

EU-Africa Business Forum: Where are the SMEs?

EUROCHAMBRES has welcomed the EU-Africa Business Forum, starting today, as a positive step to bring the private sector closer to the EU's Development Strategy. However, the association is disappointed that today's agenda is dominated by public institutions, media and large multinationals.

"We must put small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) at the heart of our new development policy. We need a balanced approach that includes the SME angle as promoter of employment, social cohesion and innovation. So why are SMEs not central to the business forum' agenda?", asked Arnaldo Abruzzini, Secretary General of EUROCHAMBRES.

As recognised by the European Commission itself SMEs are the main source of employment creation in developing and developed countries alike. The European Union and its member states have longstanding experience in supporting SMEs through enterprise policies, working in partnership with business organisations. European companies themselves are crucial partners for local companies in developing economies in terms of capacity-building, transfer of technology and know-how, increase in business flows and integration of global value chains.

The concepts of 'Private sector development support' and 'Private sector engagement for development' in third countries can and should be linked to the internationalisation of European businesses; these initiatives are mutually reinforcing.

"Therefore, a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed to private sector development in the context of enhancing a European Economic Diplomacy", concluded Mr. Abruzzini.

EUROCHAMBRES remains open to make a positive contribution to an EU's Development Strategy which recognises the value of SMEs and their representative organisations.

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