

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **Industrial Clusters: New study calls for a stronger cluster approach in existing EU policies**

In order to improve Europe's competitiveness the cluster approach in existing EU regional, enterprise and innovation policies should be strengthened. This is the key result of a study\* which will be presented at a conference\*\* on industrial clusters today. The event - organised by EUROCHAMBRES - will put the focus on the identification of policies for successful industrial clusters and will be addressed by Science and Research Commissioner Janez Potočnik.

EUROCHAMBRES' Secretary Arnaldo Abruzzini called on the Commission to increase the involvement of universities in a constructive, useful way. Mr Abruzzini said: "*Clusters of small and medium-sized firms represent some of the most forceful industrial dynamics in Europe. We should spread the concept and best practices, and support these dynamics, by focusing on better framework conditions. In particular, the innovative force of clusters must be addressed by promoting co-operation of SMEs with universities and research centres.*"

In addition, EUROCHAMBRES calls for:

- Better co-ordination of EU initiatives (e.g. Interreg III, ERDF, Regions of Knowledge, The Trend Chart on Innovation)
- Support for awareness campaigns about industrial clusters for companies and for policy makers, especially in the new Member States
- Increased exchange of best practices on clusters and benchmarking in the EU - especially amongst public institutions

### **Key results of the study**

Some key results of the study "Policies supporting Clusters Development and Integration in the Enlarged Europe" are as follows:

- **EU needs to pay more attention to clusters.** Compared with the US, the EU has been late and reluctant to focus on the development of clusters. Without reinforced and tailor-made policies it will not be possible to realise the full economic benefits and potential.

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EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 43 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers

- **Favourable framework conditions are the essence.** The market is the engine for clusters' development and growth. Policies should create favourable framework conditions that boost free and open competition.
- **EU cluster policy needs stakeholder involvement.** In order to produce effective and legitimate policies, it is crucial to involve firms as well as all relevant public and semi-public institutions in cluster initiatives and the learning process.
- **EU cluster policy needs a more coherent, co-ordinated approach.** More than a dozen (smaller) EU initiatives have been developed in the last years, but do not represent a focused and co-ordinated approach. The emphasis on clusters under the structural funds and other larger programmes has been marginal.

\*The study is part of the project "West East Industrial Districts" in which EUROCHAMBRES participates. It is funded by the European Commission under the V framework programme. The project was launched in September 2001 by a consortium of 11 European research partners and analysed the evolutionary trends of 15 industrial clusters in seven Western and Central-Eastern European countries (Germany, Italy, the UK, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovenia).

\*\* The conference "Industrial Clusters in the Competitive Knowledge Society – Why and how to support their Development in the Enlarged Union" on 29 April will take place in the European Economic and Social Committee (Rue Belliard 99, 1040 Brussels) from 9.30am to 4pm.

The programme can be downloaded from [www.eurochambres.be](http://www.eurochambres.be)

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