Mr António Costa
President of the European Council
European Council
Rue de la Loi 175
B-1048 Brussels

Brussels, 23 November 2026

Subject: **Message from the European business community on the next Multiannual Financial Framework ahead of the Special European Council, 26–27 November**

Dear President Costa,

The Special European Council on 26–27 November must be a turning point to bring Europe closer to its strategic objectives, take real action in support of the business community and revive Europe's competitiveness.

As negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) reach their final and most decisive stage, Eurochambres and SMEunited, together with their networks of millions of businesses – most of which are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – express serious concerns about the level of ambition of current negotiations.

Europe's economic future can no longer be taken for granted. Our industry faces unprecedented external pressure, and our businesses are retreating to their domestic markets, trading growth opportunities for stability. This undermines the single market, our greatest economic asset, from within. Meanwhile, high energy costs and a growing regulatory burden are draining companies' capacity to operate, invest, and innovate. Feedback from our respective members demonstrates that business confidence is fragile and getting weaker.

Ahead of the Special European Council, our organisations urge you and Heads of State or Government to ensure that the EU's commitment to an ambitious competitiveness agenda is non-negotiable in your discussions on the next long-term EU budget.

This objective must be underpinned by an ambitious European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), with simple access and proportionate requirements for SMEs, combining financial support with advisory and technical support throughout the investment journey. Crucially, the ECF needs a ringfenced envelope for direct and indirect SME support and for the future EU for Business Network, often the only gateway to EU funding for micro and small enterprises.

Eurochambres and SMEunited strongly reject any downsizing of the ECF. Closing the EU's competitiveness gap requires a Fund at least at the level proposed by the Commission.

The revised MFF negotiating box presented on 21 November goes in the opposite direction. It concentrates further cuts on Heading 2, which falls 16.2% below the Commission proposal, and reduces the ECF by 15.4%, going even further than the 10.5% cut proposed by the Irish Presidency on 10 October. The ECF InvestEU and advisory services budget also face a 22.4% reduction, potentially significantly undermining SMEs' access to EU funding, given their strong reliance on advisory support to navigate funding opportunities and prepare successful applications. These disproportionate cuts to the ECF undermine Europe's ambition to revive competitiveness and, above all, ignore the needs of millions of European businesses, many of which would then look to invest and grow outside Europe.

It is critical, President Costa, that our call is heeded to secure a long-term EU budget that matches the scale of the challenge and puts Europe's competitiveness first.

Yours sincerely,

Vladimír Dlouhý
Eurochambres President

Davide Galli
SMEunited President