

## Michel Barnier calls for 'Unity for Europe' during FIEC conference

By Mike Hayes | 20 June 2023  
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Michel Barnier, left, alongside FIEC president Philip Crampton, speaking at the recent FIEC conference in Rome

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"Due to the uncertainties and weak stability of the world and Europe," he said, "we need to protect, consolidate, reform, improve and strengthen the Single Market, which is our main asset."

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Barnier said, "My feeling is that the single market and the EU is the main answer today, which is why, in my view, we have to be European, in addition to being Italian or Irish or Norwegian.

### **Prepare for challenges**

"It's not enough to say we want to stay together, the key answer is to say we not only wish to stay together, we must have an interest to stay together – and the answer is the single market economy, which is the framework of Europe."

He went on to say that the complexity and bureaucracy that is synonymous with the operations of the European Commission, is "...the price to pay for Europe to be united but not uniform".

He added, however, that now more than ever, it is crucial for European businesses to be prepared to react quickly to global challenges such as climate change, Covid and the financial crisis of 2008 – all of which, he said, were existential threats to the Union.

"We have been organised for 60 years, to treat issues between ourselves, at the European level," he said, "and now we must be organised to face global problems, not only to treat and to manage our domestic problems at European level."

### **Breakout sessions**

Following the main addresses, a number of breakout sessions took place at the conference, which returned findings on topics including sustainability, digitalisation and gender issues.

Groups highlighted key action points within these topics, including the need to drive the adoption of sustainable construction practices, by showing them to be an opportunity and not merely a cost for businesses.

Digitalisation was identified as potentially being a key driver for this, with design, materials and difference models all having the potential to be used to help construction businesses make more sustainable decisions, driven by data.

Another issue raised during the breakout sessions was that of upskilling and reskilling the workforce, with the importance of promoting a positive image of the sector to young people seen as key.

A session leader added that it was "essential to attract a younger generation of women to the sector, by challenging negative stereotypes and proving the sector's reputation".

Position papers on key topics are expected from FIEC in the near future.

