

PRESS RELEASE

Spring Summit: European Chambers call for radical Lisbon speed-up

EUROCHAMBRES, the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, today urged European leaders to radically speed up the Lisbon agenda. The gap between the objective and the reality is widening, Chambers warned.

Christoph Leidl, President of EUROCHAMBRES said: *“The Lisbon agenda will be reduced to a fairy tale, if fundamental reforms do not take place now. A further delay will mean failure. Europe needs to recognise competitiveness as a key principle by deeds and not by words alone. This means to speed-up actions in key areas but also to replace instruments by more effective ones, if they have not proven to be successful. Further paper declaration will only undermine the limited remaining trust in the process. The growth rate in European productivity is falling since the mid-nineties and the Union’s catch up with the US is at a standstill – as the Commission itself states.”*

Review and reinforce the “open method of co-ordination”

The “open method of co-ordination” is not rigorous enough to achieve the results needed and should be critically reviewed and reinforced. Chambers propose a more effective process of benchmarking, backed up by real political commitment, interim and final targets. The Commission’s intention to define a clearer roadmap for the Lisbon process might help, but should be backed by “national road maps” of Member States for their individual commitment providing steps and decisions to be taken within a defined, limited timeframe.

Reinforce the Competitiveness Council

The Competitiveness Council must be strengthened and procedures should be introduced to ensure that decisions of other Councils do not affect competitiveness negatively. This includes extending, developing and introducing systematic competitiveness impact assessments on proposed legislation. Also major amendments by the European Parliament should be subject to business impact assessments.

Europe needs a more entrepreneurial climate

A stable, innovative and entrepreneurial economic climate is essential for economic growth. Chambers call on the Spring Summit to endorse and back the Entrepreneurship Action Plan by setting clear national targets. Moreover, Governments must reduce and

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simply existing legislation. The Irish-Dutch-Luxembourg-UK joint initiative on regulatory reform is a step in the right direction provided that concrete initiatives and outcomes result from them. Encouragement must be given by reducing and simplifying taxes on companies and entrepreneurs.

Foster R&D spending and innovation

Member States and European institutions must quickly improve the general, fiscal and financial conditions for public and private investment in R & D and innovation. The working environment for researchers and scientists must be made more attractive to stop the European brain-drain and EU immigration policy must be reviewed.

R&D spending in Europe is considerably lower than in US (the current level of EU research funding stands at 0.04% of GDP) and its growth insufficient to meet the 3% target by 2010. Moreover, the average spending on R & D in new Member States is in general half of the spending in the EU 15, which is an additional challenge.

The European business community is eagerly awaiting the action plan on innovation and urges Member States to reform education and vocational training to fit the needs of business and to further promote life-long learning.

EUROCHAMBRES' message to the Spring Summit 2004 can be downloaded from
www.eurochambres.be

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