

Empowering SMEs to drive Europe forward

Wolfgang Grenke & Gilbert Stimpflin, Co-Chairs of the EUROCHAMBRES SMEs & Economic Policy Committee, set out the Chamber network's expectations for the new EU SME Strategy.

The new EU SME Strategy that Ursula von der Leyen announced among her political priorities when she took office as President of the European Commission in July last year is due to be adopted by the Commission on 10 March.

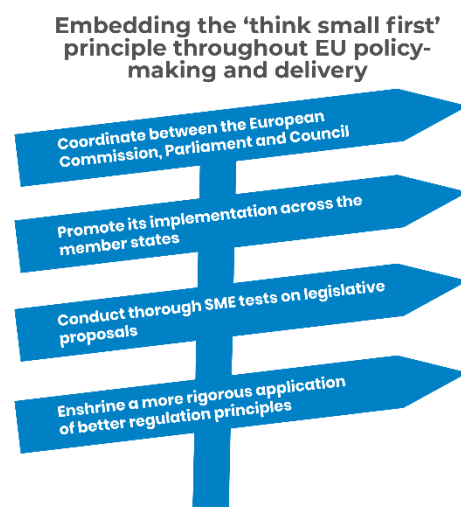
Long-term Brussels observers have seen several previous small business initiatives come and go over the years with little discernible impact on the grass roots of our economy. If this one is to differ, it needs to enable SMEs to grasp opportunities and help them respond to their main challenges. It also needs to ensure that SMEs are front and centre as the EU's political priorities are broken down into specific measures and as these measures are then implemented at national and local level.

Put differently, the EU can only fulfil its role as a pioneer of sustainable economic development if the 'think small first' principle becomes more than a nice slogan and is enshrined in policy-making and policy implementation.

Enshrining 'think small first' in EU policy-making necessitates a more rigorous application of better regulation principles, measuring costs and benefits of alternative solutions, with a particular emphasis on conducting thorough SME tests on legislative proposals.

Enshrining 'think small first' in EU policy implementation across the member states fundamentally requires coordination: between the Commission's services; between the Commission, Parliament and Council; between member states; between competent authorities within national and regional administrations; and last but not least between institutions and SME representatives such as Chambers.

It also requires quantification and monitoring. In business, we often argue that 'what can be measured can be improved' and this approach must also apply to policy-making. Chambers

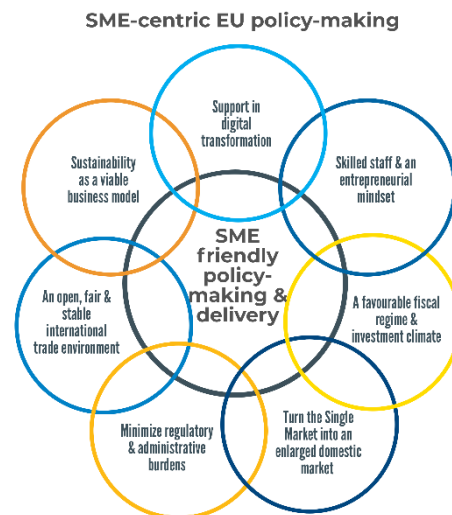


therefore, firmly believe that the delivery of the SME Strategy should be monitored carefully, integral to established EU economic governance processes and regularly appraised by the Competitiveness Council. Chambers stands ready to contribute through feedback on the impact of specific measures on the SME community at national and regional level.

In the past, policy-makers may have tried to minimize the burden of their initiatives on smaller businesses. But reducing collateral damage is not enough when we are talking about 99% of all businesses and 85% of new job creation. This is why for the new EU term, Chambers want policy-makers to go much further and show more ambition in empowering SMEs to be part of the policy solution.

This philosophy must be applied to the many important initiatives set out in the 2020 European Commission work programme on key areas such as sustainability, digitalization, artificial intelligence, industrial policy, skills, international trade and consumer protection.

This A-Z approach is what 'think small first' means to the European Chamber network and this is what the new SME Strategy must deliver if it is to have a high level of traction and impact.



Further information: Gerold Pichler, Tel. +32 2 282 08 82, pichler@eurochambres.eu
 Press contact: Karen Albuquerque, Tel. +32 2 282 08 62, albuquerque@eurochambres.eu