

**SPEECH**

4 March 2008

**HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN ALLIANCE FOR CSR  
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WORKING GROUP**

Commissioners,  
Business Leaders,  
Colleagues,

We have the opportunity today to gather for the second anniversary of the European Alliance for CSR, and I firstly would like to pay a tribute to the many business leaders who have made the effort to be present today, with a view to demonstrating the commitment of their company to CSR and sustainable development. I also want to thank Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen and Commissioner Vladimir Spidla for hosting this meeting a second time and for continuously supporting our work on CSR.

A recent FT article asked whether "CSR was dead". Definitely not, CSR is topical and CSR is developing. The Alliance shows it and corporate practices far beyond the Alliance show it. For business, reconciling economic, social and environmental sustainability is more important than ever, in the light of

- increasing worldwide competition
- an uncertain global economic environment
- high expectations of shareholders, employees, stakeholders and society at large
- ambitious commitments to become more energy-efficient and reduce emissions
- rising commodity prices
- demographic challenges
- insufficient governance in some parts of the world

By focusing on long-term sustainability companies will create more jobs, generate more wealth and innovate, but also foster skills development, develop diversity policies, and reduce their environmental footprint, thereby delivering on a wide range of Lisbon goals.

This being said, things must work both ways: public authorities, for their part, must implement the necessary reforms to create sustainable framework conditions for European business so that companies can continue on their growth path and successfully compete in a global economy. Sustainability thus becomes an overriding concept for everybody.

Now back to the Alliance. Since last year, progress in the CSR Alliance has become visible. The companies present in this room, but also many others, the different business organisations and networks have joined their forces to deliver ideas, conceive projects, enter into cooperation, exchange good practices, develop new solutions.

In 2007, BUSINESSEUROPE launched a laboratory on “Fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and promoting entrepreneurship education”, which addresses a number of issues including the business volunteer gap, in cooperation with educational programme providers as JA-YE Europe and JADE. The willingness of young people to create a business is important to enhance our future competitiveness.

Of course, there is also deep and broad ownership of CSR among our members, and the members of our members. All of them work continuously on CSR. Let me just highlight a few of the many activities that have been undertaken in 2007, more are outlined in the CSR Alliance progress report.

- The Spanish Employer Confederation CEOE has strongly echoed the European CSR Alliance at national level. A focus is currently put on equal opportunities and environmental issues. Future work in this process will concentrate on the identification of key issues for a series of laboratory meetings to be organised at national level.
- The German Employer Confederation BDA organised a laboratory on the topic of corporate volunteering, which resulted in a permanent dialogue between partners, now coordinated by the Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- In 2007 Confindustria published a Vademecum on CSR for SMEs, which is being promoted through local and regional seminars.
- In order to promote equality on the labour market, PKPP Lewiatan runs the framework project “Gender Index”, a tool for evaluating the level of gender equality/discrimination at corporate level and for improving policies.
- Danish Industries, together with the Danish government and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, has developed the CSR Compass, an online tool which companies can notably use to design and implement a responsible supply chain management strategy.
- The Confederation of British Industry set up a task force to look at how UK companies should tackle climate change as part of responsible behaviour in the environmental sphere and a number of concrete commitments were made.
- Under the motto “Let’s take up the challenge of diversity”, MEDEF supervises information and advice actions towards companies to facilitate integration and training of people with disabilities.

To conclude: CSR and sustainable development are taken seriously in the business world and driven further in constant dialogue with stakeholders. Business devotes a lot of energy to listening to and meeting stakeholders’ demands. This meeting is one of many which give us the evidence. In 2006, the Commission chose the right way forward to promote CSR and we think that this policy should not change with a new Commission in 2009.