

PRESS RELEASE

Tripartite Social Summit: EUROCHAMBRES rings alarm on Lisbon reforms

Christoph Leitl, President of EUROCHAMBRES, who today participates at the Tripartite Social Summit on Growth and Employment ahead of the Spring Council, urged Heads of State to mark the Summit as a turning point on the road towards the Lisbon targets.

Christoph Leitl said: *"The future of Europe is being decided right now. The summit can choose to change the 2010 goal, postpone it or fulfil it. We urge the latter, but that means that all key actors on European, national and regional level have to contribute to a joint lifesaving strategy for Lisbon."*

Mr Leitl continued: *"Compared to US, Europe is falling behind in key areas such as research and development, productivity and employment rates. With an expected growth rate of 4% compared to 2% in the European Union, the US economy will move further ahead of Europe in the international competition race – not to mention Asia. However, while mindful of this strong competition from the US and Asia - hoping that things in Europe will improve is simply not good enough – Europe has to show economic leadership in a global world and become a pioneer in promoting entrepreneurship."*

EUROCHAMBRES' President stated: *"Alarm bells must ring. The European competitiveness must improve. Chambers offer to place at disposal for the 2010 goal their very wide-spread training infrastructure with the aim of promoting more lifelong learning. Chambers already provide many support services for start-ups. We offer to extend these activities further – with the aim of increasing the number of start-ups and overall employment. Chambers also offer to the Summit the extensive Chamber Network around the world to promote European businesses abroad. We should aim to increase European exports from 10% towards 20%. Furthermore, Chambers support the partnership for reforms on the European and national level and suggest the implementation on a regional level with a bottom-up strategy."*

Involve all European stakeholders

EUROCHAMBRES, representing over 17 million enterprises, also demanded a strong European Commission and a pro-enterprise Parliament, and called for both to adopt competitiveness as the overarching principle for the next 5 years. As key instruments, Mr Leitl urged that the open method of co-ordination should be critically reviewed and reinforced. *"The current process is not rigorous enough to achieve the results needed. Benchmarking should be made more effective and individual commitments made by*

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EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 41 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers with over 17 million member companies.



Member States should be backed up by 'national road maps' providing steps and decisions to be taken within a defined, limited timeframe. We support the Commission's proposal to create a road map for the Lisbon Process, and demand annual reviews of these road maps.

"In the new Commission, competences with a high economic impact should be bundled together, and championed by senior Commissioners.

"The Competitiveness Council must be strengthened and procedures 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 impact assessments."

"A European growth strategy with competitiveness as the overall guiding principle involves also the European Parliament as well as other European institutions like the European Central Bank," Leitl stated. "Sustainable economic growth and job creation require a predictable environment which values innovation and entrepreneurship. Member States should reconfirm the Stability and Growth Pact and adhere to it. They should provide general, fiscal and financial conditions fostering innovative investment and entrepreneurship."

Businesses can contribute to promote investment in R & D by setting up effective linkages between them and research/academic communities and by disseminating innovation in the business community.

Mr Leitl said: *"We have got the choice: It is easy for us social partners to analyse, blame and complain. Instead, I think we must – together – act quickly to realise the great ambition that Lisbon represents. It is easy for us to view the US and Asia as insurmountable competitive threats. Instead, I believe we must act together to make Europe a global economic pioneer."*

Get involved European citizens

As managers of change the social partners play a vital role to support economic recovery in Europe. President Leitl urged the European institutions to include consultations with a wider, more representative group of social and economic partners– including Chambers of Commerce and Industry - than is currently the case.

Finally, Mr Leitl appealed to all actors to act together to engage and motivate all Europeans towards the more dynamic, growth oriented future that Lisbon promises. This must happen at EU, national and regional and local levels, he said.

The EUROCHAMBRES President concluded: *"We need corporate and political will and personal commitment. The success of the enlarged Europe will depend on the extent to which European citizens believe in the future of the European Union. Talk to the people, get them involved."*

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