

PRESS RELEASE

National Reform Programmes **Chambers urge Commission to be tougher**

As a first reaction to the European Commission's report on the National Reform Programmes (NRPs), EUROCHAMBRES urged the Commission to insist on greater ambition from the Member States – not to accept mediocrity or complacency when faced with unacceptable growth and unemployment.

Despite its positive tone, the report repeatedly points out the lack of measures, targets, deadlines and content. The same inadequacies were highlighted by a EUROCHAMBRES survey* among European Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Chambers underlined the shortcomings of their respective NRPs with regard to increasing employment, reforming the labour market and extending the internal market.

Pierre Simon, President of EUROCHAMBRES, said: *“I believe that the Commission, in a muted and diplomatic manner, confirms the business community reaction to the Reform Programmes. They lack ambition. The NRPs will not bring Europe the radical reforms needed to regain competitiveness: they will only result in slight improvements, and then only if they are actually implemented.”*

Mr Simon continued: *“Weak growth, high unemployment, insufficient investment in innovation and research demand a more robust response. The Commission must insist that political leaders pack more ambition into their bags when coming to the Spring Summit.”*

In this respect, Chambers ask for:

- **Country-specific recommendations.** The Commission should praise but also blame and shame the Member States and ask for justifications when reforms are missing;
- **A stronger governance system** along the lines of the Stability and Growth Pact, to be agreed on by the Member States;
- **Annual debates on the Lisbon Strategy** to be held by the European Parliament together with representatives of national parliaments before the Spring Summit.

On the other hand, EUROCHAMBRES supports the priorities for action outlined in the Commission report. Chambers especially welcome the Commission's proposals for R&D spending and increased flexibility for universities; the setting up of “one stop shops” for entrepreneurs before the end of 2007; and the efforts to increase training and apprenticeships for young and elderly people.

page 1 of 2

EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 44 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers with over 18 million member companies.

Mr Simon concluded: *“All this is fine, but we should bear in mind that we won’t even make limited progress without commitment and implementation and solving crucial issues like the Service Directive and opening of markets and European wide patent system. Unfortunately, the track-record of Member States’ implementation is disappointing. We need start thinking of moving towards a stronger sanctionary role of the Commission. Communicating the strategy and convincing citizens of its benefits has still not been taken up. Against the background of several elections in Europe, I fear that in a year’s time, we will again record a limited range of reforms taken and an even more limited range of results on the ground.”*

* The survey report was presented by EUROCHAMBRES on 23 January. All findings can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.be

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