

PRESS RELEASE

French “NO” **Europe must forge closer ties with citizens and find alternatives, Chambers say**

After the French “NO” to the EU Constitution, Europe must take a step forward and not backwards, EUROCHAMBRES said. *“We need to look ahead and find ways out of this situation,”* said EUROCHAMBRES’ President Christoph Leitl. *“We need more integration and consolidation at European level to cope with the challenges in economic, political and social terms. We need to go ahead and secure the role of the EU as a major global player in the future with a well-functioning Internal Market, efficient institutions and a strong position of the EU in the world. A two-speed Europe – in which some Member States cooperate on a closer basis than others – can be an alternative.”*

For European businesses, a significant part of the answer is the Constitutional treaty, the result of years of intense negotiations between the 105 representatives from the EU institutions, the governments and national parliaments of the current 25 Member States. The bulky Nice Treaty is inadequate in this respect.

“The vote in France, which is one of the leading architects of Europe, has also shown that something went very wrong in the debate on the EU Constitution“, Mr Leitl said.

According to EUROCHAMBRES, the main lessons that can be drawn from the outcome of the French referendum are the following:

- the lack of knowledge on European issues has been used by the opponents of the Constitution to nourish the fears and nationalistic reactions which usually flourish before any institutional change.
- the lack of a real European commitment from the Member States played an important role. National politicians must stop blaming the EU for all ills, and yet expect their populations to then vote ‘yes’ to a European Constitution. European citizens need to know what the European project is, how it will be reached and what will be the benefits.

Therefore, Mr Leitl urged the EU and the Member States to enter into an intensive dialogue with the European population immediately, starting at the next European Summit in June. *“In its 50 years history, the EU has brought peace, security and welfare to our continent. We must gain the citizens for the European idea which is an insurance policy for future generations. This is the vision we have to aim at and to talk about”*, he said.

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