



CSR MULTISTAKEHOLDER FORUM MEETING, 30 NOVEMBER 2010 PLENARY SESSION: EUROPEAN POLICY ON CSR – WHERE NEXT?

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1. *Continuing commitment of business to CSR*

- Companies remain committed to integrating CSR into their business operations and an increasing number are doing so.
- BUSINESSEUROPE members federations play an important role to ensure debate at national level and coordinate networks to spread CSR activities. They work to raise awareness and improve knowledge of CSR among Europe's companies. They support capacity and competence building among individual companies and work to ensure a strong stakeholder dialogue.
- The examples given in writing for the Forum are proof of this and these are only the tip of the iceberg.
- In the past couple of years numerous activities have been carried out, such as setting up websites, publishing brochures and developing practical tools to support companies with their CSR activities. Training programmes on CSR have been launched jointly with schools and universities to enhance knowledge about sustainability.
- BUSINESSEUROPE and its member federations remain committed to supporting companies in their efforts. We need the right approach at EU level to do this.
- This means continuing to acknowledge that CSR action is driven at company level and that it is based on voluntary commitments of companies.

2. *Policy approach of the Commission*

- The European Commission can help to increase the uptake of CSR amongst companies, by concentrating on practical activities which promote the business case of CSR.
- The approach should be to provide incentives for companies, for example explaining the business benefits of CSR.
- It should be about helping companies to develop innovative CSR practices, rather than setting strict and detailed rules which can be counter-productive.
- Regarding the issue of disclosure and reporting, many companies already disclose information on their CSR practices, including through CSR reports.
- Companies need flexibility in terms of how they communicate on and are transparent about their CSR policies. This is also to deal with the different information requirements of different stakeholders. Applying one single model is not appropriate.
- Transparency should be more about results rather than just reporting. There is a tendency for reporting to be seen as the only way for a company to include CSR in its overall business strategy. However, CSR can be very well integrated without the need for a report. For example, individual one-to-one-meetings with a company can be more important, for example for investors in some cases.



- The recently published consultation on disclosure of non-financial information should provide for an objective discussion, without pre-conceived ideas.
- The consultation should not lead to a one-size-fits-all approach, setting strict and detailed reporting requirements. This would not be appropriate given the differences between companies and the different information needs of stakeholders.
- Although other DGs may have a legitimate interest in the area of CSR, the overall competence and responsibility for the direction of EU policy on CSR should remain with DG Enterprise.
- In view of a number of different policy initiatives, more coherence and consistency is needed across the Commission, avoiding divergent or duplicating initiatives from different DGs.
- The creation of a special group of Commissioners on CSR, led by DG Enterprise, could be useful in providing consistency.

3. Further development of the European Alliance for CSR

- BUSINESSEUROPE is committed to further development of the European Alliance on CSR, which has been particularly useful in spreading CSR activities.
- We are willing to discuss with the European Commission and other stakeholders how the Alliance could be most usefully developed.
- The Alliance could bring together stakeholders at national level, to show examples of joint working. This could help actors in other countries to understand how they can work together on CSR projects.
- Another possibility is for the Alliance to provide a network for training and capacity building.
- The Alliance could also be used to raise awareness of the business case of CSR.

4. BUSINESSEUROPE suggestions for further promotion activities

- A European CSR award: This would act as an incentive for companies to highlight how they integrate CSR into their business practices and respond to the continually high demands of stakeholders. It would also encourage competition between companies, to continuously improve CSR practices.
- A central contact point for CSR in the European Commission: This would serve companies, as well as other stakeholders, to provide practical advice on CSR and how to integrate it in companies and organisations.
- Devising a new approach to move forward on CSR: Often, the current approach is to assume that companies have a responsibility beyond running a competitive and profitable business. Based on this assumption, stakeholders define what actions should be taken by companies. It would be more useful to identify the main areas where there are problems, for example environmental issues such as energy efficiency, how to manage the supply chain and human rights issues (to mention a few). Then to see what business can do to help solve these problems, working with other stakeholders. The Commission should work towards reconciling stakeholders' expectations on companies and assess whether their expectations are realistic and justified.