



Spotlight on  
Belgium

**orgalim**  
EUROPE'S TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES



# TECHNOLOGY AT HEART



## Delivering net-zero in the heart of Europe

### TECHNOLOGY IN ACTION

We profile four leading, future-facing high-tech manufacturing companies in Belgium and share their insights from the front line on what it takes to compete, innovate and thrive on the path to net-zero.

### TECHNOLOGY MEETS POLICY

In discussion with Bart Steukers, CEO of Agoria, the Belgian federation of the technology industry, we explore how to ensure that Europe's technology companies can keep providing the solutions to build Europe's prosperous and sustainable future.

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#TechAtHeart



Orgalim is committed to championing an EU policy agenda for sustainable growth, to supporting the industry in its transformation, and to advancing dialogue between business, policymakers and citizens on the relationship of technology to society.

# FOREWORD



**C**ompetitiveness and industrial policy have never been so high on the EU policy agenda, and rightly so. Our industries have been ringing the alarm bells for some time that competitiveness is eroding and Europe's lead in high-tech manufacturing is under threat. Orgalim's economic reports lately signal slowing demand and declining investment just when companies should be in overdrive to deliver the technology solutions essential to achieve Europe's net-zero ambitions.

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**Our industries have been ringing the alarm bells for some time that competitiveness is eroding and Europe's lead in high-tech manufacturing is under threat.**

So the European Commission President's pledge to do whatever it takes to keep our competitive edge is a welcome one, but one, of course, that begs the question: what, exactly, will it take? Orgalim's policy agenda for the next EU legislative cycle, *Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation*<sup>1</sup>, highlights six priorities, from first and foremost decreasing the regulatory burden, to ensuring a competitive and secure energy supply.

This edition of *Technology at Heart* provides further first-hand insights by profiling four high-

tech manufacturing companies in Belgium, each recognised as a Factory of the Future, to get their front-line perspectives on what it takes to compete, innovate and thrive on the path to net-zero.

I believe these case studies vividly show that the cards are still in Europe's hands and that, with a strong competitiveness push, we can continue to lead the clean tech revolution and build a resilient, competitive and decarbonised European industrial base.

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**With a strong competitiveness push, we can continue to lead the clean tech revolution.**

This report is produced in collaboration with our Belgian member association Agoria, the Belgian federation of the technology industry, and aims both to showcase the power and potential of Europe's high-tech manufacturing industries, and to inform the crucial policy decisions that can help to deliver the net-zero transformation. I am pleased to share it with you.

**Malte Lohan,**

Director General, Orgalim - Europe's Technology Industries



## Malte Lohan

Malte Lohan is the Director General of Orgalim, Europe's Technology Industries, speaking for innovative companies spanning the mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, electronics and ICT, and metal technology branches. He is responsible for setting Orgalim's strategy, acting as the senior representative of the European technology industries in Brussels and managing the operations of the association.

<sup>1</sup>[Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation](#)



# TECHNOLOGY IN ACTION



## Introduction

Arguably the most iconic Belgian landmark, the Atomium was designed and built for the Brussels World's Fair in 1958. The monument, which represents an elemental iron crystal with each sphere an atom, symbolised the confidence in scientific and technical progress that permeated the Fair, the first since World War II.

