

Conference on Entrepreneurship

SPEECH BY GEORGES JACOBS

PRESIDENT OF UNICE

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Dear Commissioner, Minister, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the annual UNICE SME Conference, which this year is devoted to the theme of “Entrepreneurship” and how to foster better conditions for the development of enterprise in Europe.
- I would like in particular to express our appreciation for the hospitality of the European Parliament and the support of the Commission in the organisation of this conference.
- Why a conference on entrepreneurship and why now?
- Business is not an end in itself but constitutes an essential lever in the economy and jobs. It is the greatest source of value-added, inspires innovation and technological progress, and creates jobs.
- The central role of business in today’s society makes it essential to give continuous thought to the necessary conditions for its success. Business is not the only social actor, it depends on other stakeholders such as consumers, employees, local communities to be successful. This includes political decisions. Governments’ short-term objectives are not always compatible with business development.
- Europe is moving towards integration. We have a significant institutional renewal of the Commission and the Parliament. So we thought it was essential to organise an early opportunity for common reflection and dialogue on what European business sees as the challenges and opportunities for a supportive enterprise policy for the future.
- As an input to this debate, UNICE has just completed a benchmarking report on the conditions for entrepreneurship in Europe. Our principal objectives are:
 - to raise awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship for the economic well-being of Europe’s citizens, and
 - to identify actions that public authorities should take to improve the business environment for entrepreneurs in Europe.
- Our report tells the story of low levels of entrepreneurship in Europe and suggests causes and possible solutions.

- The United States is a natural benchmark. The American economy benefits from a high degree of entrepreneurship. It has flexible markets. The public sector is small and the burden of taxation is lower than in Europe.
- While all this does not necessarily make the U.S. a model for Europe, it does suggest key factors that European governments need to change to improve the climate for entrepreneurship.
- We expect a great deal from the new European institutions and above all action which genuinely encourages corporate competitiveness. The main task remains with firms themselves. But they depend on proper functioning labour and capital market.

The internal market is far from complete – and needs to be pursued with renewed vigour in many areas such as transport and financial services.

The single currency will be a significant spur to economic integration – the creation of a wide and deep world currency will bring many advantages to European firms.

SMEs are the motor of the economy. 16 million firms are the key to growth and the creation of new jobs. Getting the conditions right is very important. That is what today's conference is about.

- I am therefore particularly happy that both Commissioner Liikanen and Minister Sasi, representing the Finnish Presidency, have agreed to speak this morning.

I wish you all a productive day and now hand the floor to Mr Liikanen.

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