

PRESS RELEASE

EUROCHAMBRES meets Finnish Prime Minister **Enterprise and innovation should be key points of** **Finnish Presidency**

In view of a meeting with Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen in Helsinki tomorrow, EUROCHAMBRES' President Pierre Simon highlighted the business expectations from the Finnish Presidency as from July 2006. Mr Simon asks the Finnish Prime Minister to adopt innovation and enterprise as the twin themes for the second semester.

Mr Simon said: *"We must do more to promote enterprise and encourage the entrepreneurial spirit: this is of utmost importance to reflate Europe's economy. EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the conclusions of the Spring Summit establishing 'one-stop-shops' for companies, and the commitment to reduce the time and fees needed to set up a business. But is up to the Finnish Presidency to make sure these measures are actually implemented. With its own excellent record, the Finnish Presidency can offer real leadership in pushing the research and innovation agendas."*

For Chambers the dossiers of key importance are:

National Reform Programmes. The implementation of the NRPs will take place under the Finnish Presidency. It is essential that this process is well co-ordinated and put into action. EUROCHAMBRES strongly requests the Presidency to urge all Member States to implement the programmes announced, and to be specific in the targets they set.

Competitiveness and Innovation Programmes. Now that the Parliament has secured an increased EU budget, the Finnish Presidency must help ensure that the 7th Framework Programme and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programmes are both well funded for the period 2007 -2013, and made accessible for SMEs in particular.

The Services Directive. This is the single most important piece of draft legislation being discussed. Chambers want to see the Directive passed, but not at any price, and not rushed. If not already resolved under the Austrian presidency, we urge the Finnish Presidency to negotiate a directive that will make sense, and that will make a difference. The final text must genuinely open the services market, with legal and economic certainty.

Energy. The Finnish Presidency must build on the Spring Summit decisions to develop a long term energy strategy with a diverse energy base and in line with the Lisbon goals. Energy efficiency must become a priority – especially for SMEs – and organisational support and training should be provided to them. The internal markets for electricity and gas should be completed.

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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.

Enlargement. During the Austrian Presidency, a date for EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania was decided and concrete chapters for negotiations with Croatia and Turkey opened. Chambers urge the Finnish Presidency to be the key driver for a reform process in these countries. A smooth and ambitious enlargement process will fuel Europe's economic recovery.

Mr Simon concluded: *“Chambers will play their part in these areas, but the European institutions and national governments must also concentrate adequate resources to make a real difference.”*

Kari Jalas, Managing Director of the Central Chamber of Commerce of Finland, emphasised that Finland should ratify the EU Constitution before the Finnish Presidency. This would show that Finland is really committed to develop the European Union and it would also strengthen the base for business.

The business aspirations for the Finnish Presidency are expressed in the document “Preparing Europe's Come-Back”. The document outlines the key decisions that must be made in each Council to lift the European economy and can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.be.

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