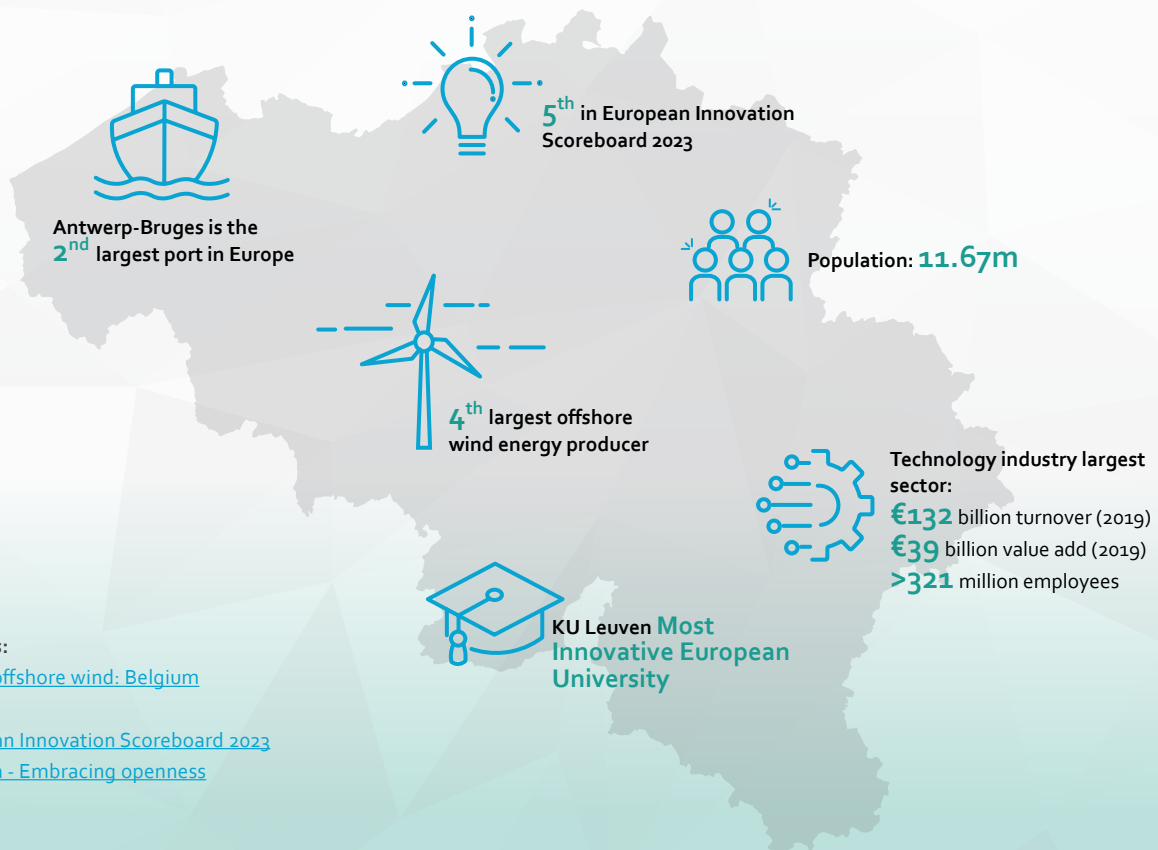
More than 60 years later, Belgium is still placing science and technology centre stage. Technology companies boast the highest added value (€39 billion in 2019) of any sector in the economy, and the country is at the forefront of a number of technology areas critical for the green and digital transition. It is the fourth largest offshore wind energy producer globally, and co-founded the North Sea Coalition that aims to quadruple combined offshore wind capacity by 2030. It is also emerging as a European hub for hydrogen, is strong in recycling infrastructure for the circular economy, and is rapidly gaining critical mass in electrification value chains – so much so that several electric cars are now being produced in Belgium.

All of this is supported by a logistics network that is one of the most developed on the continent: the Port of Antwerp-Bruges is the second biggest in Europe, with excellent road, rail and water links that can reach

some 200 million people in a 500-kilometre radius. And by a vibrant innovation ecosystem, centred around top institutions like KU Leuven, Ghent University, ULB and VUB, and the IMEC laboratories, among others. Belgium is ranked the fifth most innovative country on the European Innovation Scoreboard 2023, performing above the EU average.

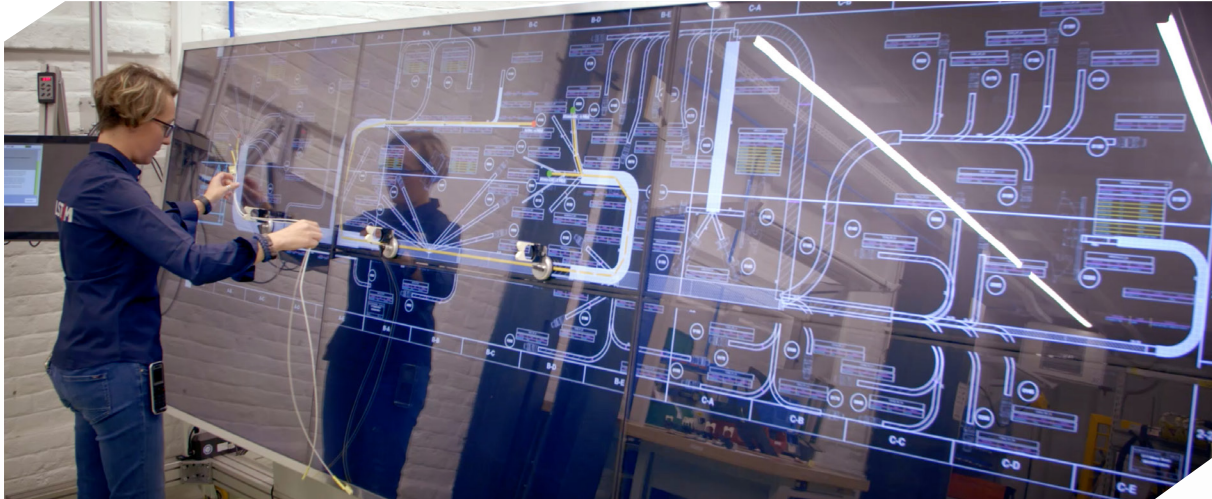
If this dynamism seems out of proportion for a country of less than 12 million people, it is not out of character. Being small and complex in its make-up, with three distinct regions, three official languages, and shared borders with four countries, cooperation is a necessity that has become ingrained in the country's DNA. It is no coincidence that Belgium is a founding member of the United Nations, NATO and the European Union, and hosts several European and international organisations.

