



COMMUNICATING EUROPE

SHARING THE VISION, DELIVERING THE RESULTS

5-6 OCTOBER 2006, THESSALONIKI, GREECE



Session de clôture Message final

Minister, Prefect, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by saying how happy I am with this conference.

I am happy for 2 good reasons:

The first is that we have heard some really excellent speeches over the past two days; we have engaged in some animated – and constructive! – debates; and we have been treated like *royalty* by our Greek hosts.

The second reason is that this year, I was very pleased to not have to engage in the process of being elected President of EUROCHAMBRES!

While Stavangar was also an excellent congress last year, I admit that the very stiff competition offered by the other Presidential candidates made last year's congress a rather more tense event for me...



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However, more seriously, having been elected as President of EUROCHAMBRES from the start of this year, I have enjoyed learning more and more about the activities of Chambers throughout Europe.

And, *this* conference has reinforced my view that – when we act together – there is no other network that can offer business as much added value as Chambers of Commerce and Industry! Whether you look at the huge number of tangible support services offered by local Chambers to their immediate communities, or whether you look at the lobbying that happens at national and EU levels on the key business issues of the day, there is no other organisation - or group of organisations - that offers so much.

This is just as well, for there are some formidable challenges facing Europe.

Our theme, over these past 2 days, has been “Communicating Europe: Sharing the Vision, Delivering the Results”. Let us consider each of these topics briefly.



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“Share the vision”. Can we really say that we share the vision? Can we say that all politicians share a single vision of how Europe, and specifically the EU, should develop? Can we say that workers from Poland and Estonia share the same vision of the EU as workers from France, Spain or Ireland? Or that company owner managers in the UK share the same vision of the Union as owner managers in Germany or Greece?

It seems clear that membership of the European Union means very different things to different people. Recent debates about the free movement of people throughout the expanded EU-27 show huge differences of opinion. Ongoing discussions about the need to protect national champions compared to allowing the market to determine who survives highlights key differences of vision. And, the defeat of the constitution in France and the Netherlands showed that the majority of people in those countries – and, unfortunately, maybe in others – did not share the ‘constitutional’ vision that has been proposed – and accepted – by many other countries.



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I do not wish to suggest that everyone must agree with everyone else! This would be a recipe for disaster. But I do believe that it is important to have a clear vision of what sort of Europe we seek to build – it is important to agree the correct principles and desired outcomes and then to stick to them. Then, by all means, let us argue about the best way of *achieving* those objectives...

Regrettably, what we seem to witness now is a lack of common vision, which leads us inexorably towards falling numbers of voters at election time, institutional bickering and constitutional gridlock.

Lady and gentlemen, the citizens and businesses of Europe deserve better!

“Deliver the results”. EUROCHAMBRES has, like many others, been very critical concerning the lack of results under the Lisbon – or “Growth and Jobs” – agenda. We will continue to do so for as long as we feel Governments delay making the necessary reforms to their labour markets, public



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services, procurement procedures and we will continue to do so for as long as Member States delay in implementing the legislation that makes up the Single Market.

That said, we are pleased to note the recent upturn in the eurozone economies – this is very welcome news after years of stagnation or limited growth.

But we should not be lulled into any false sense of achievement. Growth is still weak, unemployment in many countries remains very high, and the global economic outlook is far from stable. Add to this mix the rapidly aging populations of most European countries and the continued emergence of China and India as huge, competitive economies, and the challenges facing Europe become clearer.

We must deliver the results. But not only today. We must also deliver the results for the future, and that means addressing the demographic issues now, sorting out state and other pension plans, managing migration flows in a sensible and sensitive manner, creating and supporting more



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young firms, investing in innovation and training, and supporting our European firms abroad.

If we can do this, if we can persuade our national and European politicians to share a common vision, to take political decisions that address the long as well as short term, and if we – as an influential, grassroots network – help them, then I am sure that communicating Europe will no longer be the problem issue that it is today. That is the challenge facing us.

But, I believe we are well placed to face that challenge!

We have a huge network. 2,000 Chambers spread between 44 countries. Over 18 million member firms. Each year, we train more than 2½ million people and help 1 million firms to go international and we assist more than ½ million firms to start-up in business.

We should be proud of these achievements, but we should not be content with them.



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If, like me, you have attended some of the different sessions and workshops during this congress, you will have heard of specific Chamber initiatives that are changing the way we support business. You will have heard good and best practices that re-define how members – and non-members! – are viewing Chambers.

We must learn from one another! We must use the EUROCHAMBRES network to the full effect, and make sure that we bring back to our Chambers ideas that can be implemented immediately as well as contacts that can be deepened in the future!

As President of EUROCHAMBRES, I commit this organisation's energy to helping YOU to succeed on behalf of your member firms. I commit to following up on the recommendations and proposals that you have made during the two days, and I commit to meeting Commissioners, Prime Ministers and Members of the European Parliament to put before them your demands in terms of how they support European enterprise through new legislation, programs and old rules.



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In this regard, I appreciate the inputs that you have made to EUROCHAMBRES' manifesto document. We will reflect on all that we have heard here in Thessaloniki, and will adapt the manifesto to reflect the changes needed before we set out to disseminate it widely to European and national institutions.

Finally, I would like to thank our Greek hosts for helping to manage this congress. Their organisation has been top class, and the warmth and hospitality extended to us by George Kassimatis, Dimitrios Bakatselos, Emmanuil Vlachogiannis and all their teams has been fantastic!

So, we really thank you for inviting us here, we thank you for introducing us to the charms of Thessaloniki and we thank you for the wonderful memories we will carry home. Epharisto! (you lead the applause)

I would like to thank our speakers, panellists and moderators - for informing us, for entertaining us and for enlivening the debates we had. We appreciate the time you took to prepare for this congress, and to present your views.



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Allow me also take this opportunity to thank the many sponsors of the congress – without your support we simply could not afford to have offered all participants the programme that we have all enjoyed. We appreciate your support, and hope that your businesses continue to flourish in the future!

Arnaldo and EUROCHAMBRES staff – for their part in bringing us all together for this congress, and for their work throughout the year... I want address a very special thanks to Marie-Elisabeth Rusling and her Congress team : Marie, you can sleep well now with the feeling of a very good accomplished work !

Most of all, I want to thank YOU – for your attendance, your support, your commitment to fighting for a better business environment for all enterprises throughout Europe!

I wish you all a safe return home, and I look forward to welcoming you to Paris next year for the 2007 Annual Congress of EUROCHAMBRES.

Thank you.