

Access to markets dominates European Parliament of Enterprises

Members of the European Parliament of Enterprises, gathered in the Brussels Hemicycle today, called upon EU policy-makers to remove the obstacles hindering their access both to the internal and global markets. They also pledged for 'more Europe' in business-related political decisions.

94% of entrepreneurs urged the EU to strengthen its economic diplomacy to support their internationalisation; in relation to the internal market, over 90% expressed their support for an EU-wide e-signature framework and for the establishment of a European Private Company Statute.

Alessandro Barberis, President of EUROCHAMBRES, said: *"Today's debates clearly indicated that entrepreneurs want more Europe and more integrated policies. They are confident for the future but they still lack the necessary tools and conditions to operate, and look to the European Union's policy makers to provide them."*

Closing the proceedings, Mr Barberis handed-over the voting results to Vincent Van Quickenborne, Chair of the Competitiveness Council, and committed to disseminating them throughout the EU institutions.

The European Parliament of Enterprises was composed of over 700 entrepreneurs, from all sizes and sectors of business, coming from 45 European countries.

Results of votes

SESSION 1 – CONDITIONS

1. Against the current economic backdrop, would you support a stronger role for the European Union in economic governance? 70% YES

By expressing their positive vote, entrepreneurs demonstrated their desire for the EU to take a stronger role in economic issues. The vote implicitly supports the legislative proposals on economic governance recently tabled by the European Commission with the aim of better coordinating macroeconomic policies and strengthening EU fiscal rules.

2. Does EU policy making adequately take into account SMEs' interests? 83% NO

By largely voting 'no' on this question, entrepreneurs indicated that the 'think small first' principle remains an exception rather than a common practice within the EU institutions. EPE participants thus sent a strong message that the outcome of EU policy making must place the smaller businesses' needs upfront.

3. Should the EU ensure the removal of obstacles to the interoperability of national e-signature systems across Europe? 92% YES

This result confirms that e-signature systems are valued by businesses as a tool for reducing costs, streamlining procedures and improving security. It also confirms that a common e-signature framework across the EU is necessary for businesses to be able to apply the benefits of e-signature to cross-border operations.

4. Do you favour the introduction of a common EU system of collective redress? 46% YES, 42% NO

This mixed outcome suggests that entrepreneurs on the one hand recognise the need to reduce legal uncertainty created by the existence of different national systems of collective redress across the EU. On the other hand, they seem to have concerns about the potential for an EU system to evolve into a US 'class action' approach.

5. Should the EU fully harmonise consumer law? 74% YES

This positive result confirms the value that entrepreneurs attach to a common set of rules that protect consumers and reduce barriers to cross-border retailing. It is a clear signal of support for the full harmonisation approach of the Commission's Consumer Rights Directive proposal and a message to the Parliament not to deviate from this approach.

SESSION 2 – RESOURCES

1. Should regulations on late payments be stricter for public authorities than for businesses? 71% YES

By voting yes to this question, European entrepreneurs took the view that public authorities should be subject to stricter payment rules than businesses. The result of the vote is thus in line with the provisions contained in the recast Late Payment Directive which will be voted on by the European Parliament plenary later in October.

2. Is it currently harder to recruit staff with the right skills set than 5 years ago? 56% YES; 36% NO

European businesses appear divided on whether it has become harder over recent years for them to find people with the appropriate skills profiles or not. This potentially reflects differing situations in the many sectors represented by Members of the EPE. Nonetheless, it clearly remains important for policy makers to address the skills mismatch.

3. Is inflexibility resulting from labour laws a significant source of unemployment in the EU? 88% YES

By voting yes to this question, European entrepreneurs demonstrated that flexibility is a key factor in job creation. The result of the vote confirms the important socio-economic contribution of part-time, temporary and freelance work. It is a signal to the European Commission and national authorities to accelerate measures to enable businesses to manage their staff levels more flexibly and respond better to increasingly rapid market fluctuations.

4. Does the setting of environmental standards for products and production processes by the EU increase the competitiveness of European companies? 61% NO

By voting no to this question, businesses indicated that the setting of environmental standards does not boost their competitiveness. This may be due to the additional compliance and administrative costs that standards tend to create, or concerns about competitive disadvantages compared to producers in countries with less stringent requirements.

5. Are financial constraints the main obstacle to implementing energy efficiency measures for your company? 61% YES

Financial constraints are indeed one of the main obstacles to the implementation of energy efficiency measures. Other obstacles typically include lack of information and time.

SESSION 3 – MARKETS

1. Do you favour the establishment of an optional European Private Company Statute? 90% YES

This vote confirms that entrepreneurs support the statute as a means of setting up subsidiaries in other EU member states more easily or simply trading with less commercial barriers and lower costs. This is a strong signal to the Competitiveness Council to swiftly find a pragmatic solution on this Small Business Act priority.

2. Is the adoption of a compulsory origin marking label on imported goods from outside the EU a good idea? 62% YES

Companies have echoed what defenders of the origin marking label put forward as their main arguments: for transparency purposes, consumers need to know where the goods produced abroad come from, and the 'made in' label does not represent any substantial increase in the cost structure for producers.

3. In today's globalised market, should the EU strengthen its economic diplomacy to support internationalisation of companies and especially SMEs? 94% YES

Companies have voted in favour of a greater role for the EU in supporting the internationalisation of companies and especially SMEs. It is clear that joint efforts at EU level can add value to activities from individual member states, especially those with more limited resources.

4. Are free trade agreements between the EU and a third country relevant for your company when deciding in which country you want to do business? 67% YES

Companies have clearly stated that a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and a third country is relevant when deciding where to trade. This is mostly related to the absence or reduction of duties to be paid thanks to the agreement.

5. Should the EU increase its efforts to promote EU technical standards to open new markets in third countries? **89% YES**

Companies acknowledge that by adopting EU standards they can become more competitive and efficient because they can eventually benefit from a higher degree of standards than the national/local ones.

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