

Press Release | Brussels | October 2025

CIRAN Consortium and experts gather at the European Parliament, Brussels: Framing new social contracts and the challenges of EU's strategic autonomy

The CIRAN Consortium gathered in Brussels, Belgium, for an engaging two-day meeting, combining a high-level public event and the last in-person Consortium Meeting of the project. The event provided an opportunity for CIRAN to present project outcomes to an expert audience, while advancing discussions on community development agreements and inclusive social contracts. The Consortium Meeting helped chart the project's final-term priorities and establish a plan to maximise the visibility and impact of its results for policy and public audiences.

Imagining New Social Contracts at the European Parliament

On **13 October**, CIRAN brought together policymakers, regional leaders, researchers, and industry experts at the European Parliament to discuss a critical challenge: *How can Europe balance the urgent need for critical raw materials with environmental protection and local community rights?*

Hosted by MEP Hildegard Bentele, the session highlighted a fundamental reality: social acceptance, not technical feasibility, has become the decisive factor for mining project success in Europe. The session started with a round of presentations from **CIRAN Work Package leaders on the key project findings**. These can be found and freely downloaded from the [Results](#) page. It was followed by a **panel discussion and a Q&A** session with external experts and participants.

High-level Panel and Q&A: Key challenges and opportunities for Europe

The CIRAN Session in the European Parliament was moderated by CIRAN coordinator **Vitor Correia** and featured the following panellists: **MEP Hildegard Bentele** (European People's Party, EPP), **Antonella Valmorbida** (Association for Local Democracy), **Jean-Pierre Kucheida** (ACOM France), and **Päivi Ekdahl** (RC Lapland). Key outcomes highlighted:

The Challenge: Over 85% of EU critical raw material deposits lie within or near environmentally protected areas, creating apparent conflicts between resource security and nature conservation. Moreover, research shows that most European



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citizens do not trust national governments or Brussels politics—making the reconciliation of critical mineral extraction with EU strategic autonomy and environmental protection both urgent and complex.

The Solution: Novel social contracts such as Community Development Agreements (CDAs) offer a promising pathway—binding agreements between local authorities, mining companies, and communities that require no changes to national legal frameworks whilst adapting to local contexts.

The Consensus: Trust-building through transparent governance, inclusive engagement, and genuine stakeholder empowerment is essential. As our panellists emphasised:

- Well-informed citizens can be contributing partners, not obstacles
- Shared visions for the future matter more than legacy burdens

The Reality Check: Faster, more effective decision-making is urgently needed, currently hindered by governance frameworks, stakeholder engagement challenges, and social acceptability concerns. The path forward requires transforming opposition into support through innovative social contracts that honour both strategic necessities and democratic values.

Consortium Meeting and strategic planning towards the end of the project

On the 14th of October, CIRAN partners convened at INTRAW's premises for the last in-person Consortium Meeting. The exchange underscored the importance of keeping the momentum alive in the ongoing discussions on EU's strategic autonomy, which should account for community engagement, inclusive social contracts, and environmental protection. It stressed the necessity of integrating contributions from more diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to ensure that policy roadmaps are both comprehensive and supported by the public. For this, the Consortium will host a Panel Discussion at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in November. Although CIRAN will conclude in December 2025, the project encourages the public to access and download all openly available resources via the project website and public channels.



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CIRAN Panel Discussion at the European Parliament (Brussels). @CIRAN

About: CIRAN is a project funded by the European Union that will develop, test and validate processes to arrive at systemic policy-making, balancing environmental protection and societal needs for accessing critical raw materials (CRMs). This will be achieved through: 1) streamlined permitting procedures in environmentally protected areas; 2) modern policies and social contract frameworks that reconcile the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and domestic sourcing of CRMs in the EU; and 3) the development of a community of practice to support the uptake of the CIRAN recommendation and that will remain active after the project funding period. CIRAN proposes a logical framework that justifies extraction on the basis of a system-oriented assessment and the co-creation of knowledge (i.e. tested and validated by communities located in or nearby environmentally protected areas). It will create novel social contract models identifying rights, obligations and responsibilities of governments (national/regional), communities and mine operators, capable of dealing with transformations and challenges due to climate change. As a distinctive feature, CIRAN brings together 25 external experts on the environmental, political, social, economic, and technological factors that will shape the energy transition responses and the demand for CRMs. These experts, organised in four Expert Groups (EGs), will work with the Consortium, conveying insights on policy-making and -implementation, economic drivers, technologies, mining, local governance, social capital, nature conservation and biodiversity. The Consortium is geared to develop inclusive policy-making instruments that support the EU Green Deal and UN-led reforms to reach the climate commitments and sustainable development goals.

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