

## The Single Market is instrumental for economic recovery

The COVID-19 crisis is still there but Europe should already think now of how it can reinvigorate its economy if it wants to avoid a period of low growth and companies running into trouble. **EUROCHAMBRES' input for the EU Recovery Roadmap / Action Plan, underlines the need to reduce bureaucracy and simplify complex and different administrative procedures and rules.**

In this interview, the CEO of the Finish Chamber of Commerce, Juho Romakkaniemi and the CEO of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, Marko Čadež, co-chairs of EUROCHAMBRES Single Market Committee, weigh up the EU's options and look to the future.

### 1. In your opinion, what should be the priorities at the European level at this stage of the crisis?

**Juho Romakkaniemi:** Despite the fact that the European Union has limited competences in the area of health, there are a number of things that our European leaders can do. The most important aspect is that European leaders, heads of government and Commission, work in unison on the economic front. I believe that our political leaders realise that no country can act on its own to contain the consequences of this crisis. Now is the time to put a robust recovery plan in place. Unprecedented times require unedited responses. The prosperity of future generations and the success of our continent depends on the policy response to the crisis of today.

### 2. What is the role of Chambers of Commerce in the economic recovery and how can they assist companies who are currently struggling?

**Marko Čadež:** In the context of an unprecedented crisis, the role and ability of Chambers of Commerce to help companies solve more easily problems in difficult business situations, and the governments to better manage the crisis, have become increasingly important. I am deeply convinced that a vast majority of the EUROCHAMBRES members have passed successfully this test in this trying period. The major battle in the economic field, fought by the national governments and chambers of commerce, is the battle to preserve jobs and maintain liquidity, especially of the most vulnerable business which are more often than not, SMEs. The first packages of urgent assistance to the economy, in almost all countries, were directed to the achievement of this goal, in order to preserve the economic base and ensure a stronger basis and larger chances for a relatively fast recovery after the end of the health-related crisis.

### 3. With regards to the issue of the internal borders of the EU, what do you believe should be done now and in the next months?

**Juho Romakkaniemi:** Let me first say that I applaud the Commission's quick reactivity with the publication of guidelines for the Member States on the flow of goods and essential services early on after the outbreak of the virus. The creation of the so-called green lanes was also warranted. The European Commission is after all the guardian of the treaties and foremost this is most important role they need to currently play: safeguarding the integrity of the Single Market. Some Member States can be tempted to act on their own and selfish behaviours can be spotted

in dire times. It is the Commission's role to counter that, especially when we know how integrated all our value chains are in Europe.

#### **4. What is the role of the Single Market in the recovery process and what role can the Commission play in this respect?**

**Juho Romakkaniemi:** As I already hinted at in my previous reply, the Single Market will be instrumental in our recovery and should be one of the centrepieces of our common response to the crisis. Before anything else, we must ensure that border controls within the Single Market shall be removed as soon as the sanitary situation enables it. Health remains a priority and Member States are now elaborating strategies to lift containment measures while observing strict health protection rules in their territories. Instead of resorting to unilateral controls at national borders, a coordinated approach of the Member States would be much more efficient in order to fight against the pandemic.

At a next stage, and this is something we are already advocating for since a long time, we encourage the policy-makers to take the further integration of the Single Market seriously again. We encountered a lot of reluctance from certain Member States in the past years, but they ran out of excuses now. For instance, if we don't take the businesses seriously in their request to further harmonise the service sector, we will have a lot of explaining to do to the next generations. No topic should be too sensitive to be put on the table right now.

#### **5. How can digital tools and policy help in the economic recovery?**

**Marko Čadež:** This crisis has changed, and it is yet to change, the health-related, business and communication habits, the way in which people buy and travel, and do business. It has confirmed EUROCHAMBRES' commitment to create a digital chambers of commerce, to design common digital tools for support to companies in their digital transformation, but it has also imposed a new task on us, which is to work faster and with greater commitment, pooling all our resources – people and funds, and creating common programmes and tools.

To overcome and more easily remove the consequences of the corona virus, companies have to lower their costs by digitalization and automation of production and business processes, and to meet different requirements of their clients and partners. Therefore, it is crucial to start, as soon as possible, redesigning existing digital tools, and adapting business processes and models to the new circumstances and needs of buyers and clients.

#### **6. How can the candidate countries to the EU be associated to the recovery plan of the EU?**

**Marko Čadež:** The dynamic at which the Western Balkan economies will overcome the consequences of the health crisis will definitely depend on the recovery rate of the European Union economy, as the major foreign trade partner and the largest investor in the region.

In addition to the announced EU financial assistance, which is precious to us and for which we are grateful, the key for recovery of the Western Balkan economies lies in the deepening of the regional economic integration, faster development of the common regional area, and more integration of the region in the single legal and economic system of the European Union.

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