

PRESS RELEASE

EUROCHAMBRES Congress opens in Stavanger: Chambers urge time of action to underpin ‘time of reflection’

EUROCHAMBRES' Annual Congress started in Stavanger (Norway) today with 400 participants. In his opening speech, EUROCHAMBRES President Christoph Leitl characterised the outlook for the European economy and for "Entrepreneurship & Job" – which is this year's theme of the Congress – as "*the worst possible scenario*".

Mr Leitl said: "*A suffering economy needs certainty. A suffering economy needs strong leadership. A suffering economy needs audacious forward-looking actions. We cannot see any of this. With 20 million unemployed and sluggish growth rates around 2 percent Europe needs real reforms to put our economy back on track. What is necessary for politicians is to show citizens that they can still take important, forward-looking decisions.*"

The most pressing tasks in the view of European Chambers are:

- **Financial Perspective:** Europe's priority to revive the economy must be reflected in the financial perspectives. Spending on R&D, education and competitiveness (Chapter one on 'sustainable growth') must not be cut but 'ring-fenced'.
- **Services Directive:** The increasing importance of the "service sector" – which already accounts for 70 per cent of EU GDP – demands an urgent agreement. The European economy needs a functioning internal market in Services based on simplified rules and procedures, mutual trust and effective monitoring and enforcement.
- **National Lisbon Action Plans:** By mid-October, European governments will present their national action plans which shall contribute to increase Europe's competitiveness. Without effective national measures, the European strategy for growth and jobs will remain toothless. Chambers urge ambitious, measurable and aggressive targets. They will participate in the development and the implementation of the National Lisbon Action Plans and will closely monitor the progress achieved.

New realities need new answers

The environment of the economy has radically changed during the last decades. New economic realities – characterised by globalisation and structural changes - need new answers, Chambers say.

Mr Leitl said: *“We need to create a real economic dialogue to spur growth. All relevant actors have to be involved. To stick to old patterns and avoid change are not the ingredients for a successful forward-looking and future-oriented strategy which Europe needs to save its place in the world of tomorrow.”*

Note to the editor:

EUROCHAMBRES – created in 1958, one year after the birth of the European Communities – is the Brussels based Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry. EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 44 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers with over 18 million member companies. Chamber members employ over 120 million employees.

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