The European Tech Champions Act Simulation: General Factsheet

The Pirate Academy was made possible by the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament.

Positions in this scenario are fictionalised for educational purposes and inspired by, but not identical to, publicly reported positions. Roles are institutional functions, never named living individuals.

Background

In September 2024, Mario Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness warned that the European Union was falling behind the United States and China. It estimated that the Union needed additional investment of about EUR 750 to 800 billion a year, and argued for common European funding of strategic technologies. In January 2025, the Commission turned the report into a Competitiveness Compass. Almost every government agreed with the diagnosis: Europe has excellent research and many start-ups, but too few of them grow into large companies in Europe, and the Union depends on third countries for chips, cloud, artificial intelligence and much else.

Governments did not agree on who should pay. The EU's long-term budget for 2021 to 2027 is almost fully committed. The Union borrowed for the first time on a large scale for the NextGenerationEU recovery plan after the pandemic, but that borrowing power ends in 2026, and several member states have said clearly that it should not be repeated. When the Commission asked for EUR 10 billion of fresh money for a "Sovereignty Fund" in 2023, the member states agreed to EUR 1.5 billion. In 2025, the Union borrowed EUR 150 billion for defence (SAFE), but only to lend it on to member states, who will repay it. In July 2025, the Commission proposed a European Competitiveness Fund for the next long-term budget, from 2028.

At the same time, the world became less friendly. In August 2025, the United States and the EU agreed a framework that caps most US tariffs on European goods at 15%, including future tariffs on semiconductors. Europe's dependence on Chinese components and American technology became an everyday political topic.

This simulation puts you in **Brussels in October 2025**. The Commission has just proposed a fictional regulation: the **European Tech Champions Act (ETCA)**. It would create a European Tech Champions Programme for artificial intelligence, semiconductors, high-performance computing, biotechnology and quantum technologies, with an envelope of **EUR 10 billion for 2026 to 2030, financed by EU borrowing**. The proposal goes to the Council and the European Parliament under the ordinary legislative procedure. Over two days, you will compress months of negotiation into one mandate phase and one trilogue.

The act is fictional, but the debates, the institutions and the money problem are real. There is no historical outcome you could look up and copy. The result is entirely yours.

This factsheet gives you only the general situation and the rules. You should also study the Commission proposal and your personal role handout.

Educational purpose

This simulation is one of the two most demanding scenarios of the Pirate Academy. You will practise:

- **Working on a legal text article by article.** You will read a regulation, propose amendments in precise wording, and see how a change in one article moves the balance in another.
- **Understanding how money drives politics.** The size of the envelope, the source of the money and the way it is distributed decide who controls the programme, whose conditions apply and who can walk away.
- **Building and using a mandate.** You first negotiate inside your own institution, then defend and trade that position against the other one.
- **Counting coalitions.** In a Parliament of 720 seats, majorities have to be built group by group. In the Council, a single government can sometimes block everything.
- **Knowing your walk-away point.** At the end, you will have to decide whether the deal on the table is better for you than no deal at all.

Roles and institutions

Institution	Roles	In one line
European Commission	1	Proposed the act, writes compromises, does not vote
Council of the EU	5 or 6 member states	Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, and the Netherlands if cast
European Parliament	5 or 6 political groups	EPP, S&D, Renew Europe, Greens/EFA, ECR, and Patriots for Europe if cast

The facilitators will tell you which roles are in the room. Every participant plays one role alone. All roles are **functions, not named individuals**: you are “Germany’s representative in the Council” or “the EPP group’s negotiator”, never a real person.

One or two facilitators run the simulation and never play a role. The **lead facilitator** is the neutral referee and joint secretariat: keeps the shared documents, checks every budget sheet,

announces voting thresholds and counts votes. The **second facilitator** runs the clock and the outside world.

