



FAMILY BUSINESS POLICY DAY 2026- Brussels, 3rd June 2026

Opening Speech — Jan Kornelis van Oord, President of EFB

PART I — EUROPE AT A CROSSROADS

Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to Brussels. Welcome to the first Family Business Policy Day of European Family Businesses.

I say 'first' with some pride — and with a sense of purpose. Because this is not simply a conference. This is a statement. A statement that Europe's family businesses are here, that we have things to say, and that we intend to be heard.

Let me begin, not with data or policy briefs, but with a simple observation: Europe is at an inflection point.

The geopolitical order that shaped the last three decades — the stable, open, rules-based world we built our businesses around — is fracturing. Supply chains built over a generation are being rewired.

And time is not on our side.

Trade alliances we took for granted are being tested. And the economic security assumptions on which many of us made investment decisions are no longer reliable.

At the same time, Europe is looking inward — and rightly so — asking itself a fundamental question: how do we remain competitive?

How do we maintain our industrial base, our jobs, our living standards, in a world that is becoming more fragmented, more protectionist, and more uncertain?

These are serious questions. And they deserve serious answers.

"The good news is that the answer — part of it, at least — has been here all along. It is called the family business."

PART II — WHO WE ARE, AND WHY THAT MATTERS

Let me be direct about what I mean when I talk about family businesses, because too often in Brussels, we are misunderstood, or simply not seen at all.

We are not a category of tax policy. We are not a sub-clause in an SME regulation. We are a pillar of European society and economy.

Eighty-five percent of all European companies are family businesses. We account for sixty percent of private-sector employment. We are present in every sector — from agriculture to advanced manufacturing, from logistics to life sciences.

We are rooted in the regions of Europe that are too often forgotten in the conversations that happen in capital cities and in these very corridors.

And there is something else — something that separates us from other business models — something that I think the current moment makes more important than ever.

"We do not manage to the next quarter. We manage to the next generation."

That long-term orientation — that willingness to invest patiently, to build steadily, to keep jobs in communities even when the short-term figures might say otherwise — is precisely what Europe needs right now.

When the world becomes volatile, you want owners who are anchored. When supply chains need to be rebuilt, you want businesses whose roots run deep.

When a region needs a business and employment to stay, you want a family with patient capital that has its name above the door.

That is who is in this room today.

And that is why this day matters.

PART III — THE POLICY BATTLES WE ARE FIGHTING

But I wouldn't be doing my job as President of this organization if I only spoke about our strengths. Because today, the policy environment in Europe is moving in ways that concern me deeply.

Let me be frank with you — as frank as I would be with a fellow business owner, which is what I am.

There are three battles that, I believe, define this moment for European family businesses. And I want each of you in this room — whether you are a business owner, a policymaker, or a national association leader — to leave today with a clear understanding of what is at stake.

THE FIRST BATTLE: Business transfers and the threat to generational continuity.

Over the next ten years, a substantial share of Europe's businesses will change hands. Owners are retiring. The baby boom generation is stepping back. And the question of whether those businesses continue — whether they survive the transfer to the next generation, whether they stay in family hands, whether they remain based in Europe — is one of the most consequential economic questions facing this continent.

For thirty years, the 1994 European Commission Recommendation on business transfers has provided a framework that allowed family businesses to plan succession, to pass on what they built, without being forced to liquidate or sell business assets simply to pay a tax bill.

For thirty years, that framework protected continuity, protected employment, and protected the communities where our businesses are rooted.

That framework is now under revision. And I have to tell you — the signals coming from certain parts of the Commission are not reassuring.

"Business assets are not passive wealth. They are jobs. They are communities. They are decades of patient investment, money put to work, and let Europe thrive"

DG TAXUD has recently published a report calling for stricter inheritance and gift taxation — and it specifically questions the exemptions for business assets. It describes those exemptions as regressive, base-eroding, and tools for tax planning.

I want to be very clear about our response to that characterization:

it is wrong. It is economically illiterate. And we intend to say so — loudly, and with the evidence to back it up.

Let me give you one example. When the United Kingdom last year curtailed its Business Property Relief, the UK Treasury calculated a short-term gain.

What independent economists calculated was a loss of nearly two hundred thousand jobs and fifteen billion pounds in economic value. Tax revenue from businesses that disappear is not tax revenue. It is tax on the destruction of businesses that took generations to build.

EFB is mobilizing the most significant advocacy campaign in our history to respond to this moment. We are commissioning independent expert analysis. We are mapping the contribution of family businesses across all twenty-seven EU member states. We are engaging directly with the Commission, with the Parliament, and with national policymakers.

And I want to say to every policymaker in this room: we are not here to ask for special treatment. We are here to ask for fair treatment.

