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SEMINAR ON THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF SMEs 26 MAY 2011

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY PHILIPPE DE BUCK, DIRECTOR GENERAL BUSINESSEUROPE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to open this seminar on internationalisation of SMEs.

When internationalisation of SMEs is mentioned, the immediate reaction may be that this theme broadly overlaps with major legislative initiatives.

For instance, legislation concerning the development of the internal market. Or the successful pursuit of trade negotiations aimed at opening third-country markets.

While this reflex is certainly correct to a large degree, it is essential to complement legislative action with **effective practical support measures**. Such measures, which BUSINESSEUROPE proposes to discuss today, help SMEs to grasp the opportunities available on foreign markets.

We are glad that eminent speakers from the European Commission and business world have agreed to talk at our seminar today. They will tell us about the current and future prospects for important support measures aimed at facilitating access to the **internal market**:

- The **European Enterprise Network**, whose aims include assisting SMEs to find strategic partners abroad. This is a service which now also encompasses the identification of partners outside the EU;
- The **European strategy for development of cluster programmes**. This is also key for SMEs, because clusters can accelerate internationalisation;
- **Certain national measures**, such as the export consortia in Italy.

A good portion of these initiatives has already been put in place by the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP). This programme runs until the end of 2013 and follow-up initiatives are currently being developed.

Consequently, our seminar today is particularly timely for discussing these themes.



To underpin export and investment activities **outside the EU**, the first challenge is to improve information on third countries' regulatory environment.

To help SMEs in this quest, a large number of public and private initiatives have been launched, for instance in the framework of the European Enterprise Network. Other actions have also been taken by chambers of commerce and European business organisation networks outside the EU.

Against that background, I would like to suggest some key questions which could be usefully addressed today during the discussion.

- Is the offer of information on the regulatory environment of our commercial partners adequate in terms of quantity and quality?
- Is it accessible on a sufficiently wide basis to all interested SMEs in Europe?
- What synergies could be developed between players providing information in order to meet the needs of SMEs more fully?
- How can we reduce the headache caused by the exponential growth in complexity of different rules and standards around the world?

Starting last year, BUSINESSEUROPE encouraged the Commission to reflect on these questions. We are pleased that they are included in the consultation paper recently published.

I also suggest that we should brainstorm on the options that might be envisaged for future Community initiatives.

I would like to thank the Commission officials who came today and agreed to clarify what is at stake with the questions posed in the consultation paper. I would also like to thank the highly qualified speakers from the private sector who will shed light on how to meet challenges, and on possible policy approaches.

The contribution of the panellists and of the audience will help BUSINESSEUROPE to prepare its response to the consultation paper.

As part of this exercise, we intend to reflect on the contribution we could make to improve intelligence on the regulatory environment in third countries. We will also examine what contribution we could make to disseminate information to SMEs.

After these introductory remarks, I am very happy to pass the floor now to Mr **Daniel Calleja Crespo, Commission SME Envoy**, who will present the strategic thinking of the Commission on support to the internationalisation of SMEs.
