



Penta Insiders

Rethinking Credibility in the EU

How Policymakers Are Evaluating Engagement Today

2026

Research Methodology

At Penta, our research methodology is designed to support non-partisan, impactful policy conversations by bridging the gap between policymakers and advocates through actionable insights. Each year, we engage with thousands of policymakers across all levels of government, across the EU, Washington, D.C., and state capitals, to gather robust, real-time feedback.

Through a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, we develop a comprehensive understanding of policymaker perspectives. Our approach prioritises confidentiality and methodological rigour, enabling candid input that informs our tailored, data-driven reports. These insights address the critical challenges facing public servants across Europe and beyond.

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Executive Summary

The threshold for credible engagement in the EU has shifted. Based on our research with policymakers across EU institutions, expectations of external engagement have become more demanding and more practical over the past year. Policymakers are operating under increasing pressure to ensure the EU delivers on its objectives to be secure, competitive, and economically resilient despite financial and political constraints.

A more volatile geopolitical environment and growing economic pressure have accelerated a shift toward greater European resilience and self-reliance. In this context, organisations seeking to engage with and influence EU policymaking are expected to align with EU priorities as a baseline. Unlike in the past, when demonstrating an understanding of EU policy objectives or maintaining a presence in Brussels was often sufficient to establish credibility, policymakers now place greater weight on demonstrated commitment. This includes whether organisations are meaningfully embedded in the European economy, share exposure to the regulatory environment they seek to influence, provide clear and technically grounded input, and demonstrate a long-term commitment to Europe.

Policymakers indicated that engagement that is abstract, general, or driven primarily by positioning is less likely to inform decision-making. By contrast, input that is specific, evidence-based, and focused on improving how policy works in practice is more likely to be considered.

This reflects a broader shift in how engagement is evaluated. Influence is increasingly built through sustained contribution, practical insight, and a clear alignment between an organisation's presence in Europe and the positions it puts forward.

An Evolving Landscape is Changing How Policymakers Engage

A More Pressured Environment Is Raising Expectations of Engagement

Policymakers consistently described operating in a more complex environment shaped by geopolitical volatility, economic constraints, and the challenges of maintaining alignment across EU institutions and member states. Alongside growing security and defence priorities, policymakers highlighted increasing pressure to ensure Europe remains competitive, innovative, and economically resilient.

Within this context, policymakers described access to capital and financing as a critical challenge shaping how competitiveness and innovation are assessed. Access to capital and financing was highlighted as a more immediate barrier than regulation, affecting the ability to scale investment, build capacity, and sustain growth. As a result, engagement that focuses only on regulatory concerns, without addressing investment conditions, cost of capital, or the commercial viability of operating in Europe, is less relevant to decision-making.

“I think the bigger obstacle in Europe is not rules but access to capital and financing. That is why we do not have a Silicon Valley here. That is a different system altogether.”

— Policy Advisor, EU Parliament

Policymakers also highlighted that alignment is difficult to sustain over time due to shifting political cycles, changing priorities, and the complexity of coordinating across member states. As a result, engagement that appears only around a specific legislative file or policy debate is viewed as less valuable than engagement that demonstrates a sustained interest in helping policymakers navigate long-term challenges and shape workable policy outcomes. Policymakers indicated they place greater value on organisations that contribute constructively over time rather than engaging solely to advance a short-term position or preserve the status quo.

Policymakers increasingly distinguish between organisations that engage only when their immediate interests are at stake and those that contribute consistently and constructively to shaping policy over time.

Taken together, policymakers indicated that these pressures are changing what is useful in practice. Engagement is more likely to be considered when it reflects economic realities, accounts for shifting political timelines, and engages with how policy can be delivered under increasingly complex geopolitical and institutional conditions.

“In the USA they have one president at a time, but here we have 27 governments and it is very difficult to have alignment for long.... You need long term strategy, and our governments change every two to four years.

— Head of Service, Director-General, EU Parliament

A Model of Engagement Built on Alignment

Prior to these pressures intensifying, policymakers described a model of engagement in which credibility was judged primarily on alignment with EU priorities. In the period leading up to and during the Green Deal agenda, organisations that demonstrated support for sustainability goals, framed their activities in line with climate objectives, and maintained a visible presence in policy discussions were generally able to establish access and influence within EU institutions.

“If you want to keep the majority of the European parliament on your side, you need to also show what you're doing for sustainability. You need to keep all three thoughts in mind simultaneously and frame a message that is not only about competitiveness.

