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COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS, GALA DINNER LISBON, 7 DECEMBER 2007

SPEAKING NOTES FOR PRESIDENT SEILLIÈRE

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to see you all here this evening in the *Palácio Nacional de Ajuda* and to welcome our distinguished guest(s) from the Portuguese government.

As usual, I will start by thanking our hosts – AIP and CIP – for the great efforts they have made to organise our twice-yearly Council of Presidents here in Lisbon. President de Matos and President van Zeller: I am sure that the impressive surroundings in which we find ourselves now and today's other gatherings augur well for the success of our meeting tomorrow.

I also welcome my fellow Presidents of business federations from across Europe and their partners.

It is also a pleasure to see many of BUSINESSEUROPE's Permanent Delegates, who provide the essential link between our activities in Brussels and work in the national capitals.

Lastly, the Management Committee, who coordinate the work of the BUSINESSEUROPE team.

A warm welcome to you all.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lisbon, Portugal and its decision makers have made a true mark on Europe. Since years we speak of the Lisbon strategy. Then came a President of the Commission of Portuguese nationality to reinvigorate it. And we are now on the way to the Lisbon Treaty.

As you all know Europe has been coasting along, unlike Vasco da Gama, virtually rudderless, for several years. And this at a time when the challenges facing Europe are growing by the day, and the rest of the world is moving on. It now looks as if we can put this period behind us. The Portuguese Presidency successfully brokered a deal on the Reform Treaty at the mini-summit in October, and the way is now open for swift ratification in each of the twenty-seven Member States ahead of the next European Parliament elections in 2009. We might finally be heading towards the Cape of Good Hope!



Member States also have an important role to play in implementing the reforms for growth and jobs. Our recent Reform Barometer found patchy levels of commitment and implementation across Europe. Even though almost half of EU Member States are perceived to have made above-average efforts, the overall score is deemed to be disappointing. Particular sticking points are labour market reforms, sustainability of public finances and social security systems.

As a follow-on from this, in recent months BUSINESSEUROPE has been working intensively in the framework of the social dialogue to reach a shared analysis of what needs to be done to make the labour market more dynamic and continue to move towards the Lisbon targets. The most promising tool to this end is flexicurity, where the emphasis is shifted from job security to employment security, with adequate and targeted support to workers during transitions. We have submitted our recommendations in view of the upcoming European summit which is set to adopt common principles on flexicurity.

We have also been very active in the field of energy efficiency and climate change. For the first time, BUSINESSEUROPE has produced a video clip for television, in order to bring our message to a wider audience. Europe – and especially European industry – has taken the lead on the issue of climate protection, but it cannot solve the climate problem on its own. The negotiations in Bali this week and next could lay the foundations for a more inclusive regime when the Kyoto protocol expires at the end of 2012. BUSINESSEUROPE will continue to campaign for a global agreement with contributions from all major emitters.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are weighty issues, and the way they are tackled will determine the degree of Europe's success in the years ahead. Our meeting tomorrow will be examining some of them.

I would like to close by once more thanking our hosts for their hospitality.

I should also like to draw attention once again to the Portuguese Presidency's achievements over the last six months. Agreement on the Reform Treaty and work on the forthcoming last three-year cycle of the Lisbon strategy are of paramount importance for business. More generally, I would like to thank the Portuguese Presidency for its openness to dialogue on a wide range of issues which interest business during its period in office. Europe moves our hearts, as does fado (from fatum - destiny) which we will have the pleasure to listen to later. Europe currently forges its own destiny! Has there ever been a song about Europe, with its ups and downs, cheerful and melancholic moments? It may be time...

The Portuguese government has kindly agreed to take part in our Gala dinner this evening and I am pleased now to introduce Mr Manuel Pinho, who is minister with responsibility for Economy and Innovation and current President of the Competitiveness Council.

Sir, thank you for being with us.

We would be very pleased to hear your assessment of your country's Council Presidency and how you see things looking into the future.
