



Brussels, 13 October 2016

## 4<sup>th</sup> European Parliament of Enterprises: 700+ entrepreneurs stand up for Europe

*“The time has come for businesses to reiterate their capacity and willingness to provide solutions to the challenges of today: globalisation, unemployment, unfair competition, migration and climate change.”* With these words EUROCHAMBRES` Chairman **Richard Weber** inaugurated the fourth edition of the European Parliament of Enterprises, gathering more than 700 entrepreneurs in the Hemicycle of the European Parliament in Brussels.

During the subsequent debates and votes on trade, the single market, sustainability and skills, companies called for EU policies allowing them to contribute addressing these challenges while being able to compete globally.

Entrepreneurs also rose to their feet to demonstrate their belief in the European project. Two thirds of them indicated that Brexit would harm their business.

High-level institutional representatives - including European Parliament Vice-President **Antonio Tajani**, European Commission Vice-President **Jyrki Katainen** and **Ivan Korčok** State Secretary of Slovakia - engaged with the entrepreneurs and acknowledged their demands for a more business-friendly policy environment.

EUROCHAMBRES will follow-up on the outcomes of the event to ensure that the voice of business resonates loudly along the corridors of power in Brussels and beyond.



This event is co-organised by EUROCHAMBRES and the European Parliament under the auspices of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union



## Results of votes

### SESSION 1 - TRADE

**1. Are entrepreneurs sufficiently aware about the commercial implications of EU trade agreements? 92% NO**

An overwhelming majority of entrepreneurs today expressed that they are insufficiently aware of the commercial implications of EU trade agreements. Policy makers should treat this as a warning sign to do more on the implementation side of trade together with the business community, so that benefits do not remain on paper, but translate into real jobs and real economic growth.

**2. Should SMEs have a stronger say in EU trade policy? 95% YES**

The call could not be louder, as today a huge majority of entrepreneurs expressed that SMEs need a stronger say in the EU's trade policy. Trade negotiators thus need to pay special attention to smaller businesses and ensure adequate representation of this constituency. A rigorous application of the "think small first" principle throughout and across trade agreements is the starting point.

**3. Will the granting of the market economy status to China have negative effects on European businesses? 80% YES**

Entrepreneurs are worried about the negative effects that EU business might experience as a result of granting market economy status to China. It seems imperative that policy makers retain the tools at their disposal to shield affected companies from damaging dumping or subsidies.

**4. Do rules of origin need to be simplified in order to increase the benefits of EU free trade agreements? 86% YES**

Entrepreneurs today issued a clear verdict that the current system of rules of origin in EU trade agreements needs to be simplified. Failure to do so would impede many businesses, especially smaller ones, from profiting from tariff liberalisation.

**5. In view of current criticism of potential trade agreements with the USA (TTIP) and Canada (CETA), does an effective EU trade policy matter to the competitiveness of your business? 94% YES**

Clearly trade matters for ordinary businesses! The value of the EU negotiating trade deals collectively on behalf of all EU Member States is acknowledged by the business community.

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## SESSION 2 - INTERNAL MARKET

### 1. Do national governments do enough to tackle the problem of late payments between public bodies and business? **83% NO**

A majority of European entrepreneurs take the view that the regulation on late payments is not having adequate impact. It implies that rather than legislation, the business culture, economic conditions and power imbalances in the market are the driving factors of payment behaviour, and more should be done to address them.

### 2. Is the Single Market sufficiently integrated, allowing your company to operate and compete freely? **87% NO**

Companies' perception of the Single Market has worsened since the same question was asked in 2014. The slow and sometimes incomplete implementation of directives, the inadequacy of certain instruments, the persistence of some barriers to cross-border trade and investment combine to create the obstacles that bar entrepreneurs from capitalising on the full potential of the single market. A wake-up call to the European Commission and Member States.

### 3. Do administrative, legislative or fiscal exemptions discourage businesses from scaling up their activities? **82% YES**

SMEs must be treated as the rule, not the exception in policy-making at EU and national level. With 99% of businesses in the EU being SMEs, it is essential that legislation is conceived from their point of view, in accordance with the "Think Small First" principle. This would avoid the disincentives to company expansion that exemptions sometimes unintentionally create.

### 4. Is a lack of information on rules and requirements a significant obstacle to trading in other EU member states? **88% YES**

This demonstrates that there is still a long way to go in terms of assisting companies in their plans to expand throughout the EU. Small businesses don't have the resources to deal with the current patchwork of rules. In the absence of a fully-fledged single market, companies should at least have access to accurate and succinct information about local rules.

### 5. I search for finance across the EU, not only in my own country **51% NO**

This split outcome suggests a diverse financial landscape in Europe. Half of entrepreneurs only use national financing either through choice or necessity, while half look beyond their own country. Much needs to be done to create a genuine 'capital markets union'.

### 6. Do you agree that online traders should be legally obliged to sell to consumers throughout the EU? **59% NO**

With a mixed vote, businesses point out that they cherish what the single market has to offer and that they want to trade beyond the borders of their home market. Even if it is the Commission's objective to allow better access for consumers and business to online goods and services across Europe, it is highly questionable whether imposing an obligation to sell is the correct way to go about it since it fails to address the underlying barriers to cross-border trading.

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### SESSION 3 - SUSTAINABILITY

**1. Are national support schemes an adequate instrument to support renewables? 59% NO**

The outcome of the vote revealed divided views among entrepreneurs, mainly caused by different national situations. While some voters anticipate significant efficiency gains by harmonising support schemes for renewables, others fear that a European approach could raise the relatively low energy prices in their countries.

**2. Should energy audits become mandatory for SMEs? 74% NO**

Entrepreneurs clearly oppose mandatory energy audits for SMEs. Although small businesses consider it helpful that standards and management tools are promoted, it should be left to the entrepreneur to decide which instrument to use.

**3. Do you expect the EU economy to benefit from the measures proposed in the Circular Economy Package? 85% YES**

Entrepreneurs are fully committed to closing the loop. Most elements of the package are considered vital in bringing the circular economy project forward. It is now up to the European institutions to turn the strategy into legislation that will ultimately benefit the environment while at the same time creating jobs and growth in Europe.

**4. Would more complex environmental design standards undermine the global competitiveness of European products? 82% YES**

Entrepreneurs fear that excessive design standards could limit the innovative capacity of European businesses and put them behind international competitors. It is thus crucial to find a balance between such standards and entrepreneurial freedom that allows innovation, unique product design and high quality.

**5. Do you believe there is significant demand for more green products? 86% YES**

The positive vote confirms that markets for environmentally friendly goods are growing and suggests that consumers increasingly opt for green products. As high demand is the most effective driver for green investments, the EU and national governments should increase their efforts to promote sustainable lifestyles.

**6. Should there be mandatory environmental criteria in public procurement? 71% YES**

Entrepreneurs want environmental criteria to be factored into public procurement procedures. This confirms that most EU businesses are willing to provide information about the high sustainability standards of their products and processes. In many cases, the consideration of 'green criteria' even provides a competitive advantage vis-à-vis producers from third countries.

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European Parliament Hemicycle, Brussels Thursday 13 October 2016

## SESSION 4 - SKILLS

### 1. Should work-based learning be integral to all initial vocational education & training programmes? **98% YES**

This vote confirms the importance that the business community attaches to combining practical experience with theory. Few students, even in vocational training (VET), currently have the opportunity to spend time in a company. Parallel measures to increase the attractiveness and visibility of work-based learning are needed.

### 2. Would you be willing to host a refugee in your business as a trainee or apprentice? **90% YES**

The vast majority of the MEPEs are ready to host a refugee in their business. Some of them are already doing so. Apart from the humanitarian benefit, EU entrepreneurs recognise that welcoming refugees is also potentially beneficial to their business as they seek to fill vacancies and address specific skills requirements, significant challenges in some member states due to demographic changes. Now structures need to be put in place to allow this to happen.

### 3. Is it harder to recruit staff with the right skills than five years ago? **75% YES**

18% more entrepreneurs voted 'yes' on this questions compared to the 2010 edition of the EPE. This reveals a growing skills mismatch and an alarming policy failure given that the EU is still struggling to overcome high levels of unemployment, particularly among young people.

### 4. Is a "skills guarantee" an efficient tool in reducing unemployment? **55% YES**

The mixed outcome suggests that while entrepreneurs are worried about the high number of low skilled adults, only a small majority believes that a "skills guarantee" is an effective response to this problem.

### 5. Should entrepreneurship education be introduced at all levels of formal education? **94% YES**

MEPEs want a firm commitment from EU member states to introduce entrepreneurial skills training in the curricula of all forms and levels of education. Entrepreneurship is a skill that can be learnt and can be of benefit to all, not just future entrepreneurs.

### 6. Does a lack of transparency between national qualification systems discourage you from employing staff from other Member States? **64% YES**

This vote underlines that differences between education and training systems in the EU make it difficult for employers to assess the knowledge and skills of people with a qualification from another country. Efforts are required to improve transparency between different member states' qualifications, both general and vocational.

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