

### Mixed outcome from WTO Ministerial Conference for European business



Photo: © WTO

With trade slowing and rising protectionism, the 26-29 February 13<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi (MC13) came at a critical juncture for the global economy. Eurochambres Head of International Trade, Dominic Boucsein, was on the ground to represent the European chamber network.

MC13 delivered mixed results. On the positive side, and one of the most immediate priorities for the chamber network, was the extension of the e-commerce moratorium, which ministers agreed to extend for a 2-year period until at least March 2026, despite initial opposition from several major emerging economies. While a more permanent solution would have been preferred, another 2-year extension still takes away considerable uncertainty and avoids extra costs that would have come were the moratorium to have lapsed and allowed countries to levy tariffs on electronic transmissions. Equally positive has been the entry into force of the Joint Initiative on Domestic Services Regulation, which provides new rules that will simplify and enhance the predictability in the trade in services.

Unfortunately, however, some other important forward-looking elements that the WTO needs to address were not agreed or advanced in a manner that chambers had hoped for, due to the divergent positions in the WTO membership. These issues include agriculture, but also subsidies, whether that is in relation to fishery leading to unsustainable overfishing, or for industrial sectors. The ongoing paralysis of the Appellate Body at the WTO is also challenging. Eurochambres will continue to call for further efforts to advance the agenda for rules-based trade globally in the months and years to come.

More info: Dominic Boucsein, Head of international Trade  
Policy, [boucsein@eurochambres.eu](mailto:boucsein@eurochambres.eu)

## Deepen the single market to enhance Europe's competitiveness



Eurochambres CEO Ben Butters and counterparts from other leading business associations met on 29 February the European Commission's Deputy Secretary General Elisabeth Werner and high-level officials from key services to discuss enduring barriers to the single market and other competitiveness related priorities.

Building on the findings of the [Eurochambres 2024 Single Market Survey](#), Mr. Butters underlined the need to strengthen the implementation and enforcement of EU legislation. He also reiterated that this effort must be accompanied by a strategy focused on reducing regulatory burdens and reporting requirements.

Additional recommendations on how to achieve this can be found in this [joint business statement](#).

More info: Frederico Martins, Senior Policy Advisor for Single Market, [martins@eurochambres.eu](mailto:martins@eurochambres.eu)

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## Eurochambres meets with European Commission to address SMEs' GDPR concerns



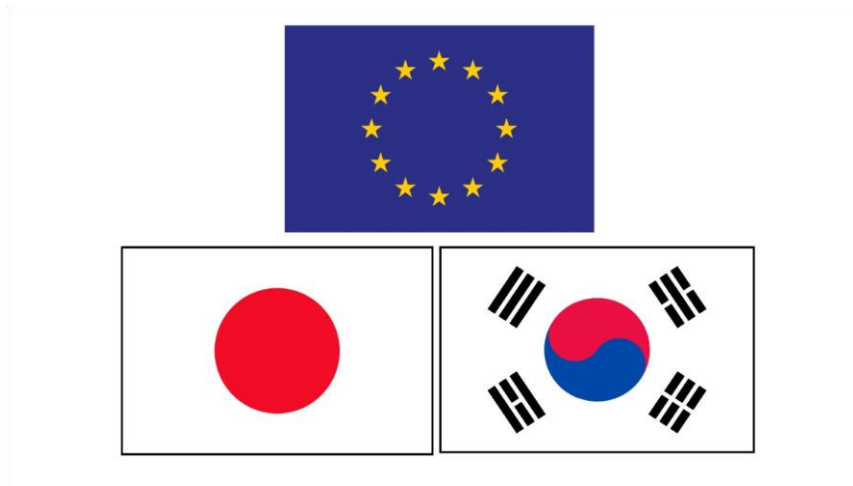
The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was considered one of the most significant pieces of information society legislation when it was under negotiation and adopted in the early-mid 2010s. It was clear that it would have considerable implications for the business community in particular, so chambers have followed closely its impact since it entered into force in 2018. With this in mind, Eurochambres and representatives from national chambers of commerce and industry were pleased to contribute to the European Commission's recent call for evidence on the application and review of the GDPR and to meet officials from the European Commission on 6 March for a detailed discussion.

Chamber representatives highlighted the importance of fostering harmonisation within the single market, improving legal certainty for international data transfers, providing more practical guidance for businesses, and making the GDPR more SME-friendly.

More info: Kerstin Hubmer, Policy Advisor for Digitalisation, [hubmer@eurochambres.eu](mailto:hubmer@eurochambres.eu)

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### Facilitating EU trade with Japan and the Republic of Korea



The EU Business Hub to Japan and the Republic of Korea project is a programme financed by the EU. It aims to strengthen the presence and visibility of EU companies in the Republic of Korea and Japan through an increase and diversification of export and investments and more resilient, green, and digital value chains.

The new action will organize 20 business missions/ matchmaking events (10 in Japan and 10 in Korea) during the 4 years. Each mission will serve a minimum of 50 EU companies active in the following sectors: (1) Green & sustainable technologies, (2) Digital solutions, (3) Healthcare & medical equipment. Each mission will last five days. Selected companies will be given access to standard assistance, as well as customized individual business services provided in the target countries.

Duration: 48 months – 04.12.2023-03.12.2027

Interested chambers can contact us for more information:

- Nicoletta Favaretto: [favaretto@eurochambres.eu](mailto:favaretto@eurochambres.eu)
  - Ana Sarateanu: [sarateanu@eurochambres.eu](mailto:sarateanu@eurochambres.eu)
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## Industrial policy key element of Europe's competitive edge



Industrial policy is key for the competitiveness of Europe's economy and SMEs provide an indispensable contribution to every industrial ecosystem. These were the main messages delivered by Eurochambres CEO Ben Butters during the Council of the EU Industry Working Party discussion organised by the Belgian Presidency on 1 March.