Nor is it a coincidence that the country is home to companies – like those in the following pages – that are leaders in tackling the kinds of complex challenges that require partnership, innovation and advanced manufacturing technologies: challenges that, as the 1958 World's Fair envisioned, can help deliver 'a world for a better life for mankind'.





## Greener and smarter rail solutions



### Challenge

The European rail supply industry is a world leader, representing nearly half of the global market and, with rail recognised as key to decarbonising transport, demand is growing. But so too is competition, challenging European rail technology companies to deliver innovative and competitive solutions, products and services to support future increased usage in an efficient and sustainable way.

And challenging it is, because innovating in the rail sector calls for working with rapidly developing digital technologies in trains that are expected to operate thirty years or more, and with older legacy systems to interface with. At the same time, the potential to improve the efficiency of European rail systems is huge.

### Solution

Alstom Belgium steps up to this challenge not only through what it innovates, but also how it does so. Its Charleroi site is unique within the Alstom Group for combining two centres of excellence, addressing the development of both greener and smarter rail solutions. Talk about the twin green and digital transition: in Charleroi they are inseparable.

The combination of green and smart is key to developing new energy optimisation solutions in rail transport, says Pierre Meunier, Innovation Excellence Director, whether we are talking about more efficient

power conversion systems for both on-board and infrastructure applications, the ability to recover and store braking energy, smart signalling to optimise traffic management, or automatic train operation to optimise driving strategies.

Take braking energy recovery. Alstom's solution, currently in use on metros, tramways and railways from Milan to Dubai, allows train and tram operators to reduce their energy consumption by 20-30%, Mr Meunier says. That reduces the need to add substations as traffic grows.

Then there's the power converters that sit on top of trains and trams. The more efficient, lighter and smaller iTAC converters developed in Charleroi allow tramways to free up space and load, which can then be used to



**The combination of green and smart is key to developing new energy optimisation solutions in rail transport.**



**Pierre Meunier**, Innovation Excellence Director, Alstom Belgium

**Main photo:** Head of Production, Samantha Esteban, operates the smart interactive cabling tool



Smart signalling system

add batteries for energy storage and use. This in turn means trains and trams can cross areas where there are no overhead power cables available or possible, without having to resort to diesel fuel.

A third piece of the puzzle is smart signalling systems, which allow more trains to travel safely on existing lines, reduce maintenance costs, and enable automatic train operation, ensuring optimum total cost of ownership. Alstom is world leader in European standard ERTMS (European Rail Traffic Management System) solutions, having equipped more than 12,000 trains.

As for how the team in Charleroi goes about developing these innovations, that is equally key in an ever more competitive market environment where efficiency and time to market pressures are keenly felt.

Here too automation plays a big role, though people always come first and foremost, as Samantha Esteban, Head of Production, explains. Collaborative open innovation is core to the culture, and a global Alstom innovation process and yearly recognition contest called I NOVE YOU fosters the participation of all employees.

Out of this have come, for example, an agile prototyping methodology, an automated watertightness test bench to ensure the required IP standards are met, and a smart interactive cabling tool to facilitate the production of cable looms. This latter innovation helps the team to produce looms faster and better: efficiency has improved 30%, industrialisation is 40% faster and paper consumption has been cut by €20,000 per year, Ms Esteban reports.

## Policy implications

Alstom Charleroi's three main asks of European policymakers?

"First, more robust investment plans from Member States in sustainable transport systems and, at the EU level, more robust deployment plans when mandating the introduction of new technologies. Rail is a proven and available technology with many advantages: already electrified, extremely safe, with a low land footprint and high capacity. Currently the speed of deployment varies a lot between countries: for example, in Belgium, 50% of the network is ERTMS equipped, while the Netherlands are barely starting. This delays the moment when the full benefits will materialise.

Second, would be a more stable and predictable regulatory framework for the rail sector, evolving in a timeframe in line with our sector – say every 6-8 years. Currently the frequent updates of the European regulatory framework every 3-4 years require significant effort to upgrade ERTMS systems and slow the deployment.

Third, to regulate only in as much as needed and make more room for norms and standards instead of regulations. For example, while the development of a coherent EU legal framework for digital technologies like AI or cybersecurity is positive, it may sometimes collide with existing sectoral regulations. If not done properly, this may create uncertainties and lead to more complex and costly authorisation processes which is in nobody's interest."

## Related Orgalim position papers

- [Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation](#)
- [Data Act](#)
- [AI Act](#)
- [Cyber Resilience Act](#)

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### About Alstom Belgium

Alstom, a world leader in smart and sustainable mobility, employs more than 2,200 people in Belgium across two sites, including 600 engineers. Alstom's Bruges site is a major assembly and testing centre for trains such as the M7 regional trains for SNCB. Its Charleroi site hosts two centres of excellence

focused on innovation and technologies enabling automatic train operation, smart signalling, and recovering braking energy for efficiency. The solutions developed in Charleroi are deployed worldwide and Alstom Charleroi contributes to the diversity of Alstom's employees with 29 different nationalities represented. The company received the Factory of the Future label for the first time in 2020.

