European Permitting Conference - REPORT

From bottlenecks to breakthroughs: Rethinking industrial permitting for a competitive & climate-neutral Europe

8 September 2026

Introduction

On 8 September 2026, the Informal Coalition on Permitting convened its first European Permitting Conference, bringing together representatives from the European institutions, national authorities, industry, investors and civil society. The conference examined how Europe can accelerate strategic industrial and energy projects while maintaining robust environmental and regulatory standards.

The central question was straightforward: Europe has established ambitious objectives for decarbonisation, competitiveness, energy security and strategic autonomy, but can it build the infrastructure and industrial capacity required to achieve them?

MEP Elena Donazzan, vice-chair of the ITRE Committee, described permitting as a structural and strategic enabler of Europe's resilience. Europe cannot ask industry to transform at unprecedented speed while projects continue to face lengthy procedures, overlapping rules, insufficient administrative capacity and legal uncertainty. Simplification should not mean deregulation, but clearer rules, better coordination, adequately staffed authorities and more efficient procedures.

Philippe Lamberts, advisor to President von der Leyen, similarly acknowledged that projects inevitably have consequences: "You cannot create an omelette without breaking some eggs: you cannot get away from the fact that everything we want to do and achieve in Europe has an environmental impact." At the same time, "Permitting is here for a reason, but it is not an excuse for doing nothing." Inaction also carries serious environmental, economic and strategic risks.

MEP Radan Kanev warned that reform has not yet produced sufficient results on the ground. In some cases, the "'one-stop shop' has become an addition to an already lengthy permitting process, rather than replacing it." He also cautioned that permitting may be used at national level as a political instrument to promote or prevent particular projects, underlining the need for greater accountability and safeguards against the politicization of decisions.

Panel 1 – Permitting, predictability and accelerating industrial projects

The first panel explored how Europe can accelerate industrial projects without weakening its standards. The strongest recurring message was that predictability, coordination and accountability matter as much as speed.

Permitting procedures can last between four and seven years, while litigation may extend some cases to ten years. This uncertainty is reflected in the cost of projects and can prevent them from reaching a final investment decision. As Chris Twomey, Sosteneo, explained: "As a financier of investible and ready-to-build projects, we spend a lot of time on the question: when is a permit actually real?" Ultimately, "We struggle to price uncertainty, and that's when projects die." Fabienne Moimaux, BNP Paribas, likewise identified unpredictability as the principal financing risk and stressed that greater certainty improves project bankability.

Stellina Siarapi, Greek Ministry of Development, argued that digitalisation should be used to redesign and simplify procedures rather than merely reproduce existing processes online. Digital systems should be interoperable, and permitting should be embedded within long-term infrastructure and industrial planning. Clear responsibilities and stronger coordination are needed across jurisdictions, authorities and infrastructure value chains.

Lucie Boost, GIE, highlighted the difficulties created by separate approvals across interconnected projects, particularly where public support schemes operate within fixed periods that are significantly shorter than permitting timelines. Governments should facilitate delivery while maintaining a level playing field across technologies and Member States.

Vincent Dufief, Imerys, focused on regulatory complexity and litigation risk: "We need to simplify and streamline permitting. Too many complex rules open doors to future litigation… This adds uncertainty to the permitting process." He called for broadly applicable simplification, more pragmatic legal procedures and the responsible use of artificial intelligence to streamline administrative steps.

Panel 2 – Building an investable CCS value chain

The second panel, focusing on CCUS, demonstrated how permitting difficulties are amplified when several interconnected projects, jurisdictions and parts of a value chain must develop simultaneously in project development.

In his dialogue with François-Régis Mouton de Lostalot, IOGP Europe, MEP Dimitris Tsiodras presented carbon capture and storage as essential to reconciling Europe's climate ambitions with the retention of energy-intensive industries, jobs and investment. This is also critical in Southern Europe to decarbonize hard-to-abate sectors such as refining, cement and metals.

Greece has the potential to become a carbon-management hub for the Mediterranean and South-East European region, building on Prinos, its geological storage potential and its maritime and industrial expertise. This will require clear cross-border CO_2 transport rules, interoperable infrastructure and coherent permitting across jurisdictions.

The Net-Zero Industry Act's target of 50 million tonnes of annual CO_2 injection capacity by 2030 provides an important political signal. However, targets and storage obligations alone will not establish a market. Today few projects only are close to operational level, leaving a huge gap towards reaching the target. Capture facilities, transport networks, storage capacity and industrial demand must develop together, with a viable commercial case across the full value chain. The discussion emphasized the challenge to apply an obligation to countries starting from very different perspectives and level of development for CCS.

Gerda Verburg, Element NL, called for greater emphasis on making projects investable, including the full use of EU ETS revenues to support industrial decarbonisation. She advocated integrated permitting across the CCS value chain, fewer duplicated consultations and effective one-stop shops. Linking project delivery to Europe's strategic position, she urged policymakers to "make sure European countries are present at the table instead of being on the menu."

Razvan Popescu, Romgaz, explained that Romania has adopted primary CO_2 legislation but still lacks the secondary rules and approved projects needed for implementation. Storage developers also face uncertainty because emitters cannot always commit to future CO_2 volumes. In his view, "CO_2 projects need a similar approach to permitting as the EU did for renewables," supported by appropriate public funding and risk-sharing mechanisms.

Tom O'Brien, Nephin Energy, highlighted the complexity created by cross-border value chains and legacy rules that restrict activities required by emerging technologies. Europe cannot rely on penalties alone: CCS must become an attractive investment proposition. Without stronger enabling conditions, he warned that under the NZIA, "When 2030 arrives, we will have a compliance crisis."

The panel explored the perspective of an industrial player developing CCU, RHI Magnesita. For certain industrial processes, electrification, biomass and hydrogen are not yet viable alternatives. CCS and carbon utilisation may therefore be essential, but industry cannot wait years for every permit required across the chain. As Martin Pischler, RHI Magnesita, summarised: "Decarbonisation has to be a business case."

Panel 3 – From sectoral experience to horizontal reform

The third panel considered what Europe can learn from existing sectoral approaches and whether a horizontal permitting initiative could address recurring barriers across industries.

The sectoral evidence demonstrated both the duration and the diversity of current procedures. Harmen Dekker, EBA, reported that permitting can take two to three years and identified the absence of genuine single points of contact as a recurring problem. Transparency and speed must progress together: applicants need clarity on procedural stages, while authorities should be subject to predictable and meaningful deadlines.

Guy Willems, WindEurope, reported average timelines of five to seven years. It presented RED III as a useful model for accelerating and improving procedures, while cautioning against reopening the Birds and Habitats Directives and expressing reservations about a horizontal permitting omnibus.

Administrative capacity emerged once again as a central constraint. Luca Franza, Edison, estimated that staffing shortages within competent authorities account for 67% of permitting blockages in Italy. Gabrielle Gathey, GD4S, confirmed that shortages of personnel and technical expertise exist not only at EU and national level, but also within local authorities responsible for implementation.

Luca Franza, Edison referred to overriding public interest as a potential mean of overcoming regulatory obstacles but warned against overreliance on flexibilities introduced through guidance. Such solutions must remain legally robust and workable in practice.

Views differed on the proposed horizontal permitting omnibus. Philippe Dumas, EGEC, considered it a useful political signal but stressed that its impact would depend on its eventual scope and content. MEP Wouter Beke, co-author with MEP Christian Ehler of the initiative calling for a horizontal omnibus, argued that faster procedures and digitalisation would not be sufficient on their own. The EU must also consider the substance and interaction of legislation, the treatment of legal appeals and whether lawmakers adequately anticipate the practical consequences of the rules they adopt.

The discussion therefore suggested that a horizontal initiative could provide a common framework for coordination, capacity and timelines, but may need to coexist with targeted sectoral approaches.

Panel 4 – Implementation and balancing competing interests

The fourth panel examined how permitting works in practice and how environmental, economic and strategic interests can be balanced in individual permitting decisions.

MEP Wouter Beke stressed that permitting has become a political issue as Europe seeks to strengthen strategic autonomy, expand grids, modernise agriculture and deliver investment. He questioned whether the current legal framework is adapted to these challenges, pointing to cumulative requirements, evolving case law and difficulties arising from the interaction of different pieces of legislation. He called for a more strategic and horizontal approach to permitting, stressing that the objective should not be to choose between competitiveness and environmental protection, but to enable both.

Pernille Weiss-Ehler, Advisor to Commissioner Roswall, similarly emphasised that environmental protection and economic development should go hand in hand, including in relation to water security. She highlighted simplification, digitalisation and skills as important elements of the Commission's work, as well as the need to mobilise private investment to address major investment gaps, including in the water sector. On permitting, she stressed the importance of finding the right balance between competing interests and suggested that a more holistic approach to water management could help, for example by considering small catchment areas within the context of larger river basins.

David Govoni, Unicalce, reported that obtaining a new mining permit in Europe can take 10–15 years, with renewals taking several years. However, he stressed that unpredictability is an even greater concern than duration, as uncertainty over timing makes it difficult to plan investments and secure capital. He identified fragmentation, overlapping requirements and differences in implementation as key bottlenecks. He called for more risk-based legislation, integrated permitting, predictable and meaningful deadlines, one-stop shops and access to sufficient and coordinated administrative and technical expertise.

David Granberg, Boliden, argued that Europe has significant geological potential, skilled labour and competent suppliers, but that permitting remains a major obstacle. He highlighted the difficulty of balancing numerous legally binding and detailed environmental rules with broader political ambitions for industrial development and strategic autonomy. On the Water Framework Directive and Natura 2000, he stressed that responsible water management and environmental protection remain important for mining, while arguing that proportionality and a more predictable approach to evidence requirements are needed to avoid open-ended exercises.

An audience member from ClientEarth disagreed that the regulatory framework is the principal cause of delay, attributing most problems to inadequate staffing and technical expertise within public authorities. They also cautioned against weakening the Water Framework Directive, noting that Member States already bear costs related to pollution caused by mining activities.

Conclusions

Across the four panels, five priorities emerged:

- Reinforce the staffing, expertise and accountability of permitting authorities.
- Establish clear, meaningful and predictable timelines.
- Improve coordination through genuine one-stop shops and interoperable digital systems.
- Apply stronger initial scoping and proportionate, risk-based procedures.
- Create enabling regulatory and commercial conditions across complete project value chains.

Participants did not agree on every legislative solution. However, they shared the view that the current combination of fragmentation, limited capacity and uncertainty is incompatible with Europe's ambitions.

Europe must maintain high environmental and social standards while making decisions quickly and predictably enough for investment, innovation and the energy transition to succeed. It has established its objectives; permitting is now one of the decisive tests of whether it can deliver them.