

You can just do things

How a WhatsApp group — and some of the world's largest companies — convinced the EU to rewrite company law in under two years.

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It started in a WhatsApp group.

In August 2024, fifteen to twenty founders, investors and policy people set up a group to stress-test their ideas. That is how co-initiator Philipp Herkelmann later described it. No organisation. No NGO. No donations raised. The driving force was Andreas Klinger — Austrian investor, former CTO of Product Hunt — who four months earlier had published an essay titled "Dear Europe, Please Wake Up" that had circulated widely in tech circles. Just people who agreed that the status quo was broken.

The problem is real enough: if you want to start a company in Europe and scale it across borders, you essentially have to register separately in each country, navigate 27 different company law systems and pay for legal help in every market. It's expensive, slow and absurd in a market that otherwise calls itself a single one.

Their solution: EU Inc. A unified European company form. One registration system. Online. Within 48 hours. Minimum capital: one euro.

If that sounds familiar, it should. Estonia has been running almost exactly this since 2014. Their e-Residency programme lets anyone in the world register a company online, without setting foot in the country. In 2025, the managing director of Estonia's e-Residency programme spelled out the model for the rest of Europe: "pick the easy wins first — unified entity, cross-border investment, digital-first business registry." The EU Inc. proposal reads like someone listened.

The human bridge between Tallinn and Brussels is not hard to find. Taavet Hinrikus — co-founder of Wise, Estonian, former EIC Ambassador — signed the EU Inc. petition. His country built this exact infrastructure a decade before the petition launched.

In October 2024, Klinger and the group launched a petition. It gathered 13,000 signatures within days. The names were not random: Patrick Collison from Stripe, Paul Graham from Y Combinator, Hinrikus and the founders of Wolt and Bolt. Europe's startup scene on a single list.

In June 2025, Klinger published his account of the project in a blog post he titled "You can just do things."

In January 2026 — fifteen months after the petition launched — Ursula von der Leyen took the stage at the World Economic Forum in Davos and announced EU Inc. as official EU policy.

He's right. You apparently can.

But the question is who "you" is.

To understand that, you need to look at what happened *before* the petition.

In December 2023, France Digitale — the French tech lobby organisation — met with Enrico Letta while he was preparing his major report on the single market. They pitched the idea of a "Simplified European Company Status." In April 2024, the Letta report was published. The concept of a "28th regime" — a 28th virtual EU state with its own company rules operating alongside the existing 27 national systems — was in it. France Digitale claims the credit.

In September 2024, Mario Draghi's report on European competitiveness made the same recommendation.

Then in October 2024 came the petition. The grassroots movement.

The sequence matters. The political groundwork had already been laid before the general public was invited to sign.

That's not unusual. It's how EU lobbying works. But it gets more interesting when you look at who is actually backing the EU-INC coalition.

One of its central partners is Allied for Startups — a European startup advocacy group that sounds innocuous enough. But Allied for Startups has a Corporate Board that includes Amazon, Microsoft, Apple, Meta and Google. And in a leaked internal Google document, Allied for Startups is explicitly named as an organisation that represents Google's positions to EU policymakers in Brussels.

That's not a startup. That's Big Tech in startup clothing.

Nor is the coalition's ambition limited to startups. The same lobby groups have already called for EU Inc. to be opened up to *all* companies — not just new ones. A regulation that begins as a tool for founders can quickly become a tax optimisation and labour law avoidance mechanism for companies of an entirely different scale.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has no doubts about the direction of travel. They've published press release after press release: EU Inc. risks creating a two-tier workforce in every EU member state. Companies will choose whichever regime suits them best — and that will rarely be the one that suits their employees.

The Commission promised to protect workers' rights. ETUC says it hasn't delivered.

Does that mean EU Inc. is a bad idea?

Not necessarily. The underlying problem — that Europe has never had a common company structure — is real. Even the proposal's sharpest critics don't dispute the principle. That says something about how uncontested the basic idea actually is.

But the process tells you something about how EU policy gets made in 2026. A handful of European founders with a genuine grievance put themselves out front. Behind them follow organisations funded by the companies that stand to benefit most from whatever rules come out the other end.

Andreas Klinger is right: you can just do things.

You just need to know the right people — or make sure the right people know you.

EU Inc. (Regulation 2026/0074(COD), COM(2026) 321 final) is currently under review by the European Parliament's JURI Committee. The Commission is targeting an agreement before the end of 2026.

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