[alstom.com/alstom-belgium](https://alstom.com/alstom-belgium)



## Lean, thriving and future-proof



### Challenge

Europe will not achieve its net-zero ambitions without the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that make up 99% of European manufacturing businesses. Many of them are highly innovative and leaders in niche markets that are key pieces of the puzzle in the transition to net-zero.

But the last few years have been exceptionally tough for SMEs, with supply chain disruptions, sharp energy and material price hikes, economic uncertainty, hiring difficulties and proliferating regulations among the myriad challenges testing their resilience, and their ability to digitalise, decarbonise and thrive.

In this challenging climate, implementing advanced manufacturing technologies is more critical than ever, but also more daunting, given the upfront costs, time and energy required to do it well.

### Solution

The rewards, however, can be considerable and just what many SMEs need to succeed, as the case of Altachem, a small company based in Harelbeke, shows. A subsidiary of the LINDAL Group, the company is a leader in the very competitive, global market for high delivery valves and polyurethane (PU) foam guns and accessories used for insulation, and a proud recipient of the Belgian Factory of the Future award in 2023.

**Main photo:** Automated guided vehicle in the assembly shop

What's the secret? "Our team is permanently working on increasing productivity by implementing the latest state-of-the-art digital solutions bringing sufficient advantage for our employees, our suppliers and our customers," says Managing Director, Jean-Marie Poppe.

It has been a methodical and step-by-step process, as Operations Manager Wouter Van haute explains. First get the basics right and introduce lean manufacturing principles, then onboard Industry 4.0 technologies gradually, setting up Proofs of Concept and learning by doing. The advantages of this approach have been minor investment and cost, and a faster learning curve and decisions. The company has also developed and leveraged what it calls the Altachem Manufacturing Ecosystem, collaborating with

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Our team is permanently working on increasing productivity by implementing the latest state-of-the-art digital solutions.”



**Jean-Marie Poppe, Managing Director, Altachem**



Flat AMR/AGV in the assembly shop

local universities and technical schools, and tapping into the technology expertise available through Agoria, Sirris and Flanders Make. “We are not too risk averse,” says Mr Van haute, “we have even onboarded start-ups and are early adopters of fast-growing technologies.”

The result: continuous improvement in the efficiency of assembly lines, a considerable reduction in scrap rate, improved energy efficiency and more engaged employees. Employees have fully embraced the process as they now have access to more visual, real-time data and a more secure and robust information system. Besides, they also have fewer repetitive handling tasks to do, as an Automated Guided Vehicle now takes care of many of the heavy handling tasks.

Along the way, the company has also significantly improved its own footprint, including by switching to green energy contracts, and participating in a regional multimodal platform to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions related to freight. “By adding sustainability as our main innovation driver to the typical triangle of ‘cost – time to market – quality’, we are paving the way for the next generation of market-leading products and

solutions for our industry,” says Mr Poppe.

## Policy implications

What helps and what hinders on the policy side, from Altachem’s perspective? Mr Poppe welcomes the European Green Deal and Fit for 55 package as significant macroeconomic programmes that will motivate EU Member States to launch initiatives to better insulate dwellings, housing and governmental buildings, thereby in turn increasing demand for his company’s products. To help companies like his contribute to achieving the Green Deal ambitions, however, he highlights in particular three further priorities that need to be addressed:

1. Create a real European Union with harmonised legal and fiscal rules that facilitate European-based companies in competing against North American and Asia-based companies. E.g. address non-harmonised energy pricing within the EU countries and the vulnerability of our EU companies compared to Asian and North American competitors when comparing gas and electricity costs.
2. Review the national (Belgian) fiscal rules to further reward the people that work hard every day as well as the companies that offer sustainable work to reach the desired 80% employment rate.
3. Support both companies and households to further accelerate the energy transition by all available means, but with a focused, scientific support.

## Related Orgalim position papers

- [Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation](#)
- [Advanced Manufacturing](#)
- [Internal Market Positions](#)
- [Electricity Market Design](#)



## About Altachem

Altachem, based in Harelbeke, Belgium, specialises in supplying high delivery valves and polyurethane foam guns, professional tools and accessories worldwide to one component foam producers and distributors active in the DIY and professional segments of the construction and building industry. Originally founded in 1992, the company was acquired by LINDAL Group in 2011, and was recognised as a Factory of the Future in 2023. A major element contributing to the award is its AltaFit employee wellbeing programme, which encompasses healthy food and drinks, workshops and trainings, ergonomics, lifelong learning opportunities and people empowerment.

[lindalgroup.com/altachem](https://lindalgroup.com/altachem)





## Technology in the service of people



### Challenge

Supporting SMEs' competitiveness and their adoption of high-tech manufacturing is key to delivering a net-zero industry, economy and society in Europe. Over 99% of companies in manufacturing are SMEs, responsible for over half of all jobs. However, implementing advanced manufacturing is still a challenge for SMEs: only one in five manufacturing companies have already done so. The obstacles – investment cost, skills, and time – are easy enough to identify, but overcoming them is harder.