The Commission

The Commission is a player with its own interests, not a neutral mediator. It does not vote, but it has four real powers:

- **The pen.** It may table compromise wording at any time and presents the final compromise package. Anyone may table wording, but the Commission's job is to find text both institutions can sign.
- **Expertise.** It may argue that a proposal is unworkable or legally doubtful. This is a political argument, not a ruling. You decide whether to listen.
- **Opposition.** Before the Council's final vote, the Commission says whether it supports the final text. If it opposes it, the Council can adopt the text only unanimously (Article 293(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).
- **Withdrawal.** It may withdraw its proposal at any time before the Council's final vote. That ends the simulation without an act.

How decisions are taken

Council

A text is adopted if **no more than one member state present votes against**: 4 of 5, or 5 of 6. Abstention counts as not against. This replaces qualified majority voting, which cannot be modelled with five or six states.

Unanimity trigger

If the budget sheet of the text being voted contains any amount of **EU borrowing for grants** or of a **new own resource**, the Council has to decide **unanimously**: every member state present has to vote in favour, and abstention counts as against. The lead facilitator checks the sheet and announces the threshold before every Council vote. In reality, both would require a separate unanimous decision and ratification by all 27 member states. The Commission's own proposal (EUR 10 billion of borrowing for grants) therefore gives every member state a veto.

Commission opposition

If the Commission opposes the final text, the Council needs unanimity, whatever the budget sheet says.

Parliament

A text is adopted if the groups voting in favour together hold at least **361 seats**, the majority of all 720 members. Each group votes as one bloc with all its seats.

Group	Seats
European People's Party (EPP)	188
Socialists and Democrats (S&D)	136

Group	Seats
Patriots for Europe (if cast, together with the 25 seats of Europe of Sovereign Nations)	84 + 25
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	78
Renew Europe	77
Greens/European Free Alliance	53
The Left, non-attached members, and Europe of Sovereign Nations if Patriots are not cast	count as not voting in favour

Count for yourself which combinations reach 361.

Binding votes

Each institution votes twice: on its **mandate** at the end of day 1, and on the **final text** at the end of day 2. Only these votes bind. Indicative votes during the trilogue are allowed and often useful.

Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed

Text is provisionally agreed when the chair of the block (in the final package, the lead facilitator) asks for objections and the same simple thresholds as in the final votes are met: no more than one Council member present objects, and the Parliament groups that do not object together hold at least 361 seats; groups not played count as objecting. The unanimity trigger and Commission opposition apply only to the binding votes, not to provisional agreement; the lead facilitator says at once when a provisionally agreed budget sheet will need unanimity at the final vote. The Commission may object, but its objection does not count. Any provisional agreement can be reopened until the final vote.

The budget sheet

Article 2 of the proposal refers to a one-page **budget sheet** annexed to the act. Every mandate and the final text should contain a complete sheet. All amounts are in EUR billion for the whole period 2026 to 2030, in steps of 0.5. A blank sheet is in Annex A.

Block A: Size

The **public envelope** is the EU public money of the programme. The **co-investment target** is the private and EIB Group money the programme hopes to attract: a target, not money.

Block B: Sources

Where the public envelope comes from. The sources must add up exactly to the envelope.

Source	How much it can bring (EUR billion)	Commission proposal
EU borrowing for grants	no limit	10
EU borrowing for loans to member states	no limit	0

Source	How much it can bring (EUR billion)	Commission proposal
National contributions	no limit	0
Reprogramming from Horizon Europe	up to 2	0
Reprogramming from Digital Europe	up to 1.5	0
Reprogramming from cohesion funds	up to 4	0
Redirected Recovery and Resilience Facility money	up to 3	0
New own resource (for example a digital levy)	up to 10	0

The limits are game numbers, not real figures.

