

PRESS RELEASE

EUROCHAMBRES urges real Austrian leadership on economic agenda

In a meeting with Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel in Vienna today, EUROCHAMBRES will outline the expectations of the European business community for the Austrian Presidency of the EU in the first term of 2006.

For EUROCHAMBRES' President, Christoph Leitl, the Austrian Presidency will become *"one of the most challenging which we expect to really push the economy forward."* He said: *"Austria will inherit a full plate of crucial dossiers which need to be urgently progressed. The British Presidency has not delivered any significant result so far. We need the Austrian Presidency to show strong leadership to manage the changes needed for a more competitive Europe with more jobs."*

For European Chambers dossiers of key importance are:

- **Growth and Jobs:** The Austrian Presidency will be the first one during the implementation phase of the National Action plans. It is essential that this process is well co-ordinated and ambitiously launched. EUROCHAMBRES strongly requests the Presidency to work closely with Chambers in this respect – as requested by the Council decision of March 2005.
- **The Services Directive:** The removal of barriers and the simplification of procedures in the service sector are essential to the realisation of a more competitive Europe. EUROCHAMBRES urges the Austrian Presidency to re-energise the directive and ensure that the current proposal is not watered down or delayed unnecessarily.
- **REACH:** The aim to reduce the impact of chemicals on the environment and human health must and can be delivered through a simple, cost efficient and workable system which does not place Europe at a competitive disadvantage.
- **Enlargement:** During the Austrian Presidency, a date for EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania will be decided and concrete chapters for negotiations with Croatia and Turkey will be opened. European Chambers urge the Presidency to be the key driver for a reform process in these countries. A smooth and ambitious enlargement process will fuel Europe's economic recovery.

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EUROCHAMBRES has member organisations in 44 countries representing a network of 2,000 regional and local Chambers with over 18 million member companies.

- **Improved communications:** The European Union needs new impetus and to re-connect with its citizens. European Chambers urge the Austrian Presidency to mobilise Member States on the crucial need for a constructive strategy to communicate Europe in all European countries and to speak as Europeans abroad.

EUROCHAMBRES' Secretary General Arnaldo Abruzzini recalled Austria's strong recent economic performance and highlighted the experience which the country has gained in the pre-enlargement era by building up economic and political links with its neighbour countries. *"In a certain way Austria has anticipated the enlargement process. This experience might help to push Europe forward"*, he said. He also pointed out that in the past small countries produced *"some of the best presidencies of the European Union"* – due to their skill *"to mediate and achieve compromises. We hope that the Austrian Presidency will not be an exception in this respect."*

EUROCHAMBRES' Position Paper "Is Work in Progress? Austrian Presidency of the European Union" can be downloaded from: www.eurochambres.be

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