

THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS ON SMALL ENTREPRENEURS

Interview with NSZ Director – Mr. Nico Volckeryck
Brussels, 24th of September 2025

Brussels, 24 September 2025 - When international policymakers gather in Brussels, Strasbourg, or New York, their debates often revolve around security, trade, or macroeconomic stability. Yet one essential reality is too often overlooked: international political decisions have a profound, and sometimes devastating, impact on the lives of small entrepreneurs and independent retailers.

Recent history has made this painfully clear. The COVID-19 crisis forced countless small businesses into survival mode: lockdowns cut off customer flows and supply chains collapsed. The war in Ukraine added yet another layer of uncertainty: skyrocketing energy prices, disrupted logistics, and rising inflation created an economic climate in which local shops, cafés, and artisans often bore the heaviest burden. For many, these were not abstract geopolitical events, but daily struggles to keep their doors open, pay their staff, and continue serving their communities.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), however, are not marginal players. They form the backbone of Europe's economy, providing the majority of private sector jobs and anchoring economic life in local communities. Their resilience determines not only employment figures but also social cohesion in towns and cities across the continent.

"When my energy bill tripled overnight, I had to choose between heating my bakery or keeping two employees on the payroll," says Sophie, an independent baker in Antwerp. "These decisions are the direct result of international conflicts, yet we are left to face them alone."

But the contribution of SMEs goes far beyond survival. Every day, they add real value to society:

- **Local employment:** SMEs create jobs close to home, ensuring that talent remains rooted in the community.
- **Innovation:** the most groundbreaking ideas often emerge from small businesses that can adapt swiftly and creatively.

- **Cultural identity:** family-owned shops, artisans, and small retailers preserve traditions and shape the unique character of towns and cities.
- **Sustainability:** more and more SMEs are investing in circular models, short supply chains, and ecological alternatives that bring global climate goals to life at the local level.

In Belgium, organizations such as the Neutraal Syndicaat voor Zelfstandigen (NSZ – Neutral Syndicate for the Self-Employed) provide a voice for these entrepreneurs. The NSZ advocates for fair regulations, reduced administrative burdens, and policies that recognize the vulnerability of SMEs in times of crisis.

"We constantly remind policymakers that every new directive, every sanction, every piece of international legislation has ripple effects that reach the smallest businesses," explains NSZ director Nico Volckeryck. "SMEs do not ask for privileges – they ask for predictability and respect."

For international decision-makers, the message is clear: the fate of SMEs must be part of the conversation. If small entrepreneurs are pushed to the margins, entire local economies weaken. Conversely, when SMEs are supported – through stable policies, predictable costs, and targeted relief – they become engines of resilience, innovation, and social stability.

Diplomacy and international politics will always operate on a global scale. But it is vital to remember that their consequences are felt most sharply at the local level. A bakery in Antwerp, a family-run restaurant in Kraków, or a craftsman in Athens – these are the people who carry the weight of global decisions. Their survival, but also their creativity and contribution to community life, is the most tangible measure of whether international policymaking truly serves the people.

The NSZ is a Belgian entrepreneurs' organization that defends the interests of self-employed professionals, freelancers, and small to medium-sized enterprises. It strives to create a favorable business climate and advocates for reduced administrative burdens, fair taxation, and more opportunities to grow. In addition to lobbying activities, NSZ provides its members with information, advice, and practical support. As such, the syndicate plays an important role as a voice for self-employed workers in the social and economic debate.

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