### Solution

Not for Delhez, though. For this small family business, technology has always been a passion, though not as an end in itself. Rather, it is the means to deliver on the company's values, placing technology in service to humanity. The leitmotif of the business, instilled by the father, and now being brought forward by the two sons and joint Managing Directors, is to do what others are not doing, or at least to do it better. And the advanced manufacturing technologies they have implemented all serve that end, helping to transform what was a traditional metal roofing business into a high-tech metal processing enterprise competing successfully

in the production of customised, high-quality parts for customers in the robotics, machinery, pharmaceutical and construction industries.

“As soon as we discover a piece of technology that allows us to save labour, we invest in it.

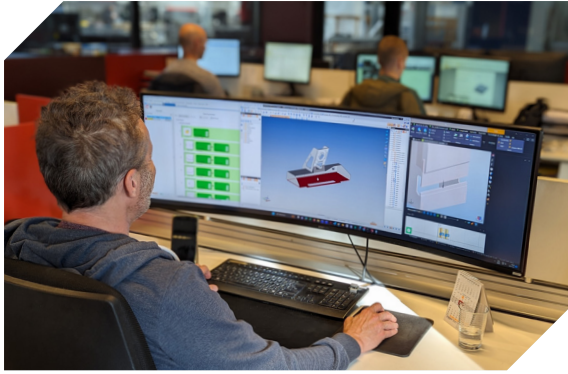
Not to replace any person with a robot – that we never do.”



**Christophe Delhez, Co-Managing Director, Delhez**

“As soon as we discover a piece of technology that allows us to save labour, we invest in it. Not to replace any person with a robot – that we never do,” says Christophe Delhez, one of the Managing Directors with his brother, Stéphan. “We give a robot to a person to give them a greater intellectual challenge and to make their work more meaningful and less repetitive. And

**Main photo:** Automated and customised production side-by-side in the Delhez factory



Preparation of the part in the shopfloor office, prior to production

automation allows us to offer new possibilities to our customers, grow and be more profitable.”

From three people thirty years ago, the business now has around 50 employees and annual turnover of around €11 million, of which €4 million was re-invested last year in new technologies. Besides the latest drawing and simulation software to process customers’ parts in 3D, and its own MES (Manufacturing Execution System), a range of high-end production tools is constantly being added to.

Automation of the bigger production series allows us to sell in Europe competitively, says Mr Delhez. For the custom production and prototypes, what makes the difference is passionate technicians and engineers who are committed to finding the best quality and most efficient solution, applying smart technologies in close collaboration with the customer.

Digitalisation and high-end machines also enable Delhez itself to be more energy-efficient and responsive. Besides, the company has installed photovoltaic panels generating nearly 400,000 kWh per year, 75% of which is self-consumed. And the commitment to people and planet doesn’t stop there: its orchards and beehives planted around the factory grounds produce 35 varieties of fruit and over 200kg of honey per year, which co-workers share in and enjoy.

## Policy implications

To further help this committed and innovative SME thrive, Christophe Delhez sees three main ways in which policy can help:

“As an entrepreneur, what bothers me is that we do our utmost to have the least impact on the environment possible, but we sometimes find ourselves competing with products coming from competitors who don’t have to respect those rules, that are transported thousands of kilometres to get here, pollute nature and destroy the market because their prices are too low. There should not be ‘racism’ against such products, but we should all have to play by the same rules.

My other wish is that standards and regulations be more flexible and responsive to keep up with new technologies, and that regulation is properly enforced. In some areas the administrative burdens are considerable, in others there are gaps where the standardisation process is too slow. Market surveillance and enforcement can also be an issue. There are currently very many manual laser welding machines arriving on the market from China without any specific standards or regulation as yet, even though the risks are much higher than with normal welding.

Third, schools should be able to have funding and easy access to new technologies so technical students can be prepared to their future work environment.”

## Related Orgalim position papers

- [Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation](#)
- [Advanced Manufacturing](#)
- [Internal Market Positions](#)

## About Delhez



Based in Thimister, in the east of Belgium, Delhez is a family business that has specialised in sheet metal and tube machining for over 20 years. It aims to be the partner of choice for metal processing of parts, both in terms of the quality of its work and the variety and complementarity of high-tech processes it offers. Employing 50 people, the company has almost doubled its turnover in the last five years to around €11 million, selling mostly in a 400km radius. The company received the Factory of the Future award in 2020.

[delhez.be](http://delhez.be)



## Building leadership in wind power



### Challenge

Europe's wind industry is a European success story, but it is currently facing a unique mix of challenges, as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen acknowledged in her 2023 State of the European Union address.

Although a record 16 GW were installed in 2022, according to the Commission, this pace is well below the 37 GW per year required to achieve the forecasted contribution of wind power to the EU's 2030 renewable energy target, now at 45%, following the Fit for 55 revision. To deliver that, Europe needs to strengthen and expand its wind supply chain. But the competitive headwinds are increasing and global market share is declining, notably in the face of price competition from China.

