

PRESS RELEASE

Spring Summit 2006: EUROCHAMBRES welcomes specific proposals but deplores exclusive consultation

EUROCHAMBRES expresses mixed feelings on the outcome of today's European Summit. Chambers warmly welcome the specific decisions reached by the Council on some points, but lament vague aspirations on others.

Energy – European Policy is vital, but should recognize needs of SMEs

EUROCHAMBRES applauds the decisions taken concerning an Energy Policy for Europe (EPE). Balancing the three objectives of supply security, competitiveness and environmental sustainability through a concrete set of actions is vital for the EU and for European enterprises. Pierre Simon, President of EUROCHAMBRES, said: *“We agree that this EPE should be developed with adequate understanding of Member States’ energy needs – but it should also acknowledge the needs of enterprises, in particular SMEs. Much more needs to be done in terms of raising awareness among smaller companies about energy efficiency, and forecasting their future needs and costs.”*

SMEs – Chambers applaud creation of “one-stop-shops” and suggest suppression of fees on start-ups

EUROCHAMBRES enthusiastically supports the decision to create “one-stop-shops” for start-ups, and the commitment to reduce as much as possible the average time and fees needed to set up a company. Mr Simon said: *“These are very specific decisions. Once implemented, they will have tangible effects on the ground. The only additional suggestion is for the Council to consider why there should be any fees levied on start-ups. We need to encourage entrepreneurs as much as possible. Why slap a state tax on would-be entrepreneurs before they even start? However, Chambers welcome the focus on helping women and young people to become entrepreneurs via explicit mention in the National Reform Programmes.”*

National Reform Programmes (NRPs) – Chambers urge strengthening of the Plans

Chambers welcome the fact that the Council has urged effective and timely implementation of the NRPs – and strengthening of the measures proposed, where necessary. Mr Simon: *“Many of the NRPs appear unambitious to the business community, and require such strengthening. Chambers urge the Commission to be specific in terms of recommendations to the Member States in 2007 concerning those additional, necessary measures.”*

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

Training & Apprenticeship – EU Chambers offer full support on the ground

EUROCHAMBRES supports the proposal to offer every young person a job, apprenticeship, additional training or other employability measure within 6 months of leaving school by 2010. In this regard, EUROCHAMBRES is willing and able to play a concrete role, by offering the support of its network of 2,000 local Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and of their schools and institutes which train more than 3 million students per year. In a meeting yesterday with Jan Figel', EU Commissioner for Education, Mr Simon discussed concrete cooperation options to implement the initiative of "Entrepreneurship in the Classroom".

However – despite these positive achievements – Chambers are critical of the lack of detail in many other conclusions, including:

7th Framework Programme (FP7) and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) – Greater budget is needed

Making oblique references to these two critical programmes is not the same as funding them adequately. Mr Simon argued: *"The Council talks up the need for investing more in knowledge and innovation, yet in the one instance where the Council itself decides on the level of investment in this area, it has previously decided to cut the budget proposed by the Commission. It is not too late to reverse this nonsensical approach. The Council – under the Austrian Presidency – can still reinstate appropriate, that is, greater budgets for these programmes."*

Better Regulation – EUROCHAMBRES disappointed with slowness of administrative reform in Member States

After 5 successive Presidencies devoted to the idea of better regulation, the Council is only now talking of establishing measurable targets in specific sectors for reducing administrative burdens, asking the Commission to report by the end of 2006. Mr Simon stated: *"We would prefer a 3 page Council conclusion – detailing only the actions Member States will take, not a 30+ page document outlining vague aspirations, notes and acknowledgements."*

Tripartite Social Summit – EUROCHAMBRES deplores lack of engagement

Finally, the conclusions also mention the need for the Commission and Member States to engage and promote dialogue with all stakeholders. In this regard, EUROCHAMBRES deplores the lack of engagement evident in the build up to this year's Spring Summit, specifically the closed-door, members-only club known as the Tripartite Social Summit. Chambers do not accept that consultation with European employer-union representatives only represents an effective or relevant engagement process.

Mr Simon concluded: *"Time and again, European leaders bemoan the fact that there is a communications deficit with the citizens and businesses of Europe. However, they compound this deficit by limiting interaction with stakeholders to a short, pre-scripted, overly-orchestrated meeting of similar minds. The Tripartite Summit, and other high level meetings, should be opened to all relevant stakeholders, not limited to the happy few. It is crucial that these meetings include organisations which are close to companies in every region. The Council must back its words with real action in this regard."*

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