

DEFENDING THE FUTURE OF RETAIL REAL ESTATE IN EUROPE: THE ROLE OF ECSP IN SHAPING EU POLICY

As EU lawmakers push ahead with ambitious sustainability rules, the retail real estate sector faces mounting pressure—and unprecedented influence from Brussels. In his newest ACROSS-column, ECSP Secretary General Julien Bouyeron reveals how Europe’s shopping places are fighting back: with facts, strategy, and a unified voice in the corridors of EU power.



In an era of rapidly evolving regulation, the retail real estate sector finds itself at a crucial crossroads. Sustainability mandates, urban mobility demands, and digital transformation are all converging on our built environment—and often, the rules guiding these shifts originate not from local governments, but from the halls of Brussels.

That is where ECSP, the European Council of Shopping Places, steps in.

As the leading voice for the retail real estate industry in Europe, ECSP represents ten company members and national councils across 15 countries. Through strong partnerships and strategic advocacy, our mission is clear: to protect, inform, and empower our sector at the European level.

WHY BRUSSELS MATTERS

Why does a shopping center in Madrid, Warsaw, or Vienna need to worry about what happens in the European Parliament?

Because EU lawmakers are increasingly setting the rules that shape our day-to-day operations—rules that can either enable growth and sustainability or impose costly, ill-suited constraints.

At ECSP, we understand that silence is not an option. The legislative machinery of the EU is complex and powerful. If we don’t engage with it, others will, and the results may not align with the realities of our industry.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF INFLUENCE

Effective lobbying is neither easy nor random. It’s a deliberate, multi-step strategy that demands clarity, timing, and precision. Our approach is built on eight essential pillars:

- 1. Prioritization:** We focus on issues where both the impact and our potential added value are high.
- 2. Targeting:** We identify the key interlocutors—those who hold the pen, shape the drafts, and cast the votes.
- 3. Insight:** We collect the right information, both public and confidential, to stay ahead of the curve.
- 4. Narrative Building:** We craft compelling, evidence-based stories to explain what’s at stake.

JULIEN BOUYERON

Julien Bouyeron, Secretary General of the ECSP: Julien Bouyeron is an “explainer” by nature. After graduating, he studied literature and worked as a French teacher before starting to work for trade associations. In various positions, including at the French Retail Association, FCD, and the European DIY Retail Association, Bouyeron has not only helped shape the retail world but has also become familiar with the perspectives of political decision-makers. He has over 10 years of advocacy experience in Brussels. The Frenchman has been the ECSP’s representative since May 2023.



IMAGE: ECSP

5. Stakeholder Mapping: We identify allies—and potential opponents—early on.

6. Drafting Solutions: We propose viable amendments supported by solid data.

7. Timing: We engage at the right moments and with the right frequency.

8. Persuasion: We go out and make the case, face to face.

Each of these steps must be executed with care. One misstep—engaging the wrong person, proposing an unworkable amendment, or missing a key vote—can set back progress significantly. Advocacy at the EU level is a game of chess, not checkers.

CASE IN POINT: ARTICLE 14 OF THE EPBD

One of our most recent successes illustrates the power of strategic advocacy.

The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) is a central pillar of the EU's green transition. While the directive has laudable goals, certain proposed requirements for non-residential buildings—like mandatory recharging points and expansive bicycle parking—posed significant practical challenges for shopping centers and retail properties.

Under Article 14, non-residential buildings not undergoing major renovation would have been required to install either recharging points for 10% of parking spaces or provide ducting for 50% of them. In addition, the installation of bicycle parking spaces representing 15% of average user capacity was on the table.

ECSP recognized that these obligations, as drafted, were ill-suited to the functional realities of retail environments. We engaged with key figures, including MEP Ciaran Cuffe and the European Commission, to revise the text. The result: a more balanced approach that still supports sustainability but takes into account the operational constraints of our sector.