With Mario Draghi's important report on the future of European competitiveness, Mr Butters stressed the inextricable link between industrial policy and European competitiveness, the subject of an important forthcoming report by Mario Draghi. He called for SMEs to be at the centre of the strategy for industrial transformation, reflecting their added value in relation to innovation and competitiveness. Linked to this, the scaleup of entrepreneurial initiatives and smaller, early-stage companies must be supported.

The chamber network continues to advocate for a more coherent and integrated EU industrial policy to factor in the contribution of SMEs to the European economy.

More info: Giacomo Fersini, Economic Policy Advisor, [fersini@eurochambres.eu](mailto:fersini@eurochambres.eu)

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## Navigating EU Consumer Law



On 5 March, Consumer Law Ready Next organised a Stakeholders Workshop, where Lead Trainers from EU member states discussed the training concept and upcoming trends, with a Training of Trainers scheduled for 26 March.

CLR Next, the new phase of the Consumer Law Ready project funded by the European Commission, began in December 2023 and will continue until the end of May 2025. Consumer Law Ready, an EU-wide training programme for SMEs, equips businesses with essential knowledge of EU consumer law, covering areas such as customer complaints, litigation prevention, and enhanced customer service. Developed by European Commission-approved experts, the programme addresses various aspects of SME trading, and its content is available in 28 languages, tailored to the consumer legislation of each country.



More info: [info@consumerlawready.eu](mailto:info@consumerlawready.eu)

## NETWORK NEWS

### Championing equality: Eurochambres Women Network event in Zagreb



On 7 March, more than 30 women entrepreneurs and managers met in Zagreb for an event organised by the Croatian Chamber of Economy and the Eurochambres Women Network. The event fostered discussion among participants on gender equality measures taken in companies and allowed an exchange of best practices on the matter.

In view of the entry into force of the EU directive 2022/2381 on women on boards (transposition deadline 28 December 2024), it is interesting to assess the current state of play among companies led by women or who count women among their managers, to see what concrete measures entrepreneurs may take to ensure a higher degree of gender equality in their companies.

The opening of the event featured interventions by the host, Marina Rožić, Secretary General of the Croatian Chamber of Economy, Martha Schultz, Vice President of Eurochambres and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, and Tiziana Pompei, Deputy Secretary-General of Unioncamere. They presented activities implemented in their respective chambers aimed at supporting the presence of women in business leadership positions.

More info: Giulia Rocchi, Member Relations Manager, [rocchi@eurochambres.eu](mailto:rocchi@eurochambres.eu)

## COMING UP

### Eurochambres Congress 2024: Navigating new horizons, creating opportunities



From 12 to 14 June, the Eurochambres Congress 2024 will gather chamber leaders in the beautiful and dynamic city of Antwerp. Coming just a few days after the European Parliament elections, the congress will be an opportunity for senior chamber management and members to exchange on the political and economic context and consider their role in driving the competitiveness of the business community.

More than an event, this congress is a collaborative hub fostering knowledge exchange, strategic alliances, and the sharing of best practices among chamber leaders. Engage during insightful plenaries with prominent speakers, interactive workshops, and networking sessions tailored for chamber management and members. Join this influential gathering where ideas converge, partnerships thrive, and the competitiveness of the European business community is strengthened.

Visit our website for more information and [secure your registration](#).

More info: Roxana Dediu, Events and Communications Officer, [dediu@eurochambres.eu](mailto:dediu@eurochambres.eu)

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### Eurochambres event on the business perspective towards EU enlargement



Eurochambres will organise on 20 March in Brussels (Residence Palace, 155 rue de la Loi, 1000 Brussels) from 9.30 to 12.30 an event on the business perspective towards EU enlargement. EU policymakers and the business community from both the EU and the candidate and potential candidate countries will discuss the economic opportunities and challenges of EU enlargement.

This will provide an opportunity for the business community to contribute actively to the current debate on EU enlargement.

Eurochambres will present the results of two comprehensive surveys on EU enlargement conducted in the candidate and potential candidate countries and in the EU.

Visit our website for more information and secure your registration: [Conference on EU enlargement: the business perspective - Eurochambres](#)

More info: Juliette Loppé, Senior Policy Advisor on Neighbourhood and Enlargement, [loppe@eurochambres.eu](mailto:loppe@eurochambres.eu)

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**EU4Business**

Funded by the European Union

**The SME and BSO Tour focused on Digital Marketing and Social Media**

✦ Tallinn, Estonia  
✦ 20-24 May 2024

EUROCHAMBRES

Eu4Business: Connecting Companies (EU4BCC) project will organise an SME and BSO Tour to Estonia focused on digital marketing and social media, from 20 May to 24 May.

The tour will host 40 participants, including representatives from SMEs and BSOs (business support organisations). Participants will have the opportunity to explore Estonia's dynamic ecosystem, learning cutting-edge digital marketing strategies and networking with experts, startups, and European businesses. Designed for marketing and communications experts from the Eastern Partnership countries who are employed in SMEs or BSOs, the tour includes interactive workshops, training sessions, B2B meetings and participation in Latitude59, the Baltics' premier startup and tech event.

Applications for the SME and BSO Tour to Estonia are now open. Interested professionals are encouraged to apply early, as participants will be selected on a rolling basis.

[Register here.](#)

More info: Laura Velasco, Senior Project Officer, [velasco@eurochambres.eu](mailto:velasco@eurochambres.eu)



Eurochