

6 October 2010

**OPEN DAYS OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**WORKSHOP ON “IMPLEMENTING THE SMALL BUSINESS ACT FOR EUROPE THROUGH THE EUROPEAN ENTREPRENEURIAL REGIONS LABEL”**

**COMMENTS BY PAUL JACOBS, VICE-CHAIR,  
BUSINESSEUROPE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMEs COMMITTEE**

**6 OCTOBER 2010**

1. BUSINESSEUROPE has supported the European Entrepreneurial Regions (EER) initiative since its inception in 1999, because it is completely in line with BUSINESSEUROPE's priority political message that every effort must be made to inject fresh dynamism into growth in Europe.
2. More specifically, BUSINESSEUROPE urges public authorities at the relevant levels to roll out a set of measures capable of doubling the European Union's forecast annual economic growth rate. The economic growth rate expected in the coming years for the European Union is currently around 1 % a year; what is therefore needed is a show of strategic and managerial creativity to achieve a growth rate of more than 2%.

BUSINESSEUROPE estimates that raising EU's growth potential from 1% at present to an average of 2% over the period 2010-14 could, through higher labour demand and fiscal revenue, translate into 6.5 million new jobs in the EU by 2014 and savings of more than 450 billion euro in public debt levels.

3. In its “Go for Growth” action agenda, BUSINESSEUROPE assigns very high importance to measures towards implementation of the Small Business Act (SBA). Accordingly, BUSINESSEUROPE is highly appreciative of the effort made by the Committee of the Regions to explain that implementation of SBA must be a matter not only for the Commission and Member States but also for the regions.

As can be seen from the presentations of action programmes by the six EER awarded regions of:

- Murcia,
- Brandenburg,
- Catalonia,
- Trnava,
- Helsinki-Uusimaa,
- County Kerry,



there is an extremely wide range of measures that regional authorities can deploy to improve the framework conditions in which SMEs operate, and to help develop an entrepreneurial mindset in individual citizens.

4. In the short time available to me, it is clearly not easy to highlight and comment in detail on the many cases or SME strategies presented by EER-labelled regions, such is the number of interesting initiatives that we have seen. Nevertheless, I would like to comment on two remarkable elements which emerge from the presentations and which BUSINESSEUROPE believes could certainly play a role in inspiring many other regions.
5. A first remarkable element that I noted in the presentations of the Brandenburg and Helsinki-Uusimaa regions is constituted by the comprehensive strategies developed for supporting innovation in products and services.
6. The thematic innovation environments developed by the Helsinki-Uusimaa region in the area of digital services, well-being, healthcare services and logistics reflect a very sophisticated strategic approach, which provide SMEs with highly effective development platforms for innovative services and products. Also very impressive are the nine knowledge clusters developed by the region, which place SMEs in contact with a great diversity of expertise.
7. In the case of the Brandenburg region, we can see a particularly extensive range of initiatives for encouraging innovation and creativity, including support for business incubators and support to innovative start-ups.
8. In the regions of Murcia, Trnava and Catalonia, to take another example of a remarkable feature, what is striking is the width of the regional action agenda, covering virtually the whole of SBA principles and mobilising up to 45 public and private organisations to foster entrepreneurship culture and provide services to entrepreneurs. Particularly positive is Catalonia's recourse to clearly defined quantitative objectives regarding growth of the SME size, among other things.
9. To conclude, I would like to say a word about the future development of EU cluster policy, a theme which has a fairly large interface with implementation of the principles of SBA at regional level.

For BUSINESSEUROPE, it is essential to have more worldwide clusters in Europe, to strengthen the competitiveness of our continent. The EU will need to give more attention to this challenge. At the same time, attention must continue to be given to existing clusters that have great potential to respond to the needs of the market, help develop European regions and promote sustainable development on a local scale. Strategies to develop the two types of cluster are not mutually exclusive but they may involve important trade-offs that must be analysed.

\*\*\*