— Head of Office and Political Advisor, EU Parliament

This dynamic was reinforced during periods of crisis, particularly during COVID-19, when organisations that contributed tangible solutions, particularly in areas such as public health, were often viewed positively and were able to build lasting credibility and relationships. Over time, this extended into the Green Deal era, when policymakers frequently expected organisations to demonstrate their relevance through clear contributions to sustainability and innovation. During this period, messaging that aligned with those priorities generally gained greater traction within policy discussions.

However, policymakers noted that alignment alone was not always sufficient. An organisation's credibility also depended on the perceived authenticity of its engagement and messaging, and whether its participation appeared genuine rather than purely performative.

Policymakers also described geographic and local engagement as an important component of credibility during this period. Organisations that built relationships beyond Brussels, including at the member state and constituency level, and worked through representative organisations, were often viewed as more effective in building support and influence.

Europe isn't like the UK; lobbying here is localized. It's useless to lobby Portuguese MEPs if you want to open a facility in Slovakia. Focus on local MPs, governments, and communities to show the benefits of having such investments there. Use umbrella organisations like Medicines for Europe to facilitate dialogue. Once the ball is rolling, engagement will follow naturally.

— Senior Legal and Policy Advisor, EU Parliament

Is Alignment Still Sufficient?

A New Credibility Model Is Emerging

Policymakers are now assessing organisational credibility against a more defined set of expectations. Although alignment with EU priorities remains important, it is no longer sufficient to differentiate organisations and is instead treated as a baseline.

Greater weight is placed on demonstrable contribution. This includes whether organisations are meaningfully embedded in the European economy, whether they are exposed to the regulatory environment they seek to influence, their ability to provide technically grounded input that engages with the detail of legislation, and if they demonstrate a long-term commitment to Europe. Together, these criteria define how credibility is now assessed in practice, with greater emphasis placed on what organisations do, rather than how they position themselves.

- **Embeddedness in the European Economy**

Policymakers are placing increased emphasis on whether organisations are meaningfully embedded in Europe's economic and industrial landscape, assessed by where they invest, operate, and create value within the region. This extends beyond headquarters location to where capital is deployed, where production and R&D take place, and the extent to which organisations contribute to Europe's long-term resilience and economic capacity.

In practice, policymakers prioritise concrete, locally relevant contributions, such as investment in manufacturing and R&D, job creation, supply chain integration, and regional economic development. These tangible signals of commitment carry significantly more weight than general claims of alignment with European priorities.

“What makes a company European? We have been cheated for the last 30 years. You have very large companies that come to Europe, open an office with three or four people, and then are allowed to apply for European permits.”

— Head of Service, Director-General, EU Parliament

- Shared Exposure to Risk and Regulation

Policymakers increasingly expect organisations to be exposed to the regulatory environment they seek to influence. Credibility is strengthened when organisations operate under the same conditions as the markets they are engaging in. At the same time, policymakers highlighted the risks created by regulatory instability, particularly when previously agreed legislation is revisited or reversed. This can undermine investment decisions and reduce confidence in the policy environment.

“We need to boost innovation, and we are not doing that simply by cutting red tape... sometimes we create, probably unintentionally, more uncertainty for businesses when we suddenly do almost a 180 on pieces of legislation that have already been approved or enforced. Companies have spent years preparing to follow new legislation, and then we roll it back.”

— Head of Office and Political Advisor, EU Parliament

Alongside this, policymakers pointed to the broader economic context shaping these expectations. Europe’s higher cost base and global competition mean that regulatory ambition must be balanced with the need to retain investment and support productivity.

“We should really foster investment here instead of elsewhere because right now, multinational companies can go wherever they want. I know that our labor force is expensive. In general, we want to keep it that way because it gives our citizens a good quality of life and reduces poverty... But we need big increases in productivity.”

— Senior Official, European Commission

These perspectives highlight a tension in how regulation is approached. Policymakers continue to see regulation as a tool to drive innovation and set standards, but are equally aware that instability and cost pressures can limit investment. Engagement that acknowledges both sides of this dynamic, improving how regulation works while recognising its economic impact, is more likely to be considered credible.

- **Technical Intelligence, Not Abstract Positioning**

Policymakers consistently distinguished between useful engagement and general positioning. Input is most valuable when it engages directly with the detail of legislation and provides concrete, workable changes.

“Concrete examples are really the best... Pointing out what works well, what needs fine tuning, and why. And with more explanation than just “This is a lot of bureaucracy.” Rather, “This means we spend this many hours reporting rather than innovating.”

— Head of Office and Political Advisor, EU Parliament

This expectation is not about volume, but precision. Policymakers are looking for input that identifies specific provisions, explains practical impact, and sets out what should change. By contrast, high-level positioning and aggregated industry views were described as less useful, particularly where they do not translate into actionable proposals.

“When organisations produce their position papers, they are inefficient in it because there are plenty of internal conversations, discussions, and arguments. And what they end up producing is basically, “We European producers want the situation to be better.” That’s how I would summarise most of their position papers. Very rarely do I have a concrete set of proposals from them, like actual tangible changes to actual tangible pieces of legislation, because they’re too big.”

— Member of Cabinet, EU Parliament

Clarity and brevity were also raised as critical. Policymakers are managing a high volume of material, and engagement that is overly long or general is less likely to be considered. What is considered useful is consistent. Engagement that is specific, clearly articulated, and directly applicable to legislation is more likely to be taken forward.

“When they prepare their positions, do not send me 10 page papers. You are giving me homework. Keep positions shorter and to the point. Be clear what you want changed, what works for you, what does not.”

— Policy Advisor, EU Parliament

- Long-Term Commitment

Policymakers noted that organisations are now being judged on their long-term commitment to operating and investing in Europe. This is reflected in where they build supply chains, invest in talent, and develop innovation capacity, and whether that activity is sustained within the EU.

“What I want to hear from them is how their products can shape our future and where we are going.... It would be good to hear, ‘In five years, in seven years, in two or three years, we can do this, and we are already working on it.’”

— Member of Cabinet, EU Parliament

A central concern among policymakers is whether the value created within Europe remains there, with emphasis on ensuring that publicly supported innovation contributes to ongoing economic activity within the EU rather than being transferred elsewhere. This is reinforced through continued presence, with organisations that remain visible and engaged over time viewed more favourably than those that appear only when legislation directly affects them.

Organisations that demonstrate where they are investing, how they are building capacity, and how they plan to contribute in the years ahead are more likely to be treated as credible participants in the policy process.

“It would be good for the important players within the industry to remind decision-makers of their existence because we also see a lot of this. We often hear, ‘We need more new companies,’ but we also need to nurture the ones we already have.”

— Head of Office and Political Advisor, EU Parliament

Implementation in Practice

How Policymakers Assess Engagement

In practice, these expectations become most visible during implementation, where policymakers assess how organisations engage with the details of legislation. At this stage, a clear distinction emerges between different modes of engagement, ranging from advocacy and alarmism to partnership and problem-solving. Engagement practices that are not backed with substantiated evidence are viewed as less effective, particularly where they practical recommendations. Messaging that relies on broad assertions, without engaging with the substance of policy, was seen as limiting credibility.

By contrast, policymakers responded more positively to engagement grounded in partnership and a problem-solving mindset. This involves bringing forward concrete evidence, acknowledging trade-offs, and contributing practical, implementable solutions to policy challenges. Partnership is demonstrated through tangible and sustained commitment, including investment, local engagement, and ongoing participation in policy discussions.

Implementation in Practice

How Policymakers Assess Engagement

Problem-solving builds on this by engaging directly with the substance of legislation, identifying specific issues, explaining their implications, and proposing targeted, workable solutions. Taken together, policymakers indicated that organisations that combine focus, transparency, and technical clarity are more likely to be viewed as credible contributors to the policymaking process.

“If you can lead with a positive message about innovation made in Europe, that will find better understanding from the policymaker side, rather than leading with fear mongering like, “If you do this or that, it will mean X, Y, Z for the industry.” Whenever we are confronted with fear mongering, the question is always, based on what data? What crystal ball do you have that we do not? Whichever way you frame your message, the more you can point to facts and figures, the easier it is to digest.”

— Head of Office and Political Advisor, EU Parliament

A New Standard for Credibility

What Will Define Influence Going Forward

Throughout our research, the overarching narrative emerging from policymakers was that their assessment of credible engagement from organisations has shifted. Effective engagement is now established through an organisation’s sustained presence in the EU, its level of investment, and its ability to engage with policy in a way that is both technically grounded and directly applicable in practice. This reflects a broader move toward engagement that is rooted in delivery and ongoing contribution, rather than positioning alone.

For policymakers, the distinction between positioning and contribution has become more pronounced, particularly where organisations are able to demonstrate relevance beyond messaging. In this context, credibility is established through the ability to engage with the realities of policy, investment, and implementation as they are experienced in practice, rather than through alignment alone. Organisations that are able to demonstrate this consistently over time are more likely to be recognised as credible participants in the policy process.

