

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **Competitiveness Council: EUROCHAMBRES demands increased focus on external trade to improve Europe's competitiveness**

EUROCHAMBRES, the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, urged the Competitiveness Council meeting in Luxembourg today to pay much more attention to the external dimension of the Lisbon process. The global economy, in which European companies compete, will not wait for Europe's current internal political problems to be solved.

Christoph Leitl, President of EUROCHAMBRES, said: *"In 2003, about 40% of EU trade in goods was with non-EU countries. We must better exploit all external trade opportunities in order to regain our competitive strength. We must improve market access for European goods, services and investment abroad. European SMEs in particular need a transparent and predictable trade and investment environment. Chambers urge the Competitiveness Council to focus more on the external dimension in view of the goal 'growth and jobs'."*

As the negotiator of multilateral and bilateral trade agreements on behalf of EU countries, the EU has a key responsibility to create a favourable external business environment for European SMEs.

### **EUROCHAMBRES key priorities for the external competitiveness dimension:**

For now, EUROCHAMBRES members urge the EU to give priority to completing the Doha Round, as long as results seem possible to achieve within a foreseeable period of time. Key areas are:

- Non-Agricultural Market Access: reducing tariffs generally, eliminating nuisance-tariffs, increasing the % of bound tariffs and cutting Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)
- Services: access to services is key to all economies but WTO negotiations are lagging behind, and what's on the table so far is dramatically lacking in ambition.
- Trade Facilitation: simplified and more transparent trade procedures hold enormous benefits, especially for SMEs, in developed and developing countries alike.

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EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 44 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers