

European Chamber network delivers recommendations to policy-makers for EU 2019-2024 term

Chambers of Commerce & Industry set out a series of recommendations for EU policy makers on sustainable growth and business competitiveness at a two day summit in Rome.

On 7 and 8 October, the third edition of the EUROCHAMBRES Economic Forum, in Rome, brought together 300 leaders of European, national and local Chambers of Commerce & Industry, together with their experts. They debated how the change of the political and economic landscape in Europe may affect the business community and provided practical and concrete answers from Chambers and their members.

The President of EUROCHAMBRES, Christoph Leitl, highlighted the importance of the 2019-2024 legislative term, as it will pave the way to the rapid transformation towards climate-neutral, circular and resource efficient industry. "Europe is at a crossroads and the chamber network met exactly at the right time to discuss how to accompany our businesses along the route. With our network representing 20 million of companies and more than 150 million employees, we are ready to provide our contribution. The objectives outlined by the incoming European Commission can only be met with the engagement of companies, accompanied by the chambers", said Leitl.

Based on the discussion, EURCHAMBRES prepared a series of recommendations to be delivered to the European Commission and the European Parliament. Chambers aim to trigger opportunities for sustainable growth and to safeguard Europe's industrial competitiveness. The recommendations concern 6 key areas for business:

1. Finance sustainable transition for SMEs

The following actions are recommended:

- Focus on value chains to achieve impact. In this way it is possible to influence and support a larger amount of companies in completing the sustainable shift and build the critical mass that is needed if we want to meet the decarbonisation challenges, we have ahead of us.
- Provide effective assistance system that will have to be part of an enabling financial framework for all types of companies and technologies. Regulators should engage and bring banks to specific educational activities, technical assistance programmes and provide SMEs with enough resources in order for them to be better prepared and develop their projects. SMEs are good at doing their core business, sometimes they struggle in order to sell their ideas and ensure that they are heard by financiers. SMEs' access to data will be critical to move towards a carbon neutral economy. Proportionality in the thresholds and simplified procedures, without too many burdensome requirements are fundamental.
- Remove the constraints in using secondary raw materials. A functioning market for secondary raw materials is essential for a circular economy. These constraints exist in terms of transboundary trade but also in terms of trust along the supply chains and of

consumers. Removing these barriers and thereby creating a single market for secondary raw materials will enable companies to have easier access to funding for circular business solutions.

2. Reduce obstacles to business in the Single Market

The first results of the EUROCHAMBRES survey on obstacles in the Single Market show that entrepreneurs still feel that many improvements can be made to ease market access in the EU. The obstacles are still relatively similar to the ones that were identified 4 years ago. In terms of solutions, businesses overwhelmingly want authorities to provide the following actions:

- Better access to information and simplified procedures. The Commission should take stock of these results when defining its priorities for the next term.
- The services market needs to be further developed, as the EU is already lagging behind the US in terms of productivity growth.
- Raise awareness about tools that help overcome language barriers. Such tools are currently being developed by the European Commission, but awareness raising should be improved to promote such tools.

3. Provide support towards digitalisation

- A collaborative approach with European and Pan-European Chambers on the digital agenda, to ensure that opportunities and challenges are fully understood and can be addressed to the benefit of our chamber organization and our members.
- Build up competences of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCIs) regarding digitalisation, being innovative and agile in this process.
- Intensify the exchange of best practices in digitalisation among CCIs and develop Eurochambres' common digital tools.
- Provide up-to-date support for companies in their own digital transformation.

4. Create opportunities for business beyond the EU

In order to create a business-friendly environment, the following actions are recommended:

- Harmonize EU FTA rules to be easy to understand and simple to use in order to ensure the uptake and continued competitiveness of EU SMEs. There is an increased need for more coherence between negotiations and implementation of trade agreements, both at EU and national level, as well as for a more effective promotion of existing support structures and services for SMEs.
- Boost trade implementation. There is a need for more Europe-wide initiatives to improve trade implementation. Concrete action plans for FTA implementation need to be developed to ensure proper enforcement of existing trade rules.
- Provide a more structured and permanent dialogue between policy makers and EU business both in Europe and in third countries to strengthen the European brand, while increasing collaboration at EU level - including through the many avenues for Chamber collaboration offered by EUROCHAMBRES.

5. Tackle socio-economically damaging skills mismatches

A range of measures are needed to address both supply and demand side obstacles to the skills issue:

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- Develop a stronger learning culture among both employees and employers. This is paramount to ensure that skills acquired and developed throughout the working life remain relevant to economic needs.
- Increase mobility within and from outside the EU and guarantee the value of vocational and work-based training.
- Improve entrepreneurship education.

6. Support entrepreneurship

- Introduce entrepreneurship in curricula at all levels of education for young people to acquire entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, to experience practical aspects of starting a business and to accept failure as a natural component of entrepreneurial life. A 'European Year of Entrepreneurship', promoted in educational institutions, would contribute to this objective.
- Involve business community in the design and delivery of programmes and initiatives aimed to support entrepreneurship. These initiatives should include training on ICT tools and new technologies to reach younger generations.
- Make entrepreneurship more appealing, not only by reducing administrative and regulatory burdens but also by recognising the role of entrepreneurs within the society by raising awareness of the benefits of entrepreneurship. A special effort should be made to untap the entrepreneurial potential of women and migrants.

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