Today, we await final Commission guidance on the ducting and recharging provisions. But on bicycle parking, we've already achieved a significant success: a more flexible rule that recognizes the specificities of retail real estate.

DEMYSTIFYING THE EU MAZE

Lobbying is only part of our job. The other is translation—not from French to German or Italian to Dutch, but from “Brussels-speak” to practical guidance for operators on the ground.

Let's face it: EU legislation is dense. The structures, the procedures, the legalese—terms like “Omnibus Regulation” and “delegated act” don't exactly roll off the tongue. For many stakeholders, understanding what's actually being proposed—and how to comply—is half the battle.

That's where ECSP comes in again. We break down complex EU directives and regulations into actionable information. Whether it's through webinars, member briefings, or tailored guidance, we make EU policy understandable.

TAILORED NATIONAL SUPPORT

Because our membership spans 15 countries, we know that one size does not fit all. The impact of EU policy can vary significantly depending on national legal frameworks, retail culture, and political priorities.

Our National Council Committee plays a vital bridging role. It connects EU-level policy with national realities, ensuring that our advocacy is rooted in both European cohesion and local relevance.

Whether it's the Green Lease initiative, our Active Assailant Guide, or the details of EPBD implementation, we work hand-in-hand with national associations to provide support that's targeted and relevant.

CONCLUSION: UNITED BY NECESSITY

The future of retail real estate is being written now—sometimes in legislative committee rooms far from our properties. But by standing together, speaking with one voice, and engaging proactively, we can shape that future rather than be shaped by it.

At ECSP, we believe that the challenges of the green transition, digitalization, and urban evolution are best met not in isolation, but in partnership. The European retail real estate sector is stronger together—and never has unity been more important.



ECSP SUMMIT 2025: REIMAGINING RETAIL SPACES WITH HEART, VISION, AND PURPOSE

Under the motto “Creating beloved places – social, sustainable & successful,” the 2025 European Shopping Places Summit brought together leading experts in the retail real estate sector from 14 different countries to discuss how to make shopping places more sustainability-oriented, successful, and impactful on a social level, while giving voice to the different markets in Europe.



Julien Bouyeron,
Secretary General of
ECSP, speaking at
the top-class and
successful ECSP
Congress in Innsbruck.



In the heart of the Austrian Alps, the city of Innsbruck became a beacon of hope and transformation for Europe’s retail real estate industry. Under the inspiring motto “Creating beloved places – social, sustainable & successful”, the inaugural European Shopping Places Summit gathered passionate experts and decision-makers from 14 countries, all driven by one shared mission: to redefine what shopping places mean in a world that craves both connection and sustainability.

The Summit wasn't just about buildings or commercial strategy—it was about people. About communities. About creating places that resonate emotionally, socially, and environmentally. With the pressure of e-commerce looming large, participants agreed: brick-and-mortar retail must evolve

into more than just transactional spaces. It must become something we feel—places that surprise us, connect us, and make us want to return.

The voices that filled the summit halls—Anette Persson from the European Commission, retail visionary Joanna Fisher, SES CEO Christoph Andexlinger, Julien Bouyeron, Secretary General of ECSP and many more—spoke not only with expertise but with urgency and optimism. Discussions ranged from EU energy policy and ESG frameworks to the emotional architecture of shopping spaces. But what united them all was a belief that retail can be both purposeful and profitable—if we dare to dream differently. Architect Christoph M. Achammer put it beautifully: good retail design evokes emotion, community, and wonder—things that the digital world can’t replicate. And as Jack Stratten reminded everyone, unforgettable experiences are now the new currency in retail.

The Summit marked more than a professional gathering—it was a movement. A declaration that the future of shopping isn’t just about sustainability or efficiency. It’s about love. For places. For people. For the planet. And with ECSP standing firm as the voice of this sector in Brussels, the path forward is not only clearer—but filled with promise.

The event in Innsbruck is just one example of how the ECSP brings the industry and its stakeholders together and discusses the most important industry topics.



**Read more about
the ECSP Summit
2025:**

