



24 April 2012

EUROPEAN BUSINESS SUMMIT 26 APRIL 2012

BUSINESS LEADERS' LUNCH WITH PRESIDENT VAN ROMPUY

JÜRGEN R. THUMANN
PRESIDENT, BUSINESSEUROPE

President van Rompuy,
President De Smedt,
Mr Deblaere,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like join Jo Deblaere in thanking our distinguished guest(s), for joining us for lunch today.

We really appreciate that you have taken the time to pursue this morning's plenary debate on how skills can get Europe back to growth, and to broaden the discussion to the overall challenges and opportunities facing the European Union.

European integration, the Single market and the Euro are key for business. We are well aware of the enormous challenges facing the European Union.

In its latest forecast, the IMF foresees an increase of world GDP by 3.5% in 2012. This represents a small improvement compared to expectations in the beginning of this year. But for Europe the IMF continues to predict a mild recession (-0,3%).

We all want a European Union with more growth and more jobs. But the question is how do we get there ?

Many of the answers are well known. It is a matter of having the political vision and courage to implement difficult reforms. I assure you that business continues to lend its support.

First, we need to put our public finances in order and strengthen the Euro.

Sound public finances are not the enemy of growth and employment. They are a driving force for growth.

European countries with the best track record in terms of growth and jobs are those who consolidated their public finances.



Second, we need additional measures as part of an ambitious growth strategy.

Such a strategy has a national and a European dimension. At national level, Member States must speed up structural reforms highlighted in the country specific recommendations agreed at European level.

This is absolutely essential to unleash the potential of Europe's many innovative firms and skilled workers. And national reforms will be all the more effective if they are embedded in growth boosting measures to complete the single market.

Problems of recognition in professional qualifications are holding back the development of cross border service activities. This must be addressed. Fully developing the digital single market could increase EU GDP by up to 4%. Hence the importance of tackling the IT skills gap.

Third, when we want to go for growth we need an ambitious external trade policy. One which is moving forward global trade liberalisation, by

- strengthening the WTO rules on trade,
- negotiating mutually beneficial free trade agreements with key partner countries such as the United-States,
- by fighting protectionism,
- and ensuring access to energy or raw materials.

Finally, we need an employment friendly education and training agenda.

Let me give you this new BUSINESSEUROPE publication. We will distribute it at the closing session of EBS later today and hand it over to President Barroso.

It makes one strong plea: **Educate for employment!**

We have more than 24 million unemployed and at the same time more than 2 million unfilled job vacancies.

- Improving cooperation between education institutions and employers,
- helping students to make the right education choices,
- and developing dual learning

can do **a lot** to reduce unemployment and closing the growing skills mismatch.

Companies are more than willing to cooperate and do its utmost to give our young generation the best possible qualification to make the best out of their lives.

With this, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to give the floor to President van Rompuy.