Rules for the sources

1. **Unanimity.** EU borrowing for grants and a new own resource trigger unanimity in the Council (see above).
2. **Loans count only if somebody borrows them.** Loans are money the EU borrows and lends on to member states, which spend it on programme actions on their territory and repay it. Before the final vote, each member state present may declare how much it would borrow. The loan line counts only up to the sum of these declarations; the rest is struck. Day 1 mandate sheets may include loans, pledges and redirections without declarations; declarations are taken only before the final votes.
3. **National contributions: all or volunteers.** The text should say how they are paid. “By GNI key” means all 27 member states pay according to their share of the EU’s gross national income. “Voluntary pledges” means only amounts pledged at the table by member states present count.
4. **Cohesion and Recovery money is voluntary.** Each member state decides whether to redirect its own allocation; the text cannot force it. As with loans, member states present declare their redirections before the final vote, and only declared amounts count. Recovery money can only be redirected for commitments made before the end of 2026.
5. **Struck amounts reduce the envelope.** Whatever is struck under rules 2 to 4 is removed from block B, and the public envelope shrinks by the same amount. Declarations above a line do not raise it. The lead facilitator records the final figures by name on the declarations sheet (Annex D) before the final votes; scoring uses the sheet after this step. If a revised package is tabled after a failed vote, the declarations stand: no new declarations are taken, and any line above the declared total is struck again.

GNI shares (rounded, for this simulation)

Germany 25%, France 17%, Italy 12%, Spain 9%, the Netherlands 6%, Poland 5%, the other 21 member states together 26%. Example: EUR 6 billion by GNI key costs Germany 1.5, France 1.0, Italy 0.7, Spain 0.5, the Netherlands 0.4 and Poland 0.3.

Block C: Distribution

The share for **open excellence-based calls** across the EU and the share for **national or regional envelopes** managed with member states. The two add up to 100%. If there are envelopes, the text should state the key: population, GNI, or a cohesion key favouring poorer regions. Open calls may include a **widening bonus**: extra evaluation points for applicants from member states or regions with weaker research and innovation performance (Article 4 or 6). The text states whether there is one.

Block D: Thematic earmarks

Minimum shares of the public envelope for quantum, semiconductors, AI, high-performance computing, biotech, and defence and dual-use technologies. They may not add up to more than 100%. Percentages move in steps of 0.5. The **climate tag** is a separate percentage: the share of the envelope that should also serve climate objectives, across all themes.

Feasibility check

The lead facilitator checks every sheet before it is voted. A sheet is infeasible if block B does not add up to the envelope, a source exceeds its limit, money comes from a source not in the table, block C does not add up to 100%, the earmarks exceed 100%, national contributions are entered without saying how they are paid, or envelopes are entered without a key. An infeasible sheet cannot be voted on until it is corrected. The lead facilitator's ruling on feasibility is final.

The working documents

The Commission proposal

Eight recitals, nine articles and the budget sheet. Its numbering is kept throughout. Article 5(3) refers to the "examination procedure": in EU law, a committee of member-state representatives that can block a Commission implementing act by qualified majority (comitology). In this simulation it does not count as the Board approving the work programmes. You may propose new articles, numbered 4a, 7a, and so on. Recitals are the short statements of intent before Article 1: you may amend them or add your own. Recitals do not bind anyone and count at most as a partial score in peer scoring.

Mandates

For every article, a mandate says "accept", "delete", or gives a full replacement wording. It also contains any new articles and recitals in full wording and a complete budget sheet. A short commentary on priorities is optional and does not bind. A template is in Annex B.

The four-column document

After day 1, the lead facilitator puts the Commission proposal, the Parliament mandate and the Council mandate side by side, with a fourth column for the compromise text (template in Annex C). Articles where both mandates agree are marked green and count as agreed from the start; like any provisional agreement they can be reopened until the final vote. The document is posted to everyone the evening of day 1. Only the lead facilitator edits this document, so that there is one authoritative version; everyone can read it and work in their own copies.

The default rule

Any article on which the trilogue has not agreed compromise wording by the end of the final package **reverts to the Commission proposal**. Articles on which both mandates already agree count as agreed from the start. The budget sheet reverts as a whole: if it is not agreed as a whole, the Commission's sheet applies. If the money is not settled, the EUR 10 billion of borrowing for grants comes back, and with it the unanimity trigger.

