

## **SPEAKER BRIEFING: MINERALS EXTRACTION VS. NATURE PROTECTION - RESOLVING THE DILEMMA BETWEEN SOCIETAL NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS**

Session at the **World Resources Forum 2025** (<https://wrf2025.org/>)

### **1 EVENT DETAILS**

**Date:** 3 September 2025, 11:00-12:00h

**Venue:** Centre International de Conférences Genève (Rue de Varembe 17, 1202 Genève, Switzerland)

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<https://wrf2025.org/programme/#online-programme>

### **2 AIM**

Discuss how can we balance environmental protection and local community rights with the urgent need to secure critical raw materials for the clean energy transition.

### **3 PARTICIPANTS**

**Moderator:**

- [Vitor Correia](#), International Raw Materials Observatory

**Panellists:**

- [Adrien Licha](#), Association for Local Democracy
- [Fabiana Di Lorenzo](#), Responsible Business Alliance
- [Florian Anderhuber](#), Euromines
- [Johanna Sydow](#), Heinrich-Böll Foundation
- [Paulo Cunha](#), Member of the European Parliament

**Speaker:**

- [Ludivine Wouters](#), Latitude Five

## CONTEXT OF THE SESSION

The [Critical Raw Materials Act \(CRMA\)](#), which was published in 2024 by the [European Commission](#), aims to address some of the challenges and opportunities that the EU faces in advancing the energy transition and achieving climate-neutrality by 2050. Among other objectives, it establishes a **target of 10% of critical raw materials to be extracted within Europe by 2030**, and it puts forward measures to expedite the permitting process for extraction projects. It also strives to enhance the monitoring and risk management of supply disruptions, and to uphold high social and environmental standards for production of critical raw materials.

The implementation of the **CRMA** faces multifaceted challenges that fundamentally threaten its capacity to transform Europe's mineral value chains and secure the EU's strategic autonomy. **Regulatory framework limitations** present the most immediate obstacle, as CRMA targets appear unattainable without enforceable compliance mechanisms and a coherent industrial strategy ensuring competitively priced energy and diverse skills development. **Administrative capacity constraints** compound these difficulties, with understaffed country and regional administrations and skills shortages creating permitting bottlenecks that fuel stakeholder distrust, ultimately reducing opportunities for constructive engagement around mineral projects.

Perhaps most critically, **public acceptance** of mining projects has emerged as the decisive factor, with social licence to operate being undermined by the disconnect between EU-level priorities and local community interests—a problem potentially exacerbated by the accelerated permitting processes for Strategic Projects. **Investment barriers** further constrain progress, as limited EU investor interest is hampered by opaque, concentrated markets and the absence of a premium market for responsibly produced minerals, requiring fundamental changes to competition rules and public sector intervention strategies.

Underlying all these challenges are **policy coherence issues**, particularly the significant tensions between environmental protection frameworks and mineral resource security objectives, which create conflicting regulatory priorities that undermine public confidence. Overcoming these interconnected difficulties requires dramatically increased coordination among Member States and with the private sector, alongside enhanced capacity to manage market disruptions and achieve genuine policy coherence across competing regulatory frameworks.

## 4 PANEL BRIEFING

### Step 1: Moderator's introduction

11:00 - 11:06

The moderator:

- Introduces the topic, aim and session outline,
- Poses two introductory poll questions for the audience to frame the topic (show of hands).

Poll Question 1: **To enable the transition towards clean energy and mobility we need to mine significantly more CRMs.** Agree, (b) Disagree, (c) Unsure.

Poll Question 2: **The EU should prioritise domestic extraction and processing of CRMs over imports from third countries.** Agree, (b) Disagree, (c) Unsure.

### Step 2: Introductory speech

11:06 - 11:14

Vitor introduces Ludivine Wouters. Ludivine makes a scene-setting presentation on EU challenges and CRMA implementation, providing essential background context for the panel discussion.

### Step 3: Panel discussion: Minerals extraction vs. nature protection

11:14 - 11:58

#### Part 1/3 Opening reactions

Vitor introduces the panellists and asks for their initial, big-picture reactions to Ludivine's presentation.

- 1-2 minutes per speaker.
- Speaking order: Adrien, Fabiana, Florian, Johanna, Paulo.

#### Part 2/3 Key questions: debate + audience Q&A

Key questions to answer:

- 1) How can we reconcile or balance the right of consent of local communities with the necessity of securing strategic raw materials for the energy transition, where projects can be considered to serve the broader public good?
- 2) With 85% of Europe's CRM deposits in or near protected areas, how can we ensure extraction serves the public good while maintaining environmental protection and democratic legitimacy?

Q&A from the audience.

#### Part 3/3 Closing statements

- 1 minute per speaker for their keyconclusions.
- Speaking order: Paulo, Johanna, Florian, Fabiana, Adrien.

### Step 4: Closing

11:58 – 12:00

Vitor thanks participants and audience, closes the session, and invites Ludivine to join the panellists for a group photo on stage.

