



**GETTING  
BACK  
TO  
BUSINESS**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD AND  
ENLARGEMENT  
PRIORITIES FOR THE  
2024-2029 EU TERM**

**EUROCHAMBRES**

## Eurochambres Neighbourhood and Enlargement Priorities for the 2024-2029 EU term

Eurochambres supports the new impetus given to EU enlargement. With its network of chambers of commerce and industry spanning the continent, Eurochambres is in a unique position to help the business community in the candidate and potential candidate countries in the economic and societal changes implied by the accession process. More widely, Eurochambres supports enhanced trade and investment relations between the EU and respectively the candidate and potential candidate and the EU neighbouring countries with a view to improve SME competitiveness.

### 1. Summary:

- ❖ Further support SME competitiveness in the EU aspiring and EU neighbouring countries and in particular improve the business environment
- ❖ Enhance public-private dialogue both at national level and between the EU and the respective national governments
- ❖ Enhance support to Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery and ensure the involvement of SMEs in the reconstruction and recovery process
- ❖ Encourage gradual accession of the candidate and potential candidate countries to the EU single market prior accession
- ❖ Further involve the business community at the different stages of the EU accession process
- ❖ Adopt a clear timeframe for the implementation of the reforms in the candidate and potential candidate countries
- ❖ Promote the Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans
- ❖ Enhance trade and investment relations between the EU and Türkiye and support the modernisation of the EU-Türkiye Customs Union

### 2. State of play:

Eurochambres' survey on the business perspective towards EU enlargement published in March 2024 revealed that many companies in candidate and potential candidate countries lack information on the EU accession process and more specifically on the EU acquis. Compliance with the EU acquis by companies is still at early stage. The survey stressed the strong willingness of the business community to play an active role in the EU accession process.

Concerning the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, the outcomes of the EU4Business: Connecting companies project (EU4BCC) and Eurochambres previous involvement in the Southern Mediterranean highlight the importance to further develop sustainable and equitable economic growth within both regions and to strengthen the public-private dialogue between both regions and the EU.

### 3. Recommendations:

#### a) EU Enlargement

##### I. **Support the EU accession negotiation process of the candidate and potential candidate countries**

Eurochambres acknowledges the powerful transformative effect of the prospect of EU membership to boost the necessary reforms in the candidate countries. Since the 2004 EU Enlargement, Eurochambres has built longstanding and sound expertise in helping the business community prepare for the challenge of enlargement and is ready to step its efforts to make sure companies remain competitive in an enlarged EU.

##### II. **Support the gradual accession of the candidate and potential candidate countries to the EU single market prior accession (implementation of the first pillar of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and DCFTAs with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova).**

Eurochambres supports the gradual accession of the aspiring countries into the EU single market that aims at aligning and harmonising their rules with EU norms and standards prior to their formal accession. The gradual accession would allow countries which make progress to get a reward right away. Companies could enjoy benefits and opportunities even before formal accession to the EU if progress had been made. Access to the EU single market should be accompanied by the simultaneous dismantling of unjustified, non-tariff barriers to trade by candidate countries. A gradual liberalisation of the free movement of workers would also allow EU member states to tackle skills shortage which hamper their competitiveness.

In this context, Eurochambres supports the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans which will provide new incentives to the Western Balkans to make decisive progress towards EU membership as well as the full implementation of the DCFTAs with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia which foresee such gradual integration into the EU single market.

Eurochambres is ready to support companies in the candidate and potential candidate countries to enhance their knowledge and awareness on the relevant areas of the EU acquis to facilitate their acquis compliance and their gradual integration into the EU single market.

##### III. **Adopt a clear timeframe for the implementation of the reforms in the candidate and potential candidate countries.**

While the merit-based procedure is essential as it will ensure that each applicant is assessed on its own merit in terms of fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria, Eurochambres supports the adoption of a clear timeframe for the EU accession negotiations with each country. Such roadmaps would facilitate the planning of the necessary reforms at company level and keep the momentum for enlargement among the business community.

##### IV. **Support the Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans**

Eurochambres supports regional economic integration and in particular the creation of a Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans. Based on EU rules and closer association to the EU's Single Market, the Common Regional Market would turn small

fragmented national economies into a larger integrated regional market. It is critical in increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the region. Any political blockage in the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan should be alleviated.

#### **V. Further involve the business community at the different stages of the EU accession process**

The enlargement process is not a purely political and technocratic process. The business community is traditionally supportive of the EU enlargement, and it should be structurally involved in the process, including in its monitoring.

