

**2009 REVIEW MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN
MULTISTAKEHOLDER FORUM ON CSR
10 TH FEBRUARY 2009**

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GENERAL REMARKS

The question of CSR is not a new concept in the world of enterprises and thus for chambers of commerce and industry. European chambers of commerce have a longstanding commitment to CSR and many SMEs already do CSR on their own initiative. However, operating in local markets, they rarely communicate their activities in a formal way and often do not even know that their activities are actually part of this concept called “CSR”. Being put off by the jargon they prefer to do the “right thing” without doing too much public relation for themselves.

EUROCHAMBRES believes that the voluntary component of codes of conduct is essential to win support, legitimacy and the necessary flexibility that is needed for any kind of CSR. A convergence of standards, codes and frameworks will not necessarily help businesses to improve and enforce their social performance. A coercive approach would stifle genuine CSR development in companies, not least in SMEs, and would not encourage them to develop tailor-made CSR or intervene beyond the minimum standard required.

EUROCHAMBRES’ CSR ACTIVITIES 2007/2008

CAESAR project - Mainstreaming CSR among SMEs (2006-2007)

*A EUROCHAMBRES initiative, financially supported by the European Union's
"Mainstreaming CSR among SMEs" programme.*

Details:

- Project launched: May 2006
- Total budget: ca € 223629

- Duration: 12 months
- Target groups: Chambers of Commerce from various European Countries
- Final beneficiaries: the business community (particularly SMEs) of the participating countries

Main activities:

1. CSR training forum

Achievements:

- ✓ 48 Chamber experts benefited from tailor made CSR training and ready to give personalized CSR guidance to SMEs.
- ✓ A new network of CSR experts

2. CSR company visits

Achievements:

- ✓ Useful advice on CSR to 200 SMEs from experienced and successfully trained CSR advisors
- ✓ Strong multiplier effect and sustainability through cooperation with Chambers of Commerce
- ✓ Many good practices were communicated and developed together with the SMEs and adapted to the specific needs of the company.

3. Practical guidelines manual

Achievements:

- ✓ The manual has been made available to every Chamber (approximately 1600 regional and local Chambers of Commerce in 29 European countries) inviting them to use it and also to access the Chambers' CSR web Portal.
- ✓ Good CSR practices from different Chambers of Commerce have been selected and presented in the guidelines manual, as well as the contact details of the respective CCI.

CASE project – Chambers towards Acquis Support & business Ethics (ongoing: 2007-2009)

CASE is a EUROCHAMBRES' initiative launched in November 2007. It is an 18-month programme co- financed by the European Commission under Business Support Programme 2006 to help business communities in Croatia, Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria, successfully manage the economic integration process with the EU.

<http://www.eurochambres.eu/content/Default.asp?PageID=176>

Details:

- Project launched: **November 2007**
- Total budget: ca € 880 000
- Duration: 18 months
- Target groups: Chambers of Commerce in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey
- Final beneficiaries: the business communities (particularly SMEs and start ups) of the beneficiary countries

Main objectives:

- To increase significantly the level of awareness of companies in the beneficiary countries on the implementation of relevant *acquis communautaire*;
- To ensure that Chambers of Commerce, as leading business organisations, have the capacity and tools to guide them in that process.

Main activities:

I. Development and implementation of the Acquis Audit:

II. Introduction of a corporate and social responsibility (CSR) strategy among young entrepreneurs:

- A CSR information campaign and training.
- Approx. 100 company visits to support the integration of a CSR strategy

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ACTIONS AT CHAMBER NETWORK LEVEL

(Example)

- Quadrant BEL (2007-2008) - / Belgian chambers of commerce

‘CSR without frontiers’:

The project was based on the concept of the “learning network” with which the Belgian local CCIs are very familiar. The first project Quadrant was started in 2004 in Voka – Kamer van Koophandel Oost-Vlaanderen.

The aim of the project Quadrant BEL was to roll out the concept within the whole Belgian local CCIs network creating 2 parallel learning networks organised simultaneously:

- chambers / multipliers (organized by the Federation – FCCIB) (goal: CSR training of Belgian local CCI to define a Chamber action plan)
- companies (organized by the Belgian Chambers of Commerce participating in the project, mainly focused on SMEs)

Main activities:

- Learning together in learning networks, with a variety of companies. Including companies from the social economy and non-social economy covering various sectors, mainly SMEs.
- Efficient mentoring. Each entrepreneur had to choose a mentee within a group to help him/ her in the implementation of CSR actions. At the same time this entrepreneur himself was a mentee of another entrepreneur.
- The identification and implementation of CSR actions (within companies and Chambers)
- **The project will be continued for a second year (2009 – 2010).**
- Publication of an attractive and practical dissemination tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Outlook for 2009 and beyond

- There are things SMEs can learn from big companies but SMEs should find their own way to do CSR

Large enterprises are not necessarily models for SMEs. It is essential to make a distinction between issues faced by SMEs and in particular small and micro enterprises and the ones faced by bigger enterprises in relation to CSR. We believe a common approach irrespective of company size would increase fixed costs for SMEs, penalising their competitiveness without necessarily gaining any ground in social cohesion and compliance.

- Exchange of experience and good practices on CSR should continue

It is crucial to rapidly and massively raise knowledge among all enterprises on issues related to CSR. The business case for CSR needs to be established, in order to identify effects derived from CSR. Developing strategies and putting them into action can be a time consuming process. The discussions of the best practices in the MSF clearly showed that the presented cases are the result of a long period of trial and error until the adequate strategy was found and partnership established.

- The right balance between sustainable development initiatives and the overarching objective of competitiveness agenda must be ensured

CSR must be a flexible instrument. One main target of CSR is to work together in new forms of partnerships to generate win-win situations for all partners. The importance of creating practical “low level approaches” has to be stressed, which implies creating an environment where companies learn practically about CSR from one another.