How to maintain European competitiveness and leadership in this increasingly competitive global wind turbine market and accelerate the energy transition in Europe?

### Solution

If anyone can do it, it is ZF Wind Power, a world leader in the development, production and testing of gearboxes for wind turbines. The company has 23% market share in the worldwide geared wind market, powering more than 80,000 wind turbines and 150 million households worldwide.

Main photo: ZF Wind Power's plant in Lommel

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The evolution and dynamics in the wind market will require a whole new level of testing and validation of modular powertrains that will drive the new generation of wind turbines.



### Dr Martin Knops, CTO, ZF Wind Power

And it is tackling head-on the challenge of maintaining and building its leadership and competitive edge, while at the same time delivering the net-zero transformation.

How? Essentially in three ways, and advanced technologies are central to all three.

First and foremost is the product itself. Since 2016, ZF has offered a modular gearbox platform concept, called SHIFT, which thanks to standardised building blocks offers wind turbine manufacturers high flexibility in adapting wind turbine designs to changing market



ZF Wind Power delivers advanced gearbox solutions on a global scale

requirements, while reducing the Levelised Cost of Energy (LCoE). Essentially, it offers more flexibility, more compact designs and, increasingly, more torque to deliver more power per turbine.

Case in point, in 2020, ZF together with Vestas launched the most powerful onshore powertrain at the time, with a capacity of 6 MW. Just a few years later, the partners launched a new powertrain on the market with a torque level more than three times higher and 15 MW output. "With the development and production of the complete 15 MW powertrain, we prove we are actively preparing for the future," says ZF Wind Power CTO, Dr Martin Knops. "The evolution and dynamics in the wind market will require a whole new level of testing and validation of modular powertrains that will drive the new generation of wind turbines." The company is currently building a test facility capable of validating wind turbine powertrains up to 30 MW, in anticipation of the next generation of even more powerful powertrains which the team is preparing to produce in future.

Second is how the gearboxes are made. For new product designs, ZF uses advanced software to create a digital twin of the facility prior to setting up the assembly process, so that everything is virtually predefined, checked in 3D, optimised and validated. This enables swift integration of

new processes in the existing manufacturing facilities. The aim is to offer fully modular production, complete powertrain testing, validation and pre-commissioning all under one roof. And to keep improving efficiency: ZF aims to reduce its Scope 1 & 2 CO<sub>2</sub> emissions worldwide by 80% by 2030 (versus 2019) and Scope 3 emissions by 40%.

Third, once in operation, the company's ZF Thrive smart service and predictive maintenance platform helps wind park operators, OEMs and other partners increase turbine performance and availability, extend their lifetime and reduce operational costs and hence the cost of energy.

## Policy implications

To support its ability to compete and thrive, ZF Wind Power's top asks of policymakers include:

1. A competitive playing field: make full use of the trade instruments to ensure a level-playing field with non-European competitors.
2. Collaboration between Commission, Member States and industry to monitor challenges, exchange best practices and coordinate actions through an EU Wind Power Forum.
3. Financial support: Europe's wind industry needs substantial investments to expand and upgrade. Investment decisions need to be taken now, in order to keep pace with the REPowerEU ambitions.
4. Create a long-term outlook: improve the auction design, simplify the permitting procedures, and enhance the grid.

## Related Orgalim position papers

- [Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation](#)
- [Renewable Energy Directive](#)
- [Electricity Market Design](#)



### About ZF Wind Power

ZF Wind Power, based in Lommel, Belgium, is a worldwide, leading, technology-driven manufacturer and service partner in the global wind turbine gearbox industry. The company is leading the high-performance onshore segments with products of up to 8000 kNm and was the first to exceed 200 Nm/kg torque density in compact modular platform designs. It delivered the world's first offshore 9.5 MW wind turbine gearbox and delivered, in close cooperation with its partner, the first 15 MW complete powertrains for the offshore market. ZF has the largest global installed capacity of +8 MW offshore wind turbine gearboxes. Since it entered the wind industry in 1979, ZF Wind Power has delivered more than 80,000 gearboxes, powering as much as 180 GW, mainly high-performance, wind turbines, covering almost 25% of the total installed capacity of gear-driven wind turbines worldwide. Together with its partners, the company constantly invests in the wind market to empower a sustainable future.

[zf.com](https://www.zf.com)



## Providing the solutions

**T**he case studies in the previous section paint a vivid picture of the decarbonised, innovative and competitive European high-tech manufacturing future that is not only possible, but already happening in the heart of Europe, in companies both big and small.

Now, the question is how to scale up and ensure that we can make these factories of the future the factories of today, everywhere. We pick up the thread with Bart Steukers, CEO of Agoria, the Belgian federation of the technology industry.

**Let's dive right in. Your organisation represents more than 2,000 technology companies from the manufacturing industry and digital and telecom sectors in Belgium. Why do they matter, not just for Belgium but for Europe as a whole?**

**Bart Steukers:** We are the biggest industrial sector offering the most value-add and the most in-house innovation, but what really counts here is that we are part of the solution. If you look at our collective challenges around CO<sub>2</sub> and around the green and digital transition, our companies all provide a piece of the solution. That is why we always say: without us, it will be tougher to find a solution for the challenges that we collectively face.

