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21 November 2007

SME ACTION DAY “THINKING BIG”, 21 NOVEMBER 2007 WELCOME BY PHILIPPE DE BUCK, SECRETARY GENERAL

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for all of us in BUSINESSEUROPE to welcome each and every one of you at this first BUSINESSEUROPE SME Action Day!

With all of you, we would like to “think big” today.

Think big because we have gathered more than 300 people with a large group of “real entrepreneurs”. Those for whom we have organised this event. Those from whom we expect a lot of input. Those BUSINESSEUROPE represents in all its undertakings.

BUSINESSEUROPE is sometimes presented or perceived as speaking for large companies. This is true, we also speak for large companies. But we know, at BUSINESSEUROPE, that the backbone of our membership, the backbone of the European economy is the small and medium-sized enterprises.

Therefore we are proud to have you all here under the leadership of Arndt Kirchhoff, our SME and entrepreneurship mentor.

He always thinks big: in his company, in BDI, in BUSINESSEUROPE. He is driven by his optimism but also by an effective vision of SMEs’ needs in the European Union.

We will have a busy agenda today, which will start with the results of a survey conducted by KPMG and presented by Robert Gutsche. I will leave it to Arndt and Robert to comment on it. What is very clear to me, is that European SMEs directors express their willingness to grow, to think big:

- That they express their confidence in the European project and in particular the internal market;
- That they expect what has been promised will be delivered and delivered big, into “Gulliver”! Gulliver was a giant, but each SME entrepreneur is or wants to be a giant in her or his field!

The European Commission – hopefully supported by the European Parliament and Council – will undertake a lot of actions to support SMEs. The “think small first” action: because the impact of each single piece of legislation on SMEs is the most important issue to assess. “Think small first” because SMEs want to “think big”, to grow, to innovate, to change, to develop, to export!



The “Small Business Act” later: yes if it is really meant to support SMEs’ development, with appropriate tools and policies.

This will be discussed throughout the day and this afternoon we will formulate concrete proposals which Arndt Kirchhoff will pass on to “your” Commissioner, Vice-President Günter Verheugen.

We will then have the opportunity to listen to Manuel Pinho, Minister for Economy and Innovation of Portugal, who will highlight achievements of the Portuguese EU Presidency which put an emphasis on SMEs.

Our BUSINESSEUROPE President, Ernest-Antoine Seillière afterwards closes this first Action Day. Working with him on a daily basis, I can assure you that he always “thinks big” with an unlimited ambition to make the voice of all entrepreneurs heard at the European level.

With Natascha Waltke and all the colleagues in BUSINESSEUROPE we have organised this with great enthusiasm knowing it was a real challenge. We have acted as an SME normally does: set an objective, create a project, organise the means and market the product.

For this project we have had the support of our members: 39 members from 33 countries. We were lucky to find good sponsors, most of them not really SMEs but all of them – KPMG, EURid, European Investment Fund, Microsoft, Intensa Sanpaolo, Ka-Vosz and Toyota – knowing how crucial it is for their business to rely on dynamic, innovative and successful companies! Many thanks.

SMEs have a story to tell, therefore the communication is a key element. Not so many newspapers report positive achievements from SMEs but European Voice, Expansión, Frankfurter Allgemeine and Les Echos have shown a big interest in your stories. Making known what we are doing and what we could achieve in a fascinating story. We, at BUSINESSEUROPE, have undertaken since last Friday, a unique action for a business organisation: we advertise for the first time on TV – EURONEWS – a clip showing that environmental issues must and can be combined with competitiveness, as you will discuss this afternoon.

I thank you for your presence, we count on you for the interaction aspect. We promise you that, as you will see at the end of our 30-second clip, BUSINESSEUROPE cares! We care about the world but we also care about you.

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