This second IPC-IMPACT Europe confirmed its success, especially in terms of quality speakers, high-priority content and active participation of IPC members (UK, Germany and France), representing a variety of capacities, company sizes or positions in the industry’s supply chain.

Discussions were very engaging and allowed for an open exchange among participants. Speakers provided valuable and frank insights and were able to hear the direct opinion of the industry, while the debate spurred new ideas on both sides.

A clear horizontal message, which was highlighted by several speakers was the need for industry to get involved in the EU policy debate.

2017’ IMPACT topics reflected key IPC policy priorities and raised most interest among participants: The new EU Industrial Strategy, the environmental legislation, REACH and its upcoming review and the Brexit negotiation and its potential impact on Industry.

European Industrial Policy

During the opening dinner, Dr. Fabian Zuleeg, Chief Executive and Chief Economist at the European Policy Centre (a very well regarded Brussels’ think tank) delivered a Keynote Speech on « Industrial Policy for Europe ». This was a very timely topic considering that the European Commission just issued a Commission’s Communication on a new EU Industrial Strategy at the end of September. Industrial policy is now back on the EU agenda with key challenges remaining for industry, such as adapting to new transformation for decarbonization, digitalization, greater focus on investment and innovation.

Dr. Zuleeg appreciated the fact that the new Strategy identifies correctly the challenges, but underlined that what is needed now is a series of concrete actions to tackle them. IPC Member participants raised concerns regarding the time frame available (18-month) until a new European Commission will be nominated. IPC Members wondered whether the EU actually implements a ‘soft’ industrial strategy through « building blocks », such as Circular Economy or Clear Energy package, which are aiming at making the European industry less dependent on the outside world. They noticed the difficulty of reconciling positions of 28 Member States on sensitive issues such as the climate policy given different national priorities. The old « Industrial » definition is reflected in the target of 20% manufacturing in Europe but it doesn’t reflect the current reality. The distinction between manufacturing and services is no longer working. We should talk today about a broader strategy for business.

Dr Zuleeg concluded that The Diesel scandal has changed people’s attitudes quite significantly. Brexit has also changed the political landscape. We have always had the coalition of the UK with Ireland and Nordic countries that were pro-business and pushed for a deregulation agenda. Currently smaller countries are trying to build new coalitions. The best approach to engage in the shaping of the industrial strategy would be now to bring people together, set the track and the right direction and bring together a number of Member States.
Can the EU reconcile the Environmental & Industrial policies?
- The French Perspective
Emmanuel Mounier, Counsellor Industrial Policy and Aude Charrier, Counsellor Environment and Chemicals at the Permanent Representation of France gave the participants an overview on both synergies and missing links between EU environmental and industrial policies. Through the French example, the session clearly showed the added value of making these two policy areas converge. Circular Economy Package and the electromobility sector were mentioned as two good examples of policy convergence.

REACH Legislation – Burden Reduction and Simplification
Mehdi Hocine, Deputy Head of Unit REACH at DG-GROW (European Commission) gave an overview of the state of play of the ongoing second REACH review, which is mainly aimed at burden reduction and simplification. As part of the review, the Commission is looking at how to simplify procedures for authorisation (for low volumes and spare parts), reduce ECHA fees for SMEs, establish clearer rules on data-sharing, and address challenges in specific sectors. The REACH review also looks at coherence, both within REACH and with other legislation, mainly the Occupational Safety and Health Directive (OSH).

He explained that the review process, including the public consultation which IPC contributed to, and showed graphs demonstrating the results from the consultation. One of the points where NGOs and industry agreed in the consultation was that there should be more enforcement of REACH at the border both for competitiveness and for environmental protection.

He commented that the decision on whether REACH might be reopened is expected by the end of the current year. He described the next steps, including expected Commission’s publications by the end of 2027 and beginning of 2018.

IPC Members commented on the necessity for reduced fees for SMEs, the need for finalization of the so-called « low volume/spare parts initiative »

Brexit Roundtable — How Can Business Prepare?
Knowledgeable speakers, Ms Jude Kirton-Darling, Member of the European Parliament (UK) and Florian Laudi (Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU) discussed with our IPC Members the likely impact of Brexit on our industry.

John Mitchell, IPC President and CEO, opened the discussion wishing for IPC to act as a forum of exchange for information on Brexit.

Speakers stressed remaining uncertainties on what business should be preparing for, outlining three key issues under negotiation, including the specific aspect of Citizen rights (with 4-4.5 million people in Europe, both sides of the Channel, now facing existential questions), the Northern Ireland issue of Brexit, putting at threat the Good Friday Agreement and the contradictory stance of the UK Government, and the Financial settlement (negotiations about the methodology for calculating “how much” money the UK will have to pay for leaving the EU). They described briefly the 2-phases process for the on-going negotiations, first addressing the three separation issues (citizens’ rights, Northern Ireland, financial settlement) and then discussing the future relationship. They emphasized uncertainties after March 2019 on the fact everything is still possible, including a scenario where UK and EU will be separated without reaching an agreement, thus going back to a relationship governed by the standard World Trade Organisation’s rules. Several scenarios were exposed and discussed and it appears that Industry needs to assess its impact on its own activity and become more vocal on this issue.