One of the lessons that can be drawn from previous enlargements is that compliance with legislation at grass-root level is as important as the adaptation of the candidate legislation at institutional level. It is therefore crucial that companies are properly and timely informed not only on the business-related EU acquis, but also on the opportunities and challenges of future accession to the EU. This would allow businesses in the candidate countries to identify, at an early stage of the process, the areas where the most effort will be needed to comply with the EU acquis so that they can plan the necessary adaptations needed. It would additionally allow the business community in both the EU and the candidate countries to actively contribute to the enlargement process and ensure that their interests are considered. Eurochambres is committed to support companies in this process.

This increased involvement should go hand-in-hand with a stronger financial support for the business community. Eurochambres is advocating for prioritising the allocation of funds for private sector to SMEs.

#### **VI. Enhance the EU-Türkiye trade relations, in particular through the modernisation of the Customs Union**

EU-Türkiye relationship is based on deep and strong economic relations. Türkiye is a strategic partner for the EU. This relationship works thanks to the close cooperation of business communities on both sides. Chambers have an essential role to play in enhancing cooperation in trade and business environment but also in other areas of common interest such as energy, food security and transport.

Eurochambres supports the modernisation of the EU-Türkiye Customs and in particular the inclusion of the Digital Agenda and the Green Deal while advocating the removal of remaining trade barriers and the full implementation of the current Customs Union.

Eurochambres has been contributing to this close cooperation through the implementation of dedicated projects for the last twenty years, the latest being the Türkiye-EU Business Dialogue project (TEBD) and its leading role in the public-private dialogue between the EU and Türkiye.

##### **b) Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery**

#### **I. Enhance support to Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery**

Chambers in the EU have been spontaneously supportive and active since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The chambers expressed their solidarity with Ukraine and the people of

Ukraine through very concrete initiatives in particular twinning programmes for Ukrainian chambers and SMEs and support to the Ukrainian refugees to facilitate their integration in the EU labour markets. Eurochambres and the chamber network is ready to step up its support to Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery.

## **II. Ensure the involvement of SMEs in the reconstruction and recovery process**

The scale of investments required for Ukraine's reconstruction will be substantial and will require a close cooperation between Ukraine and the EU as well as other donors and between public authorities and the private sector. Public authorities in both the EU and Ukraine have to further involve the private sector in the different phases of the reconstruction from the identification of needs, the prioritisation of the reforms to the implementation of the projects in the context of the Ukraine Facility. It is crucial that the funding reach SMEs and in particular MSMEs. There is evidence that they have been less resilient than large enterprises during the war.

Innovative instruments to de-risk investments are important to attract the EU private sector in Ukraine. A specific focus should be accorded to SMEs.

Moreover, the development of infrastructures needs to be further supported to allow the businesses to operate properly.

### **c) Enhanced SME competitiveness in the candidate and potential candidate countries as well as in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood and enhanced trade and investment relations**

#### **I. Further support to SME competitiveness in EU aspiring and EU neighbouring countries**

Eurochambres considers that economic development and enhanced competitiveness are key not only in the EU accession process but in the relations between the EU and its Eastern and Southern Neighbours.

Eurochambres supports measures to increase competitiveness of domestic companies and their integration in global value chains through 1/ a systematic and consistent approach to simplify business environment; 2/ enhanced internationalisation of SMEs and access to finance; 3/ tackling skills mismatch and in particular increased work-based learning component in VET; 4/ improved energy efficiency and energy security, focus should be put on decarbonisation and clean energy; 5/ enhanced digital transition; 6/ fight against corruption.

#### **II. Enhance public-private dialogue both at national level and between the EU and the respective national governments**

With a view to improve business environment as well as trade and investment relations between the EU and respectively the Western Balkans, Türkiye, the Eastern partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood, Eurochambres is actively engaged in the public-private dialogue at the EU level and support its members to enhance public-private dialogue at national level. These public-private dialogue should be further encouraged to ensure that the interest of the business community, and in particular SMEs, is taken into account in the policy-making process.

### **III. Improve mutual understanding and cooperation between the business communities**

Eurochambres actively supports concrete initiatives to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation between business communities from the EU and respectively the Western Balkans, Türkiye, the Eastern partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood. Cooperation between business communities allow not only to exchange of expertise and best practices but to bring closer business communities.



**Eurochambres** – the association of European chambers of commerce and industry – represents more than 20 million businesses through its members and a network of 1700 regional and local chambers across Europe. Eurochambres is the leading voice for the broad business community at EU level, building on chambers’ strong connections with the grass roots economy and their hands-on support to entrepreneurs. Chambers’ member businesses – over 93% of which are SMEs – employ over 120 million people.

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