



# Priorities for the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU

June 2018

The Austrian Presidency semester marks a crucial period in the reflections on the **Future of Europe**. EUROCHAMBRES welcomes this process and is actively engaged, but while debate is good, delivery is of course better! Chambers want a Europe that is fit for business, combining a **solid internal market** in terms of homogeneity and rules with **external strength** in relation to global competition and opportunities. To achieve this, the EU must be *'big on big things and small on small things'*, respecting the principle of subsidiarity.

We urge the Austrian Presidency to push for a more comprehensive engagement of member states in the EU policy process. It is crucial that **EU policy is transferred from the negotiating table to the market place**. National governments and agencies must ensure that legislation is transposed and implemented in a timely, business-friendly, non-burdensome and coherent manner at national and regional level, without gold-plating or distortion. If not, they must be held to account by the Commission.

The Austrian Presidency should steer discussions among members states on the Commission's encouraging proposal for the **next Multiannual Financial Framework** in a positive direction. Necessary funds must in particular be ensured for drivers of innovation, skills and competitiveness within the package, notably Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, InvestEU and the Digital Europe and Single Market programmes. Tax paying businesses and citizens require value for money from the EU budget, so the new period must also bring **huge improvements in administrative efficiency** to ensure that more of the funds reach end beneficiaries, rather than being absorbed on paperwork.

We look to the Austrian Presidency also to lead a discussion on how surplus funds from the current EU programming period could be effectively reallocated. EUROCHAMBRES proposes

specifically the establishment of an **integration grant** to support in particular SMEs to integrate migrants and the long-term unemployed from across the EU in their workforce. Such a grant would enable SMEs to contribute further to two significant socio-economic challenges and at the same time address widespread skills shortages.

Europe's **economic stability, resilience to crises and competitiveness** must be a priority for each EU Presidency terms, and the Austrian semester should be no exception. Strengthening the single currency, counteracting speculation and developing the European Stability Mechanism into a European Monetary Fund are important elements in Europe's economic security architecture. This must be coupled with better economic governance and accelerated convergence through a consistently rigorous approach to the implementation of structural reforms across the member states.

The Austrian Presidency should build bridges both internally and externally to **enhance the European spirit and identity**: internally, through greater cohesion of European countries and a reinforced commitment to the four freedoms of the single market; externally, through a united economic position in relation to third countries and in support of the rules-based multilateral trading system, as well as the active pursuit of free trade agreements in all parts of the world.

**Policy-makers don't create growth and jobs, entrepreneurs do**, but policy-makers must ensure favourable framework conditions for growth. This rationale must be at the heart of the debate on the future of Europe and, more importantly, at the heart of EU policy-making and delivery, both during and beyond the Austrian Presidency semester.

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