

Tripartite Social Summit 2026, Brussels - 14 October 2026

General title: Driving Europe forward

Introduction

Dear Presidents,

Dear Taoiseach,

Dear Ministers,

Dear Executive Vice-President,

Dear colleagues,

This morning, long before we sat down in this room, 26 million people went to work in retail and wholesale. This is one in seven jobs in Europe.

They opened large and small shops in Cork, Vilnius and Valencia. They drove the delivery vans, stocked the shelves, and served the first customers of the day.

We are the largest private employer in Europe. And, of the top 250 businesses in the world, one in three is a European retailer.

We are present in every community, urban and rural. And are here to stay.

For many Europeans, retail and wholesale is where working life begins: the student paying for their studies, the parent returning to work, the newcomer who needs a first chance. We offer them a job close to home, flexibility, and a ladder to climb.

But we must also be honest about the pressure we face. Our average net margins are only 2% and decreasing. Costs are rising. Consumers count every cent. And AI is transforming us.

We can make this transition a success for workers. But only if our companies have the confidence and the capacity to invest. And our sector needs to invest 600bn euros until 2030 to become more digital, sustainable and skilled.

Quality jobs and competitive companies are two sides of the same coin. That is why we ask for your support on three things.

First, every change or new risk does not need new regulation.

European and national laws and collective bargaining arrangements shape how we share information, consult, and ensure health and safety as new ways of working arise.

So, use these frameworks. If it is not necessary, do not regulate further!

Second, a Single Market that truly delivers. End the use of territorial supply constraints. Let retailers and wholesalers source in the Single Market and pass on the savings to families!

As inflation is rising again, affordability matters for many Europeans.

Third, farmers need support. But regulating contracts between retailers and large manufacturers is not the answer.

The revision of the unfair trading practices directive must not rely on the unproven idea that benefits will simply flow down the chain.

It must target practices that help farmers and small processors become more efficient.

It must help those who need it; not those who don't.

Presidents, our sector opens its doors every morning, in every corner of Europe.

Give us the conditions to operate and invest, and we will keep delivering

- quality jobs where Europeans live
- and affordability for those who need it most.

Thank you.

Delivered by Juan Manuel Morales, President EuroCommerce