



SPEAKING NOTES

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PHILIPPE DE BUCK, BUSINESSEUROPE SECRETARY GENERAL

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- Vice-President Verheugen, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to be part of this very special moment: the launch of a renewed major support Network for companies, and in particular SMEs.
- This is an ambitious project, which brings together today important regional players such as business organisations, development agencies and innovation and technology centres.
- The numbers are impressive: the Enterprise Europe Network comprises 500 organisations throughout Europe, ready to give companies advice on EU legislation, standards, policies and funding possibilities.
- But what is more, the Enterprise Europe Network will combine this with other services that are intended to serve above all one goal: to help Europe to deliver on the growth and jobs strategy by helping SMEs to innovate, grow and expand into new markets. We welcome this.
- The Single Market is a key tool for realisation of the Lisbon agenda and it is driving economic growth as barriers to the free circulation of people, goods, services and capital are progressively dismantled. With a market which now comprises 30 countries and around 500 million citizens¹, cross-border investment flows of 430 billion euros per annum and 70% of Member States' exports being destined for other EU countries, the benefits from closer integration are undeniable.
- However, there is still a long way to go before the Single Market functions optimally for citizens and enterprises, and before especially SMEs benefit from its advantages to the full. A recent survey reports that only 8% of SMEs are exporting. Our SME Action Day survey showed that SMEs want to grow and expand to new markets, but that it is not an easy thing to do.

¹ In 1994, the Internal Market was extended through the EEA Agreement to include the three EFTA countries Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

There are still many remaining barriers (of an administrative, tax and regulatory nature) to the Single Market that represent in total an unfulfilled economic potential of 275 to 350 billion euros. The Enterprise Europe Network will help SMEs to overcome some of the barriers and help them to go international.

- The challenges we are facing when it comes to SME innovation are the following:
 - how to bring universities closer to companies
 - how to bring new products, services and technologies faster to the market
 - how to make sure that SMEs become stronger players in cutting-edge areas, such as biotechnology, eco-innovation and energy-efficiency
 - how to bring innovation finances closer to SMEs by understanding better the way they work
 - how to help SMEs protect their innovation by using Intellectual Property Rights
- If the Network partners through their strong innovation competence can deliver services that help address these challenges, European SMEs will gain and therefore Europe will gain as well. SMEs carry out nearly a quarter of business R&D in the EU. But at the same time, a recent survey reveals that four in ten SMEs say that they do not have new products or that they do not have income from new products.
- The Network specialises moreover in fostering business cooperation, business partnerships and providing advice on internationalisation projects.
- A majority of SMEs are active in the domestic market only. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey only about one in five SMEs is exporting. On the occasion of BUSINESSEUROPE's SME Action Day a survey was conducted which showed that many SMEs plan to extend operations within the EU and beyond. Of course, for an SME it takes more time to overcome the obstacles to internationalisation: limited access to information about specific markets, tax issues and regulations.
- The Network partners can add a lot of value for SMEs in this regard and be a catalyst for increased business cooperation and expansion, based on long-standing experience and activities in this area of, in particular, business organisations.
- You will operate, as it is nicely put, on the basis of a "no-wrong-door" principle. This is a good concept – but its actual implementation may prove a true challenge on the ground. We hope you can make it happen, as a company would be very well served if it needed to knock on only one door and get all the answers very quickly.



- The Enterprise Europe Network can make a difference in helping companies – SMEs in particular – to find their way through EU legislation, policies and funding opportunities. It should ensure that companies are better informed about opportunities and in a better position to seize them.
- The Enterprise Europe Network will be really useful if it is able to provide the right answers and high-quality advice promptly. This is what we expect from the reshaped Network: specialist expertise, effectiveness and quick responses.
- BUSINESSEUROPE will promote the Enterprise Europe Network amongst its members, in the 32 countries where the Network will operate. I wish the new Network, you and your organisation a dynamic and good start. European companies count on you to accompany them in their endeavours.
