



NEFI Joint statement – High-level meeting

National Promotional Banks and Institutions (NPBIs) operate in an environment of rapid economic, technological and geopolitical change. European businesses, particularly SMEs and mid-caps, must invest, innovate and adapt while facing financing constraints, uncertainty and growing international competition.

Meeting in Athens on 1–2 October 2026, the members of the Network of European Financial Institutions for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (NEFI) reaffirm their commitment to cooperate in addressing these challenges and supporting economic development, competitiveness and resilience across Europe.

Our role in a changing financial landscape

NEFI members have different mandates, institutional structures and ways of working, reflecting their respective national circumstances. This diversity is a strength. It allows members to respond to the specific needs of their economies while exchanging experience and developing solutions to common European challenges.

Over the coming years, the role of NPBIs is expected to evolve further. Alongside their established countercyclical and long-term financing role, NPBIs will increasingly act as connectors within national and European financing ecosystems as well as acting as enablers or providers of technical assistance, as demonstrated for example under the InvestEU programme. The EU should continue to build on the knowledge, operational capacity and proximity to beneficiaries of NPBIs. NPBIs should be involved from an early stage in the development of such instruments. Their practical experience can help ensure that programmes respond to market needs, complement national initiatives and can be implemented effectively in different national contexts.

EU level support instruments should build on the diversity of NPBIs and their market knowledge. This requires a certain degree of flexibility for such instruments. Recent moves by the EU to regulate public support schemes in a rather detailed manner, such as within the Net-Zero Industry Act and the Industrial Acceleration Act, are therefore closely and critically monitored: Harmonisation and centralisation are diametrically opposed to diversity and flexibility. In addition, NEFI strongly supports further simplification measures regarding EU financial instruments and a larger focus on proportionality, considering the risks of the instruments for the taxpayers' funds alongside the expected impact of individual operations. For example, a DNSH check should also be possible at programme level, in case of programmes supporting environmental goals.



Cooperation as a strategic asset

Closer cooperation between NPBI is increasingly important as financing needs become more complex and interconnected. NEFI members will continue to use the network as a trusted platform for exchanging experience, identifying common challenges and developing practical approaches that can be adapted to national circumstances. NEFI will also continue its dialogue with the European Commission, the EIB Group and other relevant partners to improve coordination and strengthen the contribution of NPBI to shared European priorities.

Use of AI and data

Artificial intelligence and data-driven tools are changing the way financial institutions assess risks, interact with clients and organise their operations. They can improve efficiency, facilitate access to finance and help institutions better understand the needs of businesses.

Their use also requires careful attention to data quality, transparency, cybersecurity, governance and equal access to financing. NEFI members recognise that technological development should be addressed as a strategic focus, not only as an operational matter. Institutions should combine innovation with appropriate safeguards and approaches suited to their public mandates.

Looking ahead

Europe's future competitiveness and resilience will depend on its ability to turn strategic priorities into viable investments. Public resources alone will not be sufficient and must be used effectively to address market gaps, share risks and mobilise additional private financing.

NEFI members therefore call for earlier and meaningful involvement of NPBI in the design of EU programmes and financial instruments, simpler and more proportionate implementation frameworks and sufficient flexibility to reflect different national circumstances. Closer cooperation and capacity-building between NPBI and effective complementarity between European, national and private financing will remain essential. NEFI members view the harmonisation of rules for public support schemes throughout the EU critically, not least because this considerably reduces flexibility to act, which has been of crucial importance in times of crisis.

Through their respective mandates, NEFI members will continue to act as long-term, reliable and responsive partners in addressing market failures, supporting economic transformation and strengthening Europe's capacity to respond to future crises and opportunities.

In Athens, 1 October 2026