Bear in mind also that we are one of the most consistent employment generators: employment rates rarely go down, even in manufacturing. We also know that every job you create within the manufacturing industry creates another in the services industry, although the reverse is not always true. That in itself is a key reason to pay attention to this sector. A country or region without industry has low chances of survival in the long term. I believe that all this adds up to us being an essential sector – both for Belgium and for Europe.

**What are the biggest challenges ahead for these Belgian sectors, now and in the next five years?**

**Bart Steukers:** It has never been clearer that we need competitive industry to tackle the challenges that we face. Almost half of [European Commission

President] Ursula von der Leyen's 2023 State of the European Union speech was about competitiveness and industrial policy. That's a positive development – although one may argue the effectiveness of what she announced – and our priority focus is making sure that that momentum creates action, not only on a European level but also on a Belgian level.

In terms of competitiveness, we face a number of challenges in Belgium. First of all: are we getting the basics right? Do we have an environment that allows companies to be competitive and access the physical and digital infrastructure that they need? I believe that our current system of automatic wage indexation will, in the long-term, kill the competitiveness of Belgian companies because our wages are increasing much faster than our competitors', say, in the Netherlands, or Germany. A lot more also needs to be done in the area of digital infrastructure: for one thing, we are very low on the European rankings in terms of 5G rollout.



**If you look at our collective challenges around CO<sub>2</sub> and around the green and digital transition, our companies all provide a piece of the solution.**

Secondly, there is the matter of talent. Can companies find the talent that they need? More work is required to make our education system more focused on STEM and on scientific and technical knowledge, and to make sure we attract the best people, for example, to work on offshore wind.

The third piece of puzzle as regards competitiveness is innovation, and that is one of Belgium's great strengths. We are consistently ranked among the top European countries for entrepreneurial innovation, we have a good fiscal system that stimulates research and development, and we have Sirris and ourselves that provide a very good support system.

Orgalim’s policy agenda for the next EU legislative cycle identifies six key priorities for Delivering the Net-Zero Transformation, as you well know being a member of the Orgalim board. Can you speak a bit to why these priorities are key to address these challenges?

**Bart Steukers:** Of course, I think the number one thing in Orgalim’s agenda and also in ours is the issue of regulatory burden. If you really want to create momentum for industrial policy, it’s important that you make sure regulation serves that purpose and doesn’t undermine companies’ ability to compete. The question is not just where can we reduce regulation, but also where can regulation help? So I’m also a fan of the idea of sandboxing regulations, to examine the real-life impact of a regulation. I firmly believe that we need to do that much more than we currently do, because although regulation is very often based on good intentions, it can unfortunately have a number of nasty side effects that were not properly understood at the outset – the regulation around CBAM is an example of this.

The other issue that concerns me is that of strategic autonomy, because it seems to be having the side effect of stimulating more protectionism, whether consciously or unconsciously. This is not our DNA. Our DNA is open trade, our DNA is doing business, our DNA is working with the Single Market, and I worry that focusing so much on strategic autonomy – which in itself is not a bad thing – will, at the end of the day, lead us to forget to use our strengths, namely that we know how to do business, that we are export-driven and that we have the Single Market.

Finally, there is the issue of energy. How do you ensure a secure energy supply at the right price and that is preferably green energy? For a lot of the industries that we represent, success or failure will largely depend on how that question is answered. If the energy issue is not addressed and resolved, then I believe that we will be in real trouble.

These are all among the key priorities that Orgalim is highlighting and that really need to be worked on in the next Commission.



**If you really want to create momentum for industrial policy, it’s important that you make sure regulation serves that purpose and doesn’t undermine companies’ ability to compete.**

How can the Belgian Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2024 help?

**Bart Steukers:** Considerable work is needed to finalise the files that are open and I hope the Belgian Presidency can do much to achieve that. This is also the Presidency that can most freely build up the programme for the next Commission and the next Parliament. I also hope that the Belgian Presidency will set up long-term priorities around industrial policy and competitiveness. We are working with them to ensure that the right priorities are put forward, because this is a critical period and because they are the bridge builders between this Commission and the next one. Having a Belgian Presidency is also good because, while we have a lot of improvement points as a country, one of our strengths is that we are good bridge builders. It is in the nature of the country because our complexity as a nation has taught us to build bridges between different stakeholders. From my point of view, this is the ideal moment for the Belgian Presidency to put together a number of these priorities and to put them forward for the next Commission.



## Bart Steukers

Bart Steukers has been Agoria’s CEO since 2021, having previously been its Context Director. Before joining the Agoria team, he worked at IBM as Public Sector Executive for EMEA for 18 years, then joined Unisys for 11 years, where he became General Manager for continental Europe. He holds a seat on the Board of Directors of Orgalim, is Vice Chair of the Board of Sirris, and sits on a number of other Boards, including that of FEB, the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium.