The outside world

During the two days, news from the outside world will arrive. It does not change the rules or the scores, but it may change what your capital or your group expects from you.

Outside interests also want to shape the text. At several moments, the facilitator will draw an **amendment card**: a complete amendment drafted by an organisation lobbying in Brussels. Any role may table it as its own amendment, unchanged or edited. If nobody tables it before the end of the current block (on day 1, before the mandate votes), it lapses. The organisations on the cards are fictional.

Schedule

Day 1: Mandates (about 3 hours)

1. **Briefing (20 minutes, all together):** rules, voting, the budget sheet, scoring, etiquette.
2. **Reading and preparation (40 minutes, institution rooms):** find your allies inside your institution. The Commission may visit both rooms.
3. **Mandate building (100 minutes, institution rooms):** each institution writes its mandate and its budget sheet.
4. **Mandate votes (15 minutes):** each institution votes in its own room. If a mandate fails, the institution has ten more minutes to adjust and vote again. If it fails again, the institution enters the trilogue without a mandate: its column in the four-column document shows the individual positions of its members (each sends the lead facilitator a filled mandate template the same evening), who negotiate individually. The final vote rules do not change.

Day 2: Trilogue (about 7 hours with breaks)

1. **Opening (20 minutes):** the four-column document is presented; the Commission gives its assessment of the two mandates; every role has one 60-second opening statement; the table agrees the order of the four negotiation blocks and which institution chairs which block; each institution chooses who chairs its blocks, and the chair keeps their role and vote.
2. **Four negotiation blocks (45 to 60 minutes each):** money (Article 2, the budget sheet and Article 3); governance and oversight (Articles 5 and 8); access and safeguards (Articles 6 and 7); instruments, conditions and objectives (Articles 1 and 4 and any new articles). The Council and the Parliament chair the blocks in turn; the lead facilitator chairs the opening, the final package and the votes. If you chair a block: give the floor, keep the discussion on the block's articles (money questions can be parked for the money block), summarise where the table stands, and ask for objections when a text seems

agreed. The lead facilitator keeps the document and counts. Each institution may call two 5-minute caucuses during the day.

3. **Final package (45 minutes):** the Commission presents a consolidated compromise; remaining brackets are resolved; the budget sheet is closed; loan declarations, pledges and redirections are recorded by name on the declarations sheet (Annex D). If a revised package is tabled after a failed vote, the declarations stand.
4. **Final votes (15 minutes):** the Commission states whether it supports the text; the lead facilitator announces the Council threshold; the Council votes, then the Parliament, by roll call in role. The Council and the Parliament always both vote, even if the other has already rejected the text. If either vote fails, the Commission may table one revised package within ten minutes, and both institutions vote again, the Council first. A second failure is final.
5. **Peer scoring (35 minutes)**, then **debrief (40 minutes)**. Before scoring starts, the lead facilitator projects the consolidated final text: the compromise column with the defaults applied and the budget sheet after striking.

Scoring

Your handout lists **three needs, three wants and two or three pain points**, each with a concrete test tied to an article or the budget sheet. The final page of your handout is your **scorecard**.

Item	Fully met	Partly met
Need	+3	+1 or +2
Want	+2	+1
Pain point (if it happens)	-5	-2 if only partly

If no act is adopted, or the Commission withdraws its proposal, every role receives its **no-deal score**, printed in its handout. For many roles it is zero; some roles gain from failure and some lose.

After the final votes, each participant scores **one role from another institution** against the final text, using that role's scorecard. The facilitators assign who scores whom. Each item scores once, at the highest level reached. The scored role may contest one item; the lead facilitator rules.

There is no winner and no ranking: the opening positions are intentionally very uneven; this is not a fair competition. The question for every role in the debrief is: did the final text leave you better off than no deal?

