

S3 Summit Declaration

Bratislava, 10 February 2026

We, the Heads of Governments of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Austria and the Slovak Republic met in Bratislava on 10 February 2026 to discuss current economic challenges and work on solutions to increase Europe's industrial competitiveness ahead of the informal Leader's Retreat on 12 February 2026.

Located in the heart of Europe, Czechia, Austria and Slovakia have all three benefited substantially from EU membership and the Single Market. Consequently, we underline our strong commitment to a competitive, resilient and sustainable European economy. However, in light of persistent geopolitical uncertainties, growing protectionism and structural challenges, we express our deep concern about the loss of competitiveness in Europe. Unless this trend is not rapidly reversed, the European Union will also fail at resolving the challenges in all other areas where citizens expect solutions. The competitiveness of Europe's economy is decisive for growth, wellbeing and prosperity. Regaining economic strength through targeted political measures must be our top priority this year and years to come.

We believe that Leaders at the upcoming Retreat should identify the following areas as key to unlock the full potential of the European economy:

- **Lowering Energy Prices:** Europe's competitiveness depends critically on secure, affordable and predictable energy supplies, underpinned by regulatory frameworks that foster growth, innovation and social cohesion.
 - Today, energy prices remain structurally higher than those of key global competitors, undermining Europe's industrial base and investment attractiveness. Moreover, disparities in energy prices between EU Member States have direct implications for economic cohesion within the EU.
 - We stress the importance of a well-functioning internal energy market and call for continued efforts to improve its efficiency, transparency and resilience. This includes better coordination at EU level, investments in energy infrastructure, and the removal of remaining bottlenecks.
 - To strengthen Europe's competitiveness, our energy prices must be significantly reduced. We call on the European Commission to present concrete and effective proposals to achieve this objective. In this context we underline that, as long as gas continues to feature relevantly in the energy mix of EU Member States, especially in those that are landlocked, we must in particular address the impact of high gas price.
 - We highlight the need to accelerate all approval and permitting procedures for renewable energy and infrastructure projects.

- **Adjusting the Green Transition:** Safeguarding the Union's long-term prosperity requires a balanced approach between climate ambition and economic realism.
 - The impact of the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) on energy prices, inflation and industrial competitiveness must be carefully assessed.
 - Therefore, an overall functioning of the ETS system should be reviewed as well as further options to be considered to limit excessive energy prices and volatility of allowances and to prevent the risk of carbon and investment leakage. The revision of the ETS system must include a slower phase-out pathway for free allocation of allowances from 2028 onwards to prevent the relocation of European businesses as well as the risks of carbon leakage.
 - In this context, we need to assess whether the proposed adjustments to the ETS2 system are adequate.
 - We call on the European Commission to continue with its simplification agenda and to propose a Climate Omnibus package to reduce the administrative burden for European companies resulting from climate legislation.
- **Supporting industry, driving Europe's Automotive Competitiveness:** The automotive and supplier industry contributes decisively to prosperity, employment, and innovation in Europe. This is particularly true for Central European countries, where this sector accounts up to 10 % of GDP and together provides over 500.000 jobs
 - In this context, any new European regulation for the automotive sector must be innovation-friendly and - where appropriate and efficient - technology-neutral. In this regard, we welcome the review of the CO2 emission standards for cars and vans as a first step. Further action will nevertheless be necessary to ensure that industrial competitiveness and climate targets go hand in hand.
 - Energy-intensive industries are under increasing pressure from high input costs, decarbonization and global competition. Preserving and strengthening Europe's industrial base is essential for jobs, technological leadership and strategic autonomy.
 - As part of the Ministerial Alliance for Energy-Intensive Industries we promote a coordinated EU approach aimed at strengthening the competitiveness and long-term viability of Europe's energy-intensive industries, namely steel, aluminium and chemical industries. We need to prevent its relocation to third countries with lower environmental standards and energy prices.
- **Reducing regulatory and administrative burdens, reinforcing investments and innovations:** We must continue to reduce administrative burdens to free up our countries' capacities for innovation and growth with a specific focus on key enabling technologies.

- We underline the importance of a sustainable and structural reduction of administrative burdens. The Omnibus Regulation, as well as an Environmental as well as Digital Omnibus should be implemented.
- We therefore call for a competitiveness check across all EU policy areas, ensuring that regulatory and cost burdens do not disproportionately affect European companies or undermine their ability to operate and invest in Europe.
- Targeted support for innovation and industrial transformation must go hand in hand with safeguarding industrial activity, expansion of investment capacity and fair competition within the internal market.
- **Completing the Single Market:** We should aim at further deepening and completing the Single Market by removing remaining unjustified barriers between the Member states, to unlock the EU's full economic potential. This also includes the Savings and Investments Union.
 - We are committed to collaborate to reduce, unilateral and existing unjustified barriers as well as unfair practices in the Single Market and to identify cross-border challenges, particularly for products and services.

We stand ready to contribute constructively to strengthening Europe's competitiveness and welcome the Informal EU Leader's retreat as a forum for providing guidance on crucial economic policies. The European Union has a clear responsibility to pursue a more economically focused approach, placing competitiveness at the core of its policies through less and better regulation, concrete support for a strong industrial base, and the delivery of affordable energy for industry and citizens.

Robert FICO
Prime Minister
of the Slovak Republic

Andrej BABIŠ
Prime Minister
of the Czech Republic

Christian STOCKER
Federal Chancellor
of the Republic of Austria