

PRESS RELEASE

EUROCHAMBRES warns against any postponement of Lisbon targets

EUROCHAMBRES, the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, yesterday clearly opposed any postponement of the Lisbon target.

"It is evident that Europe is not converging with the Lisbon targets but is instead losing further competitiveness. However, this does not mean that we should give up – on the contrary: Instead of discussing the extension of the deadline of 2010 – all actors at European and national levels must focus on actions how to catch up in the remaining 5 years," claimed EUROCHAMBRES' President Christoph Leitl in a press conference on Friday.

A Commission of Economic Rejuvenation

Leitl welcomed the announcement by José Manuel Barroso, the President-designate of the incoming Commission, that he would make economic reform the heart of his tenure. *"Mr Barroso's commitment to competitiveness as the overarching principle for the new European Commission is very welcome and something we have previously called for,"* Leitl said.

He illustrated that the Barroso Commission had made a promising start – by the choice of a solid and experienced team of Commissioners working on an equal footing and by the early announcement of portfolios among the new Commissioners.

EUROCHAMBRES believes that the Barroso Commission has every chance to become successful – provided that concrete initiatives and concrete actions to improve European competitiveness follow.

Installation of a permanent high-level Lisbon expert group

"The goal of 2010 is not slipping away because the goal was not the right one – but rather because of lack of actions by Member States," Mr Leitl said.

Therefore, the Lisbon review by the Wim Kok Group - which shall be published at the beginning of November - should be used to bring the Lisbon Strategy back on track. *"Instead of the Lisbon 'lite' strategy pursued until now, we need a Lisbon Strategy with full speed ahead,"* EUROCHAMBRES' President said.

EUROCHAMBRES called for a higher level of action and responsibility on Member States' level through

- Valuable, measurable and annual benchmarks presented by Member States;
- "National Lisbon action plans" with detailed roadmaps to which Member States commit;
- The Prime Ministers must become national Lisbon 'Champions' in charge and coordination of all parties at national level;
- Regular monitoring of the delivery by annual assessments and much more public peer pressure.

Social partners and regions should also contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon targets - as key parties in the Partnerships for Change, announced at this year's Spring Summit.

"Following the example of the Kok Group, I can imagine the permanent installation of an independent high-level expert group which shall monitor the progress on the Lisbon agenda and publish annual recommendations," Mr Leitl said.

"19m unemployed are 19m too much. A growth-oriented strategy shall contribute to reduce this figure by half by 2010," Mr. Leitl continued.

A Communication Strategy for the "Future of Europe"

For EUROCHAMBRES the success of Lisbon includes a clear commitment to communications. The strategy, its necessity and importance is not well known nor understood by the general European population.

"The positive effects of Lisbon must be better communicated. Increased European competitiveness is not an abstract goal per se but is the basis for prosperity, jobs and a higher standard of living for all its citizens", Mr Leitl said.

EUROCHAMBRES welcomed the creation by President-designate Barroso of a Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communications Strategy. However, this goal also needs a solid and reasonable funding. Chambers criticized the intention of the European Commission to cut the budget for 'information tools for the citizens' as foreseen in the general draft budget for 2005 (these commitments shall be cut by a quarter to €7.3 million, whilst the administrative expenditure of the press and communication area shows an increase of 10% to €113.40 million).

"Whoever stands up for a direct involvement of the citizens has to stand up also for a direct dialogue with the citizens and provide the respective means. We are facing the ratification of the Constitution in the Member States. Cutting the funding for communication tools with the citizens means to knowingly choose the road to failure," Mr Leitl said.

The Barroso Commission should even enlarge its communication mandate in view of the upcoming ratifications of the Constitution, EUROCHAMBRES said and called for a 'pan-European information campaign' to convince European citizens as well as enterprises of

the necessity of a European Constitution. *“Commissioner Wallström’s portfolio should also specifically include the successful ratification of the Constitution throughout the 25 Member States as a key target. A failure in the ratification would damage business confidence dramatically with negative effects on the economy”*, Mr Leidl said.

Mr. Leidl assured the new Commission President of the full support of European Chambers as ‘relays of information’ thanks to its unique grassroots network.

EUROCHAMBRES and EESC sign cooperation agreement

Yesterday, EUROCHAMBRES also signed a cooperation agreement with the Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Therein, both organisations commit to support the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. EUROCHAMBRES - as non-sectorial representative of businesses of every sector and every size - and the EESC – as the EU-institution which represents civil society, will devise concepts which boost the competitiveness of businesses and secure jobs and will put forward proposals as to how measures at European level can be best implemented at national and regional level.

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