

PRESS RELEASE

Europe not prime target of C.I.S. companies **EUROCHAMBRES' survey shows lack of knowledge on** **EU legislation and Neighbourhood Policy**

Little knowledge about EU legislation, modest trade with the EU-25 and major trade obstacles: these are the main findings of EUROCHAMBRES' first survey on the "Competitiveness of C.I.S. companies". The survey was carried out among Belarusian, Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian enterprises - the majority of which were big companies and manufacturers - in April and May 2005.

"There is a clear message for the General Affairs and External Relations Council next week here", Christoph Leitl, President of EUROCHAMBRES, said. "As is clear from the results of the survey involving our Eastern neighbours, C.I.S companies are not sufficiently informed. EUROCHAMBRES calls for enhanced efforts to ensure an effective implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy and for measures to tackle the lack of knowledge of EU legislation. Furthermore, customs procedures should be simplified in order to open the door for enhanced EU-C.I.S. trade".

Lack of knowledge of EU-legislation – poor language skills

Knowledge on EU-related matters and language skills can be considered as key indicators to evaluate the level of competitiveness of a company. The majority of C.I.S. enterprises claim to have only limited knowledge on relevant EU legislation. One out of four respondents has practically no information or only limited knowledge in this field. In 65% of the companies very few employees are able to work in a foreign language.

Room for improvements in EU-C.I.S. trade relations

EU countries do not constitute the top export destination of the C.I.S. companies, where trade with former Soviet Union republics is still very important.

Enlargement seems to have had only little positive impact on EU-C.I.S. trade. Only one out of four C.I.S. companies considers to have gained easier access to the EU market as a result of the 2004 EU enlargement.

Customs procedures (too bureaucratic, time-consuming and expensive) as well as different technical standards and certifications are still considered as the main obstacles. The respondents have particularly emphasized problems related to the lack of mutually recognized certification bodies, and the insufficiency of national certificates.

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

Chambers urge delivery of commitments on European Neighbourhood Policy

75% of companies in the Eastern neighbouring countries have only vague, if any, information about the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – though they are deemed to be the primary beneficiaries.

In its position paper published today, EUROCHAMBRES asks to be actively involved in the definition and execution of detailed ENP measures, building on its widespread, local-rooted network, as well as on its experience and commitment to trade development.

As the survey shows, Chambers play a key role for C.I.S. business. Respondents rate Chambers, together with EU Institutions websites and European business partners, among the best information channels on EU-related matters. Both national and local Chambers are credited with providing export-promotion assistance.

The EUROCHAMBRES Survey “Competitiveness of C.I.S. companies” can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.be

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