

Scaling Up Cleantech: A Benelux Blueprint for Europe

Manifesto by the Benelux Cleantech
Ecosystem





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We, the entrepreneurs, investors, and researchers of the Benelux cleantech ecosystem, believe that clean technology is not just an environmental necessity – it is a big economic opportunity for Europe. Our economies, our industries, and our future depend on scaling breakthrough solutions that power a sustainable, competitive, and resilient Europe. We have a plan – 10 points to supercharge the cleantech engine of growth.

The Benelux region has all the ingredients to lead on this endeavour. It has world-class innovators, strong economic foundations, and a history of pioneering collaboration. Did you know that the European treaties even specifically allow the Benelux Union to integrate faster than the EU as a whole (art. 350 TFEU)? The Benelux has the unique position of being Europe's regulatory sandbox! So, if any region should be a leader on policy-driven growth for cleantech, it is the Benelux.

Yet, too often, promising cleantech companies leave when they start to scale. They seek growth opportunities outside of the EU, frustrated by regulatory complexity, fragmented markets, and insufficient access to later-stage funding.

Whilst many actors play their part in solving this, no one is yet exclusively focusing on hard-core regulatory affairs. And this while it is high time for a policy agenda that ensures that cleantech can thrive in Europe, with policies that support its growth, financing mechanisms that de-risk investment, and public initiatives that accelerate user uptake. It is time for the Benelux to fully take up its one-of-a-kind role as a pioneer and a bridgehead and lead the way on policy-driven growth for cleantech in the whole of the EU.

Cleantech – a broad spectrum with one goal

Let's start by defining what we mean by cleantech. These are the technologies that have the potential to revolutionize an industry due to their FOAK (first of a kind) status and breakthrough science, and that are needed to solve the challenge of getting to net zero by 2050. They are the gamechangers, from agriculture and food to the circular economy and new materials, from fuels and chemistry to energy generation and power, and to energy storage and grids. They are the sustainable innovations that raise the bar and that are needed to drive sustainable wealth and wellbeing, climate resilience, and economic competitiveness.

The Challenge We Face

Cleantech is not scaling fast enough. While the market and institutions provide strong early-stage funding, the valley of death remains a major barrier for growth. Cleantech faces three key challenges:

1 Market Access

- High energy prices hinder production at an acceptable market price, adding to the 'green premium'
- Overregulation and slow permitting hinder the commercialization of new solutions
- Scaling across borders remains complex due to fragmented regulations and inconsistent incentives

2 Insufficient Funding

- Growth capital is scarce, forcing companies to seek foreign investment and relocate
- Public funding mechanisms do not sufficiently de-risk early-scale investments

3 Limited User Uptake

- Industries do not adopt cleantech solutions at the necessary pace
- Public procurement does not sufficiently prioritize clean innovations

We call for



Fast-tracking market access for gamechangers by lowering regulatory barriers and enlarging the market they can play in.



Unlocking funding at scale to ensure breakthrough technologies can grow and remain in Europe.



Boosting user uptake through demand-driven policies that empower industries and consumers to adopt cleantech.

Switching Gears

As the Clean Industrial Deal emphasises, Europe's competitiveness and wellbeing depends on creating an innovative industrial base that can outperform global competitors and lead the way on sustainability. This can only be achieved with the breakthrough innovations cleantech brings. We welcome the direction the Clean Industrial Deal sets as it treats **clean industry as a competitive advantage** and considers the business case of sustainability. We are eager to help the EU to turn this plan into actions that seriously accelerate the scaling of cleantech. Cleantech at scale is that innovative industrial base that creates the jobs and prosperity of the future. Time is not on our side. We therefore call for a pragmatic approach.

The Benelux Union: A Policy Bridgehead for Cleantech

The Benelux Union has a history of pioneering European integration. Already in 1944, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg saw the potential of closer collaboration. This led to an economic union that provided the model for future European integration, and has given the Benelux a special legal status in the EU. As per article 350 TFEU, the Benelux can officially go beyond EU integration and deepen their collaboration. This makes the Benelux the smallest version of the EU internal market – and hence the ideal testing ground for cross-border policies that can then be turned into EU level regulation. The Benelux Union is *the* pioneer for the internal market and sustainability.

The Benelux plays this role as an accelerator for Europe with conviction. From the Schengen process to collaboration on energy security with France and Germany and to the Digital Single Market – it all started in the Benelux. Now, this unique region should lead the way again: this time as a **policy sandbox for cleantech in Europe**, demonstrating how smart regulation and cross-border cooperation can accelerate sustainable industrial growth. By leading on cleantech policy, the Benelux can shape the broader EU agenda and ensure European competitiveness for the future. It is the living lab for Europe and the only region that can do this.



Project Bridgehead

How the Benelux becomes the
launchpad for scaling Cleantech in
Europe



To unlock the full potential of cleantech, **we call on Benelux policymakers** to implement targeted measures that will truly accelerate scaling, ensure access to funding, and drive widespread adoption.

Cleantech companies need to be able to produce and to sell their products. They need access to the market. Right now, cleantech companies struggle to get their products to market fast due to high operational costs, slow permitting, and fragmented regulations. We underscore the ambitions of the EU's Affordable Energy Act and call upon the Benelux to show the way by taking measures to **lower energy prices** for cleantech. A Benelux Decision on targeted energy tax reductions for certified cleantech companies would serve as an EU pilot. Establishing a joint Benelux PPA platform for cleantech enables cross-border electricity procurement at scale and advances energy security mechanisms in the EU.


As repeatedly expressed by the EU, in the Clean Industrial Deal and before that in the Net Zero Industry Act, fast-track permitting is key to reduce the time to market for cleantech. In the Benelux, steps are indeed being taken to implement faster permitting, yet only for strategic projects and not yet in a harmonized way. Given the strategic importance of cleantech, we ask for a Benelux Decision to create single, unified **fast-lane permitting processes for all cleantech companies** while prioritizing their access to public infrastructure (e.g., grid connection) and land use. A harmonized fast-track model in the Benelux will reduce the lead time for the building of FOAK production facilities. It can then be exported to the EU level, strengthening Europe's global competitiveness in cleantech production.

To scale, companies need access to the full internal market that is the EU. The Benelux is an ideal testing ground for the EU's ambition to complete the single market. To reduce cross-border administrative burdens and increase access for cleantech to larger markets, we propose the creation of the **Innovative Benelux Company as a precursor to EU Inc.** under the 28th legal regime, simplifying regulatory and tax requirements across the region, enabling cleantech businesses to operate seamlessly and access a much bigger market. This will not only help cleantech scale faster and provide proof of concept for the EU, but also show the incredible value of the Benelux as the innovation sandbox for Europe.

All this would be part of a fast-track of the CID through a **Benelux Cleantech strategy** that formally acknowledges cleantech as a key sector for the future and sets out how to support the scaling of cleantech companies in the Benelux.

Cleantech growth needs bold and patient money. Cleantech start-ups and scale-ups require access to patient capital, yet growth-stage funding remains scarce. As lower technology readiness levels (TRL) and long investment timelines significantly reduce the financing options for breakthrough solutions, we need targeted instruments that recognize the potential and the needs of cleantech start-ups and scale-ups. Building on the groundwork laid by the Clean Industrial Deal, we advocate for direct, predictable funding across all TRLs through **cleantech-focused loan programmes**. We ask the Benelux member states to support expanding InvestEU with a dedicated cleantech window and to step up their commitment to de-risking loans for cleantech companies with low TRLs while ensuring that Benelux National Promotional Banks and Institutions have a leading and shaping role in EU cleantech funding and de-risking programmes.

While we commend the EU for recognizing the importance of redirecting funds from ETS to industrial decarbonization efforts, amongst others through the Industrial Decarbonization Bank, there is no guarantee that the available funds will be directed towards cleantech innovation and deployment. We therefore call for a Benelux Decision to **allocate a minimum percentage of ETS revenues to cleantech R&D and deployment** and allocate a portion of ETS revenues to subsidize energy costs for cleantech start-ups and scale-ups. This helps bridge the valley of death for scaling cleantech companies and supports the EU's ambition to decarbonize industry through cleantech.



We also need to ensure that money that wants to be invested in cleantech does not stumble on unnecessary hurdles. In its Clean Industrial Deal, the EU cites the importance of private investment. The Benelux can play a leading role in unlocking this investment. We ask for a Benelux decision to **treat cleantech funding and investment favourably**, also by institutional investors. This will take the adjustment of regulatory frameworks that currently classify such investments as high risk. Support from the Benelux member states for recalibration of restrictions for institutional funds at an EU level is indispensable. Cleantech is a growth engine for the future, so let's give it the fuel to grow.

Scaling cleantech requires market demand. Cleantech innovations too often come at a 'green premium', which poses a challenge for commercialization and scaling. To increase the appeal of cleantech to end users, we need to bring down the cost through economies of scale. As the EU recognizes in the Clean Industrial Deal, procurement should take a broader set of criteria into account to create a demand surge. We call on the Benelux to lead by example by reaching a Benelux Decision on a **cleantech-first public procurement programme**, ensuring that public contracts prioritize clean innovations and create early-stage revenue streams for innovators.

A **Benelux top-runner programme** can further accelerate adoption by setting new benchmarks for performance and rewarding frontrunners in clean technology. A Benelux pilot would test a dynamic standard-setting approach, allowing leading clean technologies to continuously raise performance benchmarks. This will strengthen the revision of EU product and procurement regulations by showing in practice how highlighting market leaders creates a competitive push for innovation and scaling while reducing the green premium and providing visibility to cleantech solutions.

To de-risk offtake agreements, **state-backed business continuity guarantees** should be established for critical cleantech projects, ensuring that promising solutions do not fail due to market fluctuations or hesitancy. While the EU is committed to setting up funding guarantees, we also need a first customer guarantee fund to spur private demand. We therefore call for a Benelux pilot with the EIB to expand the EIB Cleantech Guarantee Facility to include purchase guarantees for private buyers.



Our Call to Action

The Benelux Union stands for progress and thriving through integration and innovation. It is uniquely positioned to be a pioneer. By taking the lead in the EU as it historically has, the Benelux can accelerate cleantech scaling in Europe, unlocking sustainable growth, creating jobs, and ensuring Europe remains at the forefront of the clean industrial revolution.

Now, we stand at a crossroads. The EU can become a global cleantech leader, or it can continue to lose its most promising innovators to markets that move faster and fund better. We urge policymakers to seize this moment and implement an ambitious cleantech growth agenda. Let the Benelux be the regulatory sandbox for European innovation policy so it can be tried and tested as soon as possible and be taken up at the EU level.

The time for action is now.
Let's scale cleantech together.



A large, stylized teal wave graphic that starts from the left edge, dips down, and then rises back up towards the right edge, creating a smooth, flowing shape.

Cleantech
for **Benelux**