Rules of diplomacy and etiquette

(Read aloud at the start of day 1.)

- **Stay in character:** negotiate as your function, in a diplomatic register. Focus on positions and interests, never on the person playing the role. In-character sharpness should never land out of character.
- **Respect the floor:** at the table, speak when the chair gives you the floor. No interruptions.

- **Time discipline:** opening statements on day 2 are strictly 60 seconds. The lead facilitator, who chairs the opening, will cut you off, and it is nothing personal.
- **Confidentiality:** your handout is for you alone. You may tell others what you want, in character, and you may bluff.
- **The tap-out:** at any moment, any participant may pause or step out of the simulation, no questions asked. Tell a facilitator or simply say "tap-out". Simulations run on pressure; the tap-out is what makes the pressure safe.
- **No recording:** the simulation is not recorded, by anyone. Notes are fine.
- **Out of the game:** one organiser, named at the briefing, is the contact for anything that happens outside the game during the two days, including the evening programme.
- **Rule zero:** the lead facilitator's ruling is final and follows the spirit of the rules rather than their letter.

Practical logistics

- The simulation runs in person. There is a **plenary room** with one table for everyone, a **Council room** and a **Parliament room** for day 1 and for caucuses, and two or three corners for bilaterals. You may move freely between rooms during negotiation time.
- The **shared documents** (the four-column document and the budget sheet) are projected in the plenary room and readable on your device. Each institution has its own editable working copy on day 1.
- A **messaging channel** reaches everyone at once for time calls, news and amendment cards. You can message each facilitator privately.
- Please bring a laptop or tablet if you have one. Each institution needs at least two devices that can edit documents.

Key principles in brief

- **Money decides everything else.** Whoever pays wants control; whoever receives wants freedom; whoever wants conditions has to find the money for them.
- **Nothing is agreed until it is written.** Verbal understandings do not exist until they are in the four-column document.
- **Know your numbers.** Before day 1, decide which envelope, which sources and which distribution you can live with, and which you cannot.
- **Know your majority.** In the Parliament, count seats before you count arguments. In the Council, watch for the unanimity trigger.
- **Think in packages.** Anything can be traded against anything: money against governance, conditions against access, an earmark against a vote.
- **Side agreements** between any parties are allowed. They should be written down with the clear support of everyone in them, and are published only after the simulation.

Recommended preparation

- Read the Commission proposal article by article and mark where the items of your handout sit.
- Fill in the budget sheet in Annex A the way you would like it, and then the way you could accept it.

- Look up the basic position of your country or group on European industrial policy in 2025. You do not need to become an expert; your handout takes priority.
- Beyond the key numbers in Annex E, we recommend that you read about what the EU actually did in this field **after** the simulation rather than before.

Annex A - Budget sheet (blank)

All amounts in EUR billion for 2026 to 2030, in steps of 0.5.

Block A: Size

Line	Amount
Public envelope (= sum of block B)	
Co-investment target (private and EIB Group; a target, not money)	

Block B: Sources (must add up to the public envelope)

Source	Limit	Amount	Notes
EU borrowing for grants (unanimity)	no limit		
EU borrowing for loans to member states	no limit		declarations by:
National contributions	no limit		by GNI key / voluntary pledges by:
Reprogramming from Horizon Europe	up to 2		
Reprogramming from Digital Europe	up to 1.5		
Reprogramming from cohesion funds	up to 4		voluntary, by:
Redirected Recovery and Resilience Facility money	up to 3		voluntary, by:
New own resource (unanimity)	up to 10		which:

Block C: Distribution (add up to 100%)

Line	Share	Notes
Open excellence-based calls		widening bonus: yes / no
National or regional envelopes		key: population / GNI / cohesion

Block D: Thematic earmarks (minimum shares, not more than 100% in total)

Line	Minimum share
Quantum technologies	
Semiconductors	
Artificial intelligence	
High-performance computing	
Biotechnology	
Defence and dual-use technologies	
Climate tag (separate: share that should also serve climate objectives)	

Annex B - Mandate template

One per institution. Fill in every row; attach the budget sheet (Annex A). "Accept" means the Commission text stands; "delete" removes the article; otherwise give the full replacement wording. New articles and recitals go in full wording at the end. The commentary is optional and does not bind.

