

Chambers and Regions said a collective effort is needed to boost uptake of EU Free Trade Agreements (FTA)

EUROCHAMBRES and the European Committee of the Regions have conducted the joint survey over the past months, with an objective to identify opportunities and obstacles faced in the implementation of EU FTAs. The survey is based on feedback from regions and chambers of commerce covering all EU member states.

The survey confirms the attractiveness of FTA for regional and national economies, with the main benefits deriving from tariff reductions as well as new access for EU service providers. At the same time, it highlights some deficiencies with regard to the lack of awareness among SMEs when using FTAs in practice. More actions by all actors are instrumental at the EU, national and regional level. The particular role of chambers was highlighted in the survey, as being a valuable source of input for governments. The expertise of chambers and regions will be key in ensuring that measures taken will help small businesses and local communities across the EU to seize the potential of FTAs.

EUROCHAMBRES Head of International Trade and Foreign Policy, Dominic Boucsein, stated that the EU has done a great job in creating the world's largest network of trade agreements. "However, Europe is still punching below its weight when it comes to FTA implementation. We must maximize the economic benefits of FTAs, which means closing the knowledge gap among SMEs, simplifying rules of origin, and ensuring more coherent EU wide action on implementation at all levels".

According to the key findings of the survey, practical information and better guidance is needed on the EU's FTA, especially regarding the area of public procurement. Some core components of FTAs, such as customs procedures or administrative burdens, remains critical and should be simplified. Member states should strengthen their support for FTA implementation together with chambers and regions. An implementation action plan to accompany major EU FTA should be implemented in order to cater to the needs and challenges of national and regional economies.

The rapporteur for the European Committee of the Regions' opinion on implementation of free trade agreements, Cllr. Michael Murphy, explained that more informative activities can help improve the reach of practical information and provide support to SMEs in all regions. "I look forward to working together with stakeholders and facilitating discussions on developing tools and methods that can be used to increase the uptake of FTAs, particularly among micro-enterprises and SMEs across all EU's regions."

Based on the results of the survey, a list of recommendation will be delivered to the European Commission. The survey will also feed into the CoR opinion on the implementation of free trade agreements to be adopted next year.

Additional information:

- Survey on Free Trade Agreements: Report – <http://bit.ly/SurveyTrade>

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