globally. Ibec has proactively engaged with BusinessEurope, the EU institutions and relevant stakeholders on the topic. Any 'European preference' criteria must only be considered on a case-by-case basis.

If demonstrated to be necessary, it must be strictly limited and removed when the specific criteria to promote European interests has been achieved. A blanket 'Buy European' approach risks undermining the international cooperation needed to revive European competitiveness, ultimately undermining Europe's competitiveness ambitions.

Supporting this, Ibec's advocacy has focused on how strict, protectionist 'Made in Europe' requirements and FDI provisions in the IAA could negatively impact Irish and European competitiveness.

International affairs

Promoting trade openness

Ibec has been closely monitoring developments in EU-China relations. With a view to tackling Chinese overcapacity and unfair competition in the EU, the EU-China Trade and Investment Consultations were launched in June. On Friday 9 October, the two sides agreed to moderate Chinese exports of hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles to the EU and Beijing agreed to lower duties on many European exports.

Looking ahead, the EU is examining a more comprehensive package to address excess capacity through a proposed diversification instrument, with a call for evidence currently underway. Given the strategic sensitivities and structural dependencies surrounding EU-China trade, Ibec is feeding into this call for evidence and contributed to a BusinessEurope paper **“What is the way forward for EU-China relations – Views from European business”** published in October.



Policy desks

Shaping the circular economy act

In partnership with Systems Transformation Hub, Ibec recently hosted representatives from the European Commission, Member States, the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, business, and civil society for a high-level roundtable on the forthcoming Circular Economy Act.

With the Act planned to be published during Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, this was an important opportunity for Irish business to engage directly with policymakers and provide insight on how the Circular Economy Act can lay the foundations that will help build a stronger, more resilient European economy.

Ibec passed on a clear message to policy makers that capital is ready to be invested but uncertainty about rules and market conditions are holding back delivery of projects. Amplifying this problem is fragmentation across the Single Market acting as a barrier to circularity. Differing national rules, classifications, and end-of-waste criteria were seen to make secondary materials harder to trade and often more expensive than virgin inputs.

Europe's progress on recycling and reusing materials has stalled in recent years. To fix this, the new Act needs to make circular business models simple, practical, and financially viable for companies. To promote maximum harmonisation, the Act should be legislated on an Internal Market legal basis in the form of a regulation as opposed to directives. Harmonisation of standards is essential to limit the negative impact of diverging national rules and gold-plating – two of the so called 'Terrible Ten' barriers to holding back integration of the Single Market across the EU.

For an island nation like Ireland, reusing materials locally builds stronger supply chains and protects businesses from global trade shocks. However, circular business models depend on scale to be economically viable. The Circular Economy Act needs to provide the right investment signals by accelerating planning consents for the required infrastructure, including for processing, treatment and shipment.

For more, contact Juan Pablo Martinez, Environmental Sustainability Policy Senior Executive, Policy, Lobbying and Global Affairs Division

Policy desks

Influencing the Quality Jobs Act at the Tripartite Social Summit

Ibec Chair Anne Heraty and CEO Danny McCoy participated in the Tripartite Social Summit (TSS) on 14 October, a centrepiece of the Irish EU Presidency.

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Council President Antonio Costa and Taoiseach Micheál Martin participated alongside European social partners.

On the same day, Ibec also had a bilateral meeting with Roxana Mînzatu, the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission with responsibility for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness.

In these engagements, Ibec emphasised that before considering any new legislative action including the Quality Jobs Act, the Commission should demonstrate that there is a genuine regulatory gap which cannot be addressed through better implementation, guidance or enforcement. Further, true job quality stems from sustainable, competitive, and profitable enterprises capable of generating long-term employment. Overly rigid legislative mandates risk reducing labour market flexibility, which could inadvertently discourage hiring and investment within the Single Market.

