



| Article

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## EU SME Strategy as a driver of Europe's recovery

**Small and medium sized enterprises** (SMEs) make a crucial contribution to the EU and are the main source of growth and innovation across the economy. The SME Strategy published by the European Commission in March reflected this important role, but it came just days before the outbreak of COVID-19, which has of course dramatically changed the context.

The '*EU SME Strategy as a driver of Europe's recovery*' online event that EUROCHAMBRES co-organised with BusinessEurope and SMEunited on 23 September considered the March communication in the context of the crisis and the recovery process. Following the keynote speech of European Commissioner for the Single Market, Thierry Breton, and remarks from MEP Martina Dlabajová and German Minister of Economic Affairs and Energy, Peter Altmaier, EUROCHAMBRES President Christoph Leitl challenged EU policy makers to come forward with concrete measures to support SMEs in these most challenging conditions.

President Leitl highlighted the need to ensure financial support to previously viable businesses struggling to cope with the economic slowdown, advocating a rethink on EU 'de minimis' rules for state aid and criticising the Council's recent decision to drop the proposed Solvency Support Instrument. He also stressed the importance of putting SMEs at the heart of Europe's twin digital and ecological transition by ensuring that policy decisions reflect the conditions that smaller businesses need to drive this paradigm shift. Referring to the new Green Deal, he said "*this must be more than wishful targets. It must be a philosophy and an action plan.*"

Building on this, President Leitl argued that the importance of the SME Strategy as a roadmap for entrepreneur-friendly policy making has grown because of the crisis: "*Let small enterprises thrive by creating an ecosystem that is conducive to business and innovation*", he said. "*EU institutions must be bolder and bring forward concrete measures that boost the recovery of SMEs and help them rebuild Europe's economy: 'Think Small First' should become 'Do Small First'.*"

Discussions during the online event, attended by more than 200 participants, also highlighted the considerable difficulties for SMEs from the introduction of additional restrictions to cross-border activities in response to COVID-19. Commissioner Breton reported on positive discussions with member states on this topic at the previous week's Competitiveness Council. EUROCHAMBRES urges the Commission to build on this and ensure better coordination and communication to avoid further unilateral measures that could be inconsistent, disproportionate, and discriminatory. A well-functioning single market is a direct and cost-effective way in which to support SMEs and bolster the recovery.



Commissioner Breton acknowledged the continuous and crucial support of the EUROCHAMBRES and the vital role of the chamber network in the response to the economic recovery. Chambers remain fully committed to helping their members get through this hugely challenging period and to working with the EU institutions in designing policies that allow SMEs to survive, recover and be at the heart of Europe's recovery.

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The EU SME Strategy as a driver of Europe's recovery online event was held on 23 September and organised by EUROCHAMBRES, BusinessEurope and SMEUnited.

The speakers were:

Thierry Breton, European Commissioner for Internal Market

Peter Altmaier, German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy

Martina Dlabajová, Co-Chair of the European Parliament SME Intergroup MEP

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Interventions by:

- Christoph Leitl, President of EUROCHAMBRES
- Markus J. Beyrer, Director General of BusinessEurope
- Alban Maggiar, President of SMEUnited