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21 November 2007

SME ACTION DAY “THINKING BIG”, 21 NOVEMBER 2007 CLOSING BY ERNEST-ANTOINE SEILLIÈRE, PRESIDENT

Ladies and Gentlemen:

After very interesting debates, we are now coming to the end of the first BUSINESSEUROPE SME Action Day. I would like to thank all of you for your active participation in the different panels. The discussions today have underlined again that ambitious and competitive SMEs and active policies to foster SME growth constitute the basis for further prosperity in Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today has been a very good day for European SMEs.

We have had the opportunity to discuss obstacles and levers for SME development, and heard what entrepreneurs expect from policy-makers. I am very happy that so many entrepreneurs have made their way to Brussels today. It was very useful to hear from you what problems you face on a daily basis. I promise you that this will be used in our lobbying and advocacy action in the near future.

Because this will help us to define key priorities for action in the different focus areas of the event. What are currently our priorities in BUSINESSEUROPE?

Firstly, implement the reforms for growth and jobs. This must be undertaken even when the economy is doing better. Amongst the initiatives to take at national level, we have mentioned clearly to foster entrepreneurship and SME growth. The study presented and discussed today is the proof that this is worthwhile. When companies – SMEs in particular – encounter growth, they can create jobs. This is the case for the “Growth and jobs strategy”.

Secondly, internal market integration.

Europe’s internal market is a tremendous instrument for economic power. But it must be adapted to the realities of the 21st century: it must respond to the challenges of globalisation and create new opportunities in an enlarged European Union. Better enforcement of the principles and legislation governing the Internal Market should be one of the priorities for future action. It is essential for its well-functioning and plays a central role in citizens’ and companies’ perception of Europe.

The enforcement of the internal market by companies is a key success factor. Whenever you encounter an obstacle, you should react. SMEs must be able to take full advantage of the EU internal market because this is a condition for growth. We, at BUSINESSEUROPE, must look at the implementation of all the regulation fostering the internal market.



Since the collapse of the Constitutional Treaty we have urged the political decision-makers to settle this setback and this is our third priority. Nothing is more harmful to pursuing a strategy than bad governance. What is true for business is even more true for political institutions.

We as BUSINESSEUROPE welcomed the outcome of the European Council in June reforming the Treaties. After almost six years of institutional debate the basis has now been laid to move Europe forward.

I take the opportunity of the presence this afternoon of Minister Pinho to congratulate the Portuguese government for the way they conducted the final discussions.

But the institutional debate is one thing, economic governance is something more. The European institutions must coordinate their policy in such a way that we can face competition from other parts of the world.

As we talk about the global world we are in, I can mention you our fourth priority, the fight against any kind of protectionism: be it internally in Europe or abroad.

What small and medium-sized companies expect in a level playing field is market access in a non-discriminatory attitude based on whatever criteria.

The larger the domestic market is, the stronger companies are. The better market access is, the more exports, foreign investments and bilateral trade there will be.

Fifthly, one of the most and complex issues we have to deal with is energy and climate policies.

I do not want to dwell on it now. Be reassured that BUSINESSEUROPE wants to play a constructive role and in doing so help to solve the challenge of climate change. But we also expect our decision-makers not to put the burden only on industry's/ companies' shoulders. This is a global problem that needs global solutions.

When it comes to energy, what does an SME ask for? Secure energy at the lowest price possible. This means again, a well functioning internal market with more competition between the energy suppliers. It means also, investments in interconnection in energy grids to foster a more open energy market.

Last but not least but not least, social issues. Let me be clear on it: it is not at EU level that we will start bargaining on working conditions or wages. This must be done at the most appropriate level: national, sectoral, company.

At European level the social dialogue is important to help reforming the existing social systems in order to face challenges ahead of globalisation and the ageing population. The recent common analysis of the labour market with joint recommendations to – mainly – national governments is a perfect example of what we can achieve.

There again, we have – together with trade unions – put a stress on entrepreneurship and SME policies.

You see, ladies and gentlemen, whatever we undertake, whatever we work on or lobby for, if we do not take the development of SMEs into account, we will miss our goal.

The first action day must be a beginning and I count on Arndt Kirchhoff to continue this work. By doing so, and if we are heard, we can really turn Europe into an economic and social success story.