Thirdly, the diversity of national labour market systems, industrial relations models and social dialogue traditions is not an obstacle to be overcome, but a core feature of the European social model. Future EU action must therefore fully respect subsidiarity, proportionality, national competences and social partner autonomy.

Ibec also raised Skillnets in Ireland as a good example of upskilling and reskilling to meet the demands of the economy of tomorrow. The Skillnets training framework demonstrates how industry-led upskilling can bridge the productivity gap, deliver real competitiveness for

our businesses and future-proof skills for our people. Scaling this kind of enterprise-led collaboration across the Single Market is exactly how we translate the high-level ambitions of the Draghi and Letta reports into tangible European competitiveness through skills funding focused on AI. For example, there is potential to invest in these types of initiatives by leveraging ESF+.

Ibec contributed to the BusinessEurope response to the second-phase European social partners consultation on the Quality Jobs Act in September which emphasised that although the fields identified for potential EU actions are relevant for the modern world of work, this doesn't automatically justify legislative action at the EU level.

Further, established EU directives including the Working Time Directive, GDPR and the AI Act already offer strong employee protections. Introducing additional legislative layers risks creating overlapping compliance obligations, legal ambiguity and conflicting definitions. Also, expanded reporting obligations and added regulatory friction threaten international competitiveness.

For more, contact Kara McGann, Head of Skills and Social Policy, Policy, Lobbying and Global Affairs Division

Sectoral highlights

BioPharmaChem Ireland

Unlocking growth capital for European biotech

BioPharmaChem Ireland (BPCI) recently co-organised a high-level policy panel with EuropaBio hosted by Regina Doherty MEP at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Bringing together institutional investors, founders, and senior European policymakers from the Parliament and the Commission, the event positioned Irish biopharma priorities at the heart of the European legislative agenda. Our discussions focused on a critical file for our sector and a key pillar of the ongoing Irish EU Presidency: the EU Biotech Act.

With Ireland holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU until the end of December, ensuring this file delivers for life sciences competitiveness is central to both national and European growth agendas.

The EU Biotech Act should focus on three core priorities: accelerating regulatory timelines, protecting intellectual property (IP) safeguards, and unlocking late-stage venture capital. BPCI is calling for fast-tracking clinical trial procedures and establishing standardised multi-country authorisation frameworks to reduce time-to-market. It's also critical to maintain robust, predictable IP protections and Supplementary Protection Certificates (SPCs) to preserve investor confidence in complex clinical development. Finally, BPCI urges the facilitation of cross-border private equity investment and channelling European capital market mechanisms to bridge the late-stage scaling gap.

Dr. Sinéad Keogh, Director of BPCI, chaired a panel at the Parliament to examine the EU-US funding divide. Featuring leaders from Dansk Biotek, the European Investment Bank, Sofinnova Partners, the European Commission, and Benno Therapeutics, the session highlighted concrete pathways to mobilise €15 billion in pension capital targeted specifically at closing the severe Series B and Series C scaling rounds where the US holds an 870% capital advantage and deliver the

€10 billion BioTechEU initiative (announced for 2026–2027) alongside the EIB's existing €3.5 billion venture debt book.

Back in Ireland, this vision aligns directly with state-level execution. We particularly welcome the new €1 billion ISIF Scaling Fund announced in Budget 2027. Through our Budget submission and BPCI's Together for Others strategy, we called for dedicated supports to help indigenous companies attract growth capital, retain valuable IP, and compete globally.

The new fund delivers on this strategy, this new ISIF Fund will help deliver on this goal by enabling native firms to access growth capital, retain valuable IP in Ireland, and compete globally. However, to maximise its impact, the fund's design must reflect the long innovation cycles, high capital intensity, and distinct risk profile that characterise the biopharma sector.

Contribution from Ailbhe Byrne, Senior Public Affairs Executive, BioPharmaChem Ireland



Sectoral highlights

Retail Ireland

Implementing EU packaging and labelling rules

The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) began applying from 12 August 2026, representing one of the most significant changes to packaging compliance requirements in recent years.