Article	Accept / delete / replace	Replacement wording (if any)	Commentary (optional)
Recitals 1 to 8 (and any new ones)			
Art. 1 Subject matter and objectives			
Art. 2 Budget and financial arrangements			
Art. 3 Priority domains			
Art. 4 Forms of support			
Art. 5 Governance and coordination			
Art. 6 Access and eligibility			
Art. 7 Safeguards for strategic autonomy			
Art. 8 Monitoring and evaluation			
Art. 9 Entry into force			
New articles (4a, 7a, …)			

Article	Accept / delete / replace	Replacement wording (if any)	Commentary (optional)
Budget sheet (Annex A)	attached		

Adopted by the [Council / Parliament] on [date], [votes for / against / abstentions].

Annex C - Four-column document (template)

Kept by the lead facilitator. One row per article or paragraph; new articles are added in order (4a, 7a, and so on).

Article	Commission proposal	Parliament mandate	Council mandate	Compromise text
Recitals 1 to 8 (and any new ones)				
Art. 1 Subject matter and objectives				
Art. 2 Budget and financial arrangements				
Art. 3 Priority domains				
Art. 4 Forms of support				
Art. 5 Governance and coordination				
Art. 6 Access and eligibility				
Art. 7 Safeguards for strategic autonomy				
Art. 8 Monitoring and evaluation				
Art. 9 Entry into force				
Annex: budget sheet, blocks A to D				

Annex D - Declarations sheet

Kept by the lead facilitator and filled in before the final votes. Only amounts declared here count (rules 2 to 4 for the sources; rule 5 for the effect). Declarations above a line do not raise it. All amounts in EUR billion.

Member state present	Loans it would borrow	Voluntary national contribution pledged (only if the text says “voluntary pledges”)	Cohesion money redirected	Recovery money redirected
Germany				
France				
Italy				
Spain				
Poland				
Netherlands (if cast)				
Total declared				
Amount in the sheet				
Struck (sheet minus declared, if positive)				

Public envelope after striking: _____

Annex E - Key numbers: what the EU has done so far

Real figures as of October 2025, for comparison with the EUR 10 billion in the proposal.

Instrument	When	EU public money	Where it came from
European Chips Act	2023	EUR 3.3 billion to 2030; “more than EUR 43 billion” of total investment expected	reprogrammed from Horizon Europe and Digital Europe
European Tech Champions Initiative	2023	EUR 3.75 billion fund of funds	Germany, France and Spain EUR 1 billion each, Italy EUR 150 million, Belgium EUR 100 million, EIB Group EUR 500 million
Sovereignty Fund, became STEP	2023 to 2024	EUR 10 billion proposed; EUR 1.5 billion agreed	mid-term revision of the long-term budget; the rest reprogrammed

Instrument	When	EU public money	Where it came from
EIB TechEU	2025	EUR 70 billion of EIB Group financing, aiming to mobilise about EUR 250 billion by 2027	EIB balance sheet (loans, guarantees, equity)
Scaleup Europe Fund	announced September 2025	EUR 1 billion from Horizon Europe towards a EUR 5 billion fund with private investors	reprogrammed, plus private capital
InvestAI	February 2025	EUR 200 billion to be “mobilised”, including EUR 20 billion for AI gigafactories	existing programmes and private money
SAFE	May 2025	EUR 150 billion	EU borrowing, lent to member states, repaid by them
European Competitiveness Fund (proposal)	July 2025	EUR 409 billion for 2028 to 2034	the next long-term budget, under negotiation

Note the difference between public money and “mobilised” money: the large numbers usually include private and national investment that the EU hopes to attract.