

POSITION PAPER

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Towards a sustainable and cooperative “Made in Europe”

As the European Union turned its focus towards regaining its competitive edge, the concept of “Made in Europe” began to take shape. In her 2025 State of the Union speech, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a strategic direction to boost European manufacturing, particularly in clean tech and strategic industries, to reduce dependency on third countries and ensure economic security in order to foster industrial independence, create local jobs, and ensure products meet high European standards. The revised Public Procurement Directive and the Industrial Accelerator Act should serve as key instruments for implementing the “Made in EU” objectives.

While the EU aims to increase its competitiveness amidst a changing geopolitical context, the “Made in Europe” concept should mean more than strengthening the economic security and strategic autonomy of the EU. It should serve as a vehicle to ensure that goods and services support quality local jobs, foster sustainable enterprises, and advance the EU’s social and environmental objectives.

Cooperatives are collectively owned and democratically governed by their members (consumers, producers, employees, local communities) who have an equal say in the business management and the way the surpluses are allocated. They are essential partners in delivering this vision, steered by the seven cooperative principles, embedding sustainability, resilience and inclusion in all areas of work, combining economic performance with social progress.



Going forward, for cooperatives “Made in EU” means...

...concern for the local community. Cooperatives are deeply embedded in the local economy. They ensure that production is performed in Europe and that the local community benefits from quality jobs and fair redistribution of generated wealth. As enterprises owned and controlled by members from the community, cooperatives’ “asset-lock” mechanism prevents relocation and retains EU-added value both within the local communities and in Europe as a whole, supporting long-term territorial development including in the most demographic and economically underdeveloped territories. Moreover, because cooperatives are required to reinvest most of the surpluses in the enterprise rather than distributing them, they guarantee that the wealth created remains within their community. Public money spent through procurement or investments made in EU products therefore circulates locally, strengthening regional economies and social cohesion.

...quality jobs. Cooperatives provide meaningful, empowering, quality jobs and contribute to “well-made in EU”. When they are worker-owned, this dimension is further reinforced as workers’ co-ownership and active participation in decision-making naturally support fair wages, good working conditions, and long-term employment. In many cases, cooperatives can also foster inclusive employment, offering opportunities to disadvantaged groups, reaching those far from the labour market.

...social inclusion. Cooperatives are built on values of equality and solidarity, placing people over profits, ensuring that economic activity serves their members and the local community, rather than the other way around. By providing services of general interest, especially to vulnerable and marginalised groups, they strengthen social inclusion, reduce inequalities, and reinforce the social fabric of their communities.

...environmental sustainability. The long-term orientation and strong local roots of cooperatives encourage circular economic practices, including the sustainable use of resources and efficient waste management. By prioritising long-term environmental and social goals over short-term profit maximisation, they act as strategic partners in reaching the EU’s green objectives and a just transition.

...long-term resilience. Cooperatives are inherently resilient and less sensitive to external shocks than conventional enterprises. Their democratic governance, local embeddedness and asset-lock mechanisms enable them to remain operational even in times of crisis. Their long-term orientation ensures continuity across generations. In addition, mutualistic cooperative instruments, such as solidarity funds, mutual guarantees, and shared financial support mechanisms, help members face economic shocks when needed.

...fair distribution of wealth. The wealth generated by cooperatives remains embedded in the economy and contributes to public revenues through taxes paid where value is created, rather than being extracted by external shareholders and transferred abroad. Even when cooperatives grow and scale or internationalise, their member-based governance and territorial anchoring ensure that economic activity continues to serve communities at the local and regional level. Moreover, cooperatives prioritise equality in narrowing pay gaps, including the gender pay gap. By prioritising reinvestment and collective benefit, they help reduce inequalities and strengthen solidarity-based communities.

...sustainable and resilient European supply chains. Thanks to their strong local anchoring, democratic governance and inter-enterprise cooperation, cooperatives foster stable, long-term relationships along production chains. By connecting producers, processors, service providers and distributors, they contribute to more robust supply chains, reducing exposure to volatile global markets. By keeping value creation within Europe, cooperatives reinforce the EU's strategic autonomy, uphold high social and environmental standards and support a fair and inclusive sustainable and industrial transition.

...human-centric innovation. Cooperatives develop solutions aligned with the needs of their members and local communities, operating successfully across both traditional industries and the digital and technology sectors. Their model is itself a form of innovation: democratic governance and collective ownership offer an alternative to extractive, shareholder-driven tech structures, driving technology development oriented towards the common good. Their asset-lock mechanisms and member-based ownership protect against hostile takeovers and ensure strategic technological capabilities remain under European control, helping safeguard the EU's technological sovereignty.

We therefore call for the following recommendations:

1. By taking into account their added value, the strategic importance of cooperatives must be acknowledged and explicitly reflected in the “Made in EU” concept.
2. In particular, as the EU is currently revising the Public Procurement Directive, the “Made in EU” criteria should allow for the awarding of additional points and improve access to enterprises that not only guarantee production within the EU but also retain the value created in the EU, such as cooperatives. The revision is therefore well-positioned to set the scene for a “European preference” across all public spending.
3. “Choosing European” should be understood as an investment in local, sustainable, and democratic value-based production that delivers tangible benefits to people and communities. But producing in Europe is not enough: economic and social value must also be owned and retained in Europe. Therefore, the “Made in EU” approach must rest on an “Owned by EU” foundation. In practice, this means prioritising models such as cooperatives, which guarantee that public money and investments subject to “Made in EU” requirements strengthen Europe’s strategic autonomy while directly supporting quality jobs, social cohesion, democratic participation and a more sustainable European economy.
4. We call for greater coherence and alignment among the various concepts, such as “Made in EU”, “Designed in EU” or “Owned in Europe”, ensuring that their interpretation is grounded in the principles outlined above.
5. Avoid imposing additional administrative burdens that may adversely affect SMEs, including cooperatives, notably by providing accompanying support measures to help offset supply chain cost increases caused by shifts in public procurement decisions following the Made in Europe” requirements.