While Retail Ireland strongly supports the objectives of the circular economy and the transition to more sustainable packaging systems, members have raised serious concerns regarding the practical implementation of the Regulation and the readiness of businesses to comply with new obligations. A key concern has been the delayed publication of European Commission guidance and outstanding secondary legislation, leaving businesses with very limited time to understand

requirements, gather supplier information, update packaging specifications, and implement new compliance processes. Even well-prepared companies face significant challenges due to factors outside their control.

In July, a letter was sent to Minister Alan Dillon TD outlining the sector's principal concerns and calling for a pragmatic response from Government. Among the key asks were a risk-based approach to enforcement during the initial implementation period, greater clarity on national enforcement responsibilities, harmonised definitions of important concepts such as “producer” and “manufacturer”, and clear guidance on supplier responsibilities and evidence requirements. Practical solutions are required around digital labelling, product documentation, substances of concern, and cross-border supply chain challenges.

Retail Ireland has worked alongside other affected trade associations and raised members' concerns with officials in the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment (DCEE). Discussions focused on the real-world challenges businesses are encountering, including supplier data bottlenecks, compliance documentation requirements, and uncertainty arising from delayed EU-level guidance.

This engagement has helped secure important acknowledgements from Government regarding the

difficulties created by implementation delays. Retail Ireland welcomed indications that Irish authorities will take a pragmatic, risk-based approach to enforcement, recognise documented good-faith compliance efforts by businesses, and support a harmonised EU-wide rollout to minimise Single Market disruption.

Looking ahead, Retail Ireland will continue its advocacy on PPWR implementation both directly and through the centralised Ibec policy team, working alongside other associations to engage with DCEE on outstanding implementation challenges.

Retail Ireland has been actively gathering feedback from members to understand how businesses are managing the new requirements in practice and to identify any persistent compliance, operational or supply chain issues. Building on this feedback, Ibec will look to meet with DCEE officials to discuss the challenges that remain post go-live and to ensure that implementation continues to be practical, proportionate and consistent with a harmonised EU approach.

Contribution from Samira Nicolo, Senior Executive, Retail Ireland



Contact the EU and International Policy Team

[linkedin.com/company/ibec](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ibec)
www.ibec.ie

Neil Willoughby

Head of EU and International Policy
neil.willoughby@ibec.ie

José Amsing

Head of International Strategic Partnerships
jose.amsing@ibec.ie

Sevelina Todorova

Operations and Administrative Officer
sevelina.todorova@ibec.ie

Róisín de Bhaldraithe

Senior EU Policy Executive
roisin.debaldraithe@ibec.ie

Áine Clarke

Senior Trade Policy Executive
aine.clarke@ibec.ie

Ewan Ramsay

EU Policy Executive
ewan.ramsay@ibec.ie

Oonagh Delargy

Trade Policy Executive
oonagh.delargy@ibec.ie

Dublin

84/86 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin 2.
T: +353 1 605 1500
E: membership@ibec.ie

Cork

Second Floor,
Penrose One,
Penrose Dock,
Cork.
T: + 353 21 4295511
E: cork@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/cork

Donegal

3rd Floor,
Pier One,
Quay Street,
Donegal Town,
Donegal.
T: + 353 74 9722474
E: northwest@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/northwest

Galway

Hibernian House,
Eyre Square,
Galway
T: +353 91 561109
E: galway@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/west

Limerick

Gardner House,
Bank Place,
Charlotte Quay,
Limerick.
T: + 353 61 410411
E: midwest@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/midwest

Waterford

Waterford Business Park,
Cork Road,
Waterford.
T: + 353 51 331260
E: southeast@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/southeast

Brussels

Avenue de Cortenbergh 100,
1000 Brussels,
Belgium.
T: +32 (0)2 740 14 30
E: europe@ibec.ie
www.ibec.ie/europe