## 5 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS – KEY POINTS

### EU CRM Agenda

- May 2024 CRM Act – Final stages of VdL 1: ambition statement, implementation gaps.
- New policy cycle: redefinition / rebalancing of European priorities – economic and regional security, re-industrialisation competitiveness and transition and climate action.
- Polish Presidency recommendations (1-year reality check):
  - Value chain integration via Industry 5.0 approach,
  - Enhanced financial derisking through redirected EU budget tools and EIB redesign,
  - Robust institutional framework with clear contact points,
  - Coherent international "Team Europe" engagement,
  - Public acceptance through co-design and community agreements.
- Sustainability, fairness and responsibility in mineral value chains: shift from upstream focus to whole-of-economy approach, responsibility as a driver of reliability of mineral value chains and mitigation of operational disruption factors as well as geopolitical risk.
- Market Mechanisms: Standards-based tools and demand-side measures to unlock investment (G7 Action Plan).

**Conclusion:** (re)balancing macro and local level priorities, enduring dilemma; governance and transparency foundational to success, requiring clarity of purpose; solutions-building at global, regional and local levels for effective outcomes.

## 6 SUMMARY

Convened by the [CIRAN](#) project at the [World Resources Forum 2025](#), a panel of industry and civil society actors discussed the enduring dilemma of access to mineral resources: how to fulfil societal need for minerals critical to development, security and global transition stakes and communities' expectations of local benefits, protection of nature and management of long-term impacts.

**The issue of balancing societal expectations is arising with new urgency in the EU, as the bloc aims to bolster its strategic autonomy with domestic mining and mineral operations.** To that end, the [Critical Raw Materials Act \(CRMA\)](#) was adopted in May 2024, in the final days of the [first](#) von der Leyen Commission and just as the EU engaged in a complex political [transition](#) while facing tectonic [shifts](#) in geopolitics and trade. The CRMA was not accompanied by a [dedicated EU budget](#) and has thus been implemented primarily through coordination initiatives, with limited results: the selection of [Strategic Projects](#) within and outside the EU has not convinced global markets; [Strategic Partnerships](#) with third countries have not channelled investment; European downstream industry have not mobilised on this issue, as the low-price environment reduces the perceived urgency of supply risk; attempts to overcome demand fragmentation through a [demand aggregation platform](#) or [EU CRM Centre](#) (modelled on [AggregateEU](#) despite its unfavourable review by the [European Court of Auditors](#)) were widely dismissed by [producers](#) as well as [commodity trading platforms](#).

**Beyond uncertain first steps over the last year, the paradigm shift in European policy is opening a space for more risk-informed, market-aligned and proactive CRM strategies.** Minerals are foundational to the economic and regional security imperatives facing the [second](#) von der Leyen Commission, with redefined [priorities](#) balancing climate ambitions and competitiveness: EU-level [industrial policy](#) is emerging in a context of geostrategic tensions, where market forces are not favourable to security of supply and systemic rivals' advantage stems from forward-looking industrial strategy and investment. In line with the Commission's [Political Guidelines 2024-2029](#) and the [Draghi Report](#), the [Competitiveness Compass](#) outlines a framework for action until 2030 to promote innovation, decarbonisation and reduce dependencies. Resulting initiatives, such as the [Clean Industrial Deal](#), the [Steel and Metals Action Plan](#) and the [REArm Europe Plan](#), are all based on increased internal coordination, more decisive global positioning and more effective use of European policy instruments. In this dynamic context, integration of CRM stakes to competition reform (consultation on industry cooperation to [procure and recycle CRM](#)) and trade policy ([clean trade and investment partnerships](#)) demonstrates that these issues belong at the core of European policy-making. This was spotlighted during [Poland's Council presidency](#), at a [High Level Conference on EU Raw Materials Policy](#) from which arose six recommendations to reset the EU CRM agenda for competitiveness (Appendix I): as it sets a new course for its future, the EU must define its mineral ambitions and investment capacity – and take urgent and effective measures to realise them.

**Even as policy debates continue at EU level, implications on the ground also need increased attention as parties' expectations, engagement and shared goals evolve.** CIRAN project [results](#) demonstrate *inter alia* that [protected areas](#) cover more than 24% of the EU and neighbouring countries and approximately 85% of CRM occurrences are less than 5km away from one of them. Across the EU, social perception of mining and minerals also impact investment and operations even as local and permitting authorities (often at different levels of government) struggle to adapt.

Finding an optimal balance of requirements for economic activity, including extractives and relating infrastructure, nature protection and community expectations is high-stakes, and difficult when loss of trust in institutions is prevalent. The panel highlighted four keys to effective consensus-building:

**Clarify and communicate European priorities** -- MEP Paulo Cunha highlighted the need for better prioritisation and more clarity of purpose from the EU, to refocus European action and improve coordination across multiple levels of government – coordination which was deemed the “missing key” to European success by RMI Senior Director Fabiana Di Lorenzo. The EU must make forward-looking choices on industry, transition and defence, articulating European mineral demand and enabling more purposeful debate of regional and local stakes, agreed Johanna Sydow of the Heinrich-Böll Foundation, also calling out the risks arising from excessive deregulation in this context.

**Invest in regulators’ knowledge, skills and resources for sound governance and permitting** -- Better understanding of the sector and stronger technical capacity is required to drive more effective policy, giving authorities at all levels, from the European Commission to national and local governments, the opportunity to truly own their role in the minerals agenda, said Ms Di Lorenzo. Permitting authorities in particular must be equipped with human, technical and financial resources necessary for robust, risk-informed decision-making – itself a pillar of trust-building with affected communities and society more widely, explained Euromines’ Deputy DG, Florian Anderhuber. This was echoed by Ms Sydow, particularly as regulatory and permitting authorities must be able to not only assess individual projects but also take a holistic view on cumulative impacts. The risks posed by the challenging fiscal context, affecting local authorities’ engagement and capacity, were underlined by Adrien Licha, Coordinator of the European Association for Local Democracy.

**Acknowledge and manage the tension between European public interest priorities and local stakes** -- Overly simplistic narratives of “minerals for transition” neither reflect complex market dynamics nor foster a genuine debate of local concerns, impacts and goals, noted Ms Di Lorenzo, who recommended focusing on local benefits for consensus-building and lasting acceptance. Strategic autonomy concerns at the heart of EU policy do not attract citizen attention in the same way, underlined Mr Licha, who also pointed out the importance of correctly scoping local participation and providing legitimate representatives of local interests (be they elected and/or civil society leaders) with sufficient leverage to meaningfully engage. This aligned with Ms Sydow’s reminder of the need for granular understanding of local stakes and specificities to overcome blanket rejection narratives. Mr Anderhuber also clarified how opportunities can be overlooked by two-dimensional land planning, which does not reflect the three-dimensional land use inherent to mining: underground operations may be conducted sufficiently far below protected areas, with relating surface operations sufficiently distant and discreet, not to detract from protection goals.

**Beyond consultation, foster local participation in decision-making** -- The solution to opposition cannot be to minimise involvement of local authorities and civil society, but rather to reinforce their role and empower stakeholders to participate constructively, sharing ownership of negotiated solutions, underlined MEP Cunha. In fact, such consensus-building completes rather than competes with robust administration, explained Mr Anderhuber: bolstering regulatory and permitting capacity is a systemic priority, which itself unlocks the opportunity for early-stage, constructive local engagement – the individual project-level priority. Access to quality information is essential to foster dialogue, with Mr Licha spotlighting reports of high risk of misinformation on environmental issues.

**Appendix I - Recommendations: CRMA implementation reset for competitiveness**

**i. Public acceptance through co-design** - The paradigm of policy implementation must shift to encompass bottom-up approaches driven by a shared local vision. Community Development Agreements (CDAs) have proven their value worldwide as formal arrangements bridging permitting trust gaps and allowing equitable allocation of burden and benefits. A robust CDA framework should be founded on equitable partnership principles and incorporate: negotiated tripartite agreements formalising rights and obligations of companies, permitting and local authorities as well as affected communities; representative monitoring bodies with adequate resources and authority as well as effective dispute resolution mechanisms; and provisions to address broader socio-economic priorities of affected regions.

**ii. Effective financial support to derisk strategic sectors** – To derisk and future-proof strategic sectors, European and Member State financial institutions must mobilise and coordinate to increase their risk-bearing capacity and reduce financing costs for responsible mineral operators, improving European credibility in global mineral markets.

**iii. Robust and transparent institutional framework** - Increased coordination of EU and Member State priorities and private sector actors requires a streamlined institutional landscape, overcoming dilution of the CRM agenda across Commission directorates and lack of a credible contact point for international partners. A well-designed European agency would improve transparency as well as coordination.

**iv. Consistent and credible international engagement** - European raw materials diplomacy must be steered by market demands and opportunities, in addition to geostrategic drivers, cooperation imperatives with emerging economies and global transition goals, environmental protection and societal values to which the EU remains committed. It must be led by streamlined institutional capacity orchestrating a more coherent, strategic and credible 'Team Europe' offering to partners.

**v. Research, innovation and skills to build the future** - The EU should develop a comprehensive CRM research and innovation programme on the foundation of previous Horizon initiatives, significantly scaling up investment to address the full range of technological and systemic challenges. To foster innovation, enhance EU domestic mining and minerals capacity and connect dynamically with global partners pursuing similar objectives, urgent action is needed to close the critical skills gap in geology, mining and processing.

**vi. Value Chain Integration – Industry 5.0** - Transversal to all recommendations is a comprehensive rethink of mineral value chains as dynamic systems: artificial interventions in supply security will not be tenable, only sustained demand can support a purposeful redesign of strategic sectors and value chains. Clarification of European priorities, encompassing defence needs as well as select transition choices focusing on European strengths in infrastructure, is a necessary first step to more integrated value chains, supported by new policy, financing and engagement frameworks.