

Central Chamber of Commerce of Finland: Goals for the Finnish EU Presidency

Finland will hold the EU Presidency for the six month period 1 July – 31 December.2006. The Central Chamber of Commerce of Finland wants the Finnish Presidency to clearly prioritize issues which promote Europe's competitiveness in the global markets. The Finnish Presidency needs to advocate all such activity where a joint EU effort is plainly more beneficial than all the individual Member States acting separately on their own. An example of such activity is Research and Development. Europe-wide R&D co-operation is certain to give better results than the separate efforts of the individual Member States.

The Finnish Presidency must aim at reforming the EU's economic structures, completing the Internal market, improving the legislation, cutting down the red tape burdening the business, and advancing the Union's external relations with special focus on the Union's relations with Russia.

Kick-start for the Lisbon Strategy

The implementation of the Lisbon Strategy has been justly criticized. The Member States' lack of commitment must be turned around. The problem is that many Member States still lack a long-term, growth-sustaining economic policy. Obviously, the Member States have not been prepared to reform their economic structures. Tightening competition within the Internal market and in international trade would increase the pressure to commence the necessary economic reforms in the Member States.

Finland needs to actively add momentum to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. The Finnish Presidency should press for the determined implementation of the existing commitments, and prioritize in all EU decision-making the factors affecting the EU economy and competitive capacity.

Completion of the Internal Market

Finland should counterpoint the Member States' contractual obligations to enforce the Internal Market. The EU Presidency needs to concentrate on improving regulation and on speeding up and making more effective the complaints procedures in Internal Market regulation breaches.

In the Internal Market, especially energy and service markets require substantial improvement. The aim must be to create a true Internal Market.

A key issue in the energy market, beside the energy prices, is the security of supply. Regardless of some improvement, the EU markets are still very fragmented.

The downfall of the Service Directive has been an example of the Member States' minute desire to build a joint Service Market. Liberalization of the European Service Market would boost the business' competitiveness also in the non-EU markets. The Finnish Presidency should see to it that the Service Directive, impaired as it may be, will now be ratified.

Finland also needs to see to it that the Action Plan for the Financing Services progresses as planned. Added profitability of the Financing Services will obviously strengthen the total European

competitiveness. Finland also needs to do all in her power to promote the realisation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA).

Strengthening the European Union External Relations

Finland must strengthen the Union's political and economic viability through sound international co-operation. A single voice will give the European Union much stronger leverage. The Union's Russian relations, in particular, need to be built further. Furthermore, the Finnish Presidency should aim at promoting a strategic partnership between the EU and Russia. Important, especially for Finland, is also the issue of strengthening the strategic character of the Nordic Dimension within the EU external relations policy.

Promoting the WTO negotiations is essential for the liberalization of international trade. The Finnish Presidency should give its strong support to all efforts aimed at facilitating the market access of goods and services. The European Union must help build the WTO into an efficient trade organization which operates on jointly agreed regulations and which offers the international business a predictable and safe operating environment.

Safety and Security

The security of the operating environment is a critical business success factor. The European Union is faced with growing threats of terrorism, corruption and international crime. To prevent their adverse effects, the Finnish Presidency is expected to strengthen the role of the EU within the global community, and to enhance the Union's collective monitoring and security systems.

Development of the EMU

A further task for the Finnish Presidency is the revamping of the Economic and Monetary Union. The EMU legislation needs to be further developed so that it more efficiently than so far supports the Union's basic goals, economic stability and growth. We expect the Finnish Presidency to be careful to admit into the EMU only nations which fully meet the Union's membership criteria. The enlargement of the EMU would entail significant benefits for the entire European business community.

The European Innovation Policy

It is central for the success of the EU that an operating environment which encourages innovation be strengthened. Therefore, the Finnish Presidency should ensure that the seventh framework programme for research and technology will truly boost top level European know-how. It is critical to actively involve the European business community in the framework programme and its implementation.