Agoria has a long history of working closely together with Orgalim on these and other EU policy issues. What are the main added value benefits that Agoria and the Belgian technology industry as a whole get from this European level collaboration with Orgalim?

**Bart Steukers:** Obviously, it is important that we understand what is happening at the European level and that we work together on European files and positions because, at the end of the day, 70% of legislation is created at the European level. Working together with organisations such as Orgalim is essential from an advocacy point of view.

I also personally believe that it is important to draw inspiration from colleagues, to understand what is happening in other countries, in other similar organisations, and to understand, if you are coming from a similar world view, how to see opportunities and challenges from a different perspective and how to address them. I believe that Orgalim has a major role to play here as well, especially in bringing the high-tech manufacturing industries together, to find out how we can draw as much inspiration from each other as possible and use that to our advantage at the European and national levels, and to ensure that we are as synchronised as possible across Member States. Basically, it is crucial that we set the right example and stick together.

# ■ AGORIA

## About Agoria

Agoria is the Belgian federation of the technology industry, counting more than 2,000 technology companies from the manufacturing industry and the digital and telecom sectors among its members. It is the largest federation within the Federation of Belgian Enterprises, with some 200 employees, based at offices in Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Liège and Charleroi. Agoria also has its own technology centre, Sirris, which supports companies in introducing new technologies into their products, processes and business. The history of Agoria dates back to 1946, when Fabrimetal, the Federation of Enterprises in the Metal Industry was established. As the organisation expanded to support companies also in other sectors, such as ICT, the name was changed to Agoria in November 2000.

[agoria.be](http://agoria.be)

**sirris** innovation  
forward

## About Sirris

Founded by Agoria in 1949, Sirris is the innovation companion of the Belgian technological industry, providing hands-on support to all Belgian companies that are carrying out technological innovation projects in one of these domains: advanced manufacturing, product innovation, digital transformation, the green transition and innovation management. With a team of over 150 multidisciplinary engineers, scientists and technicians operating from eight locations across Belgium, Sirris supports around 1,300 innovation projects in companies a year. Sirris and Agoria together initiated the Factory of the Future Awards in 2015 in cooperation with various other sector and industry associations.

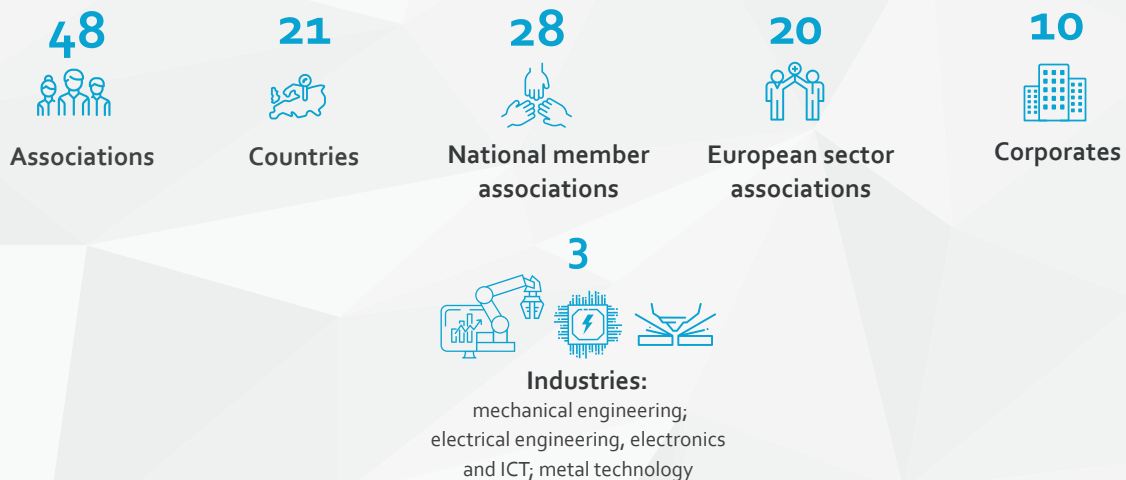
[sirris.be](http://sirris.be)

Orgalim's Technology at Heart series presents stories showcasing how the technology industries we represent are shaping a future that's good for Europe's economy and society – and how the right policy framework can help them do even more.

Orgalim represents Europe's technology industries, comprised of 770,000 innovative companies spanning the mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, electronics, ICT and metal technology branches. Together they represent the EU's largest manufacturing sector, generating annual turnover of €2,819 billion, manufacturing one-third of all European exports and providing 11.9 million direct jobs.

We are a European-level federation that engages with EU policymakers on behalf of our membership, speaking for 28 national member associations, 20 European sector associations, and 10 corporates. Founded in 1954, and with hundreds of industry experts engaging across a broad range of policy areas, we are recognised as the foremost voice of Europe's technology industries in Brussels. Our advocacy work addresses the broad spectrum of policy and regulatory issues that impact our companies, while our Partnership services provide support to a broader network of clients in the field.

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