Treat productive business assets for what they are — not as private wealth to be taxed, but as productive engines of employment and growth that deserve to be preserved across generations.

I repeat: "We are not here to ask for special treatment. We are here to ask for fair treatment."

THE SECOND BATTLE: The Single Market — still incomplete after thirty years.

We will hear more about this in detail today. But let me share a number that stayed with me. The IMF recently estimated that internal market barriers within the European Union are equivalent to a forty-four percent tariff on goods and a hundred and ten percent tariff on services.

One hundred and ten percent.

We talk endlessly about competitiveness vis-à-vis China, vis-à-vis the United States — and rightly so. But the largest barrier to European competitiveness is often the border between two EU member states.

For family businesses, this is not an abstract policy debate. It is a daily reality. A business owner who wants to expand into a neighboring market faces a thicket of different regulatory requirements, recognition barriers, and administrative burdens.

A skilled worker who wants to move across a border to fill a vacancy in a family business faces qualification recognition problems that can take years to resolve.

The European Commission has rightly called these the 'terrible ten' barriers. Our job today — and the job of the policymakers in this room — is to make sure that the response is as ambitious as the diagnosis.

THE THIRD BATTLE: Europe's industrial base — and where family businesses fit.

The Industrial Accelerator Act, the “Made in Europe” agenda, the Buy European principle — these are responses to a real and serious threat: the erosion of Europe's manufacturing base, the vulnerability of our supply chains, the reliance on foreign production for goods and technologies that are strategically critical.

I welcome the ambition. But I want to make sure that family businesses — who are among the most rooted, the most resilient, and the most long-term oriented businesses in Europe — are not left out of the conversation about what 'Made in Europe' actually means.

Europe needs to be bold and strong but not naïf.

We are not asking for subsidies. We are asking to be recognized. We are asking that when the new European industrial policy is written, the businesses that have been manufacturing in Europe for two, three, four generations — that never offshored, never financialized, never chased the cheapest labour — are counted as part of the solution.

PART IV — A CALL TO VISIBILITY AND ACTION

I want to close the substantive part of this speech with a point that may seem technical but is, I believe, fundamental.

Family businesses are invisible in the data.

There are no harmonized EU-level statistics on family businesses. No Eurostat dataset. No official count of how many of us there are, what we contribute, how many people we employ, what share of GDP we represent.

Policymakers are making decisions that affect millions of businesses and hundreds of millions of workers, without the data to understand the entity they are regulating.

"Invisible in the data, we risk becoming invisible in the policy."

I am pleased to report that last month, EFB met with the Deputy Director-General of Eurostat.

And we achieved something I consider rather significant: an agreement in principle that developing EU-level statistics on family businesses is achievable, using existing data sources, without creating new burdens. This is the beginning. But it is an important beginning. Because you cannot defend what you cannot measure.

You cannot advocate for what you cannot count.

You cannot shape European industrial, tax, and competition policy in favor of family businesses if those businesses do not exist in the official databases.

To every policymaker, every MEP, every Commissioner's representative in this room: we are asking for your support in making this happen. Not as a favor, but as a much-needed correction of a long-standing gap that damages the quality of European policy.

And to every family business owner, every national association leader in this room: we need your engagement, now, more than at any point in EFB's history.

The 1994 Recommendation will be updated. The Single Market will be reformed. Industrial policy will be written. The question is not whether these things will happen. The question is whether family businesses have a seat at the table when they do.

We have built businesses that outlasted financial crises, pandemics, and even world wars. We have employed people in regions that capital markets forgot. We have invested in communities when quarterly returns would have said: don't.

We have done all of this quietly — perhaps too quietly.

"Today is a day when we stop being quiet"

PART V — WELCOME AND HANDOVER

We have assembled today a remarkable group of people. Family business owners from across Europe, who will share the practical realities of running multigenerational enterprises in a demanding environment.

Members of the European Parliament and the European Commission, who are shaping the decisions that will define the next decade.

National association leaders who carry the voice of thousands of businesses back to their capitals.

I want to thank each of you for being here. I want to thank our speakers for their willingness to engage with these questions seriously and openly.

And I want to thank the team at EFB — above all, our Secretary General Jesús Casado — for making this day possible.

Over the next hours, you will hear about the changing world order and what it means for European businesses exposed to geopolitical risk.

You will discuss the path to completing the Single Market. You will examine what 'Made in Europe' really means for family businesses.

And you will hear from owners and policymakers about the critical challenge of business transfers and what the next generation of European business continuity policy should look like.

These are not easy conversations. But they are necessary ones. And there is no better place to have them than here in Brussel — with the people who have the most at stake, and the most to offer.

Welcome, everyone, to the Family Business Policy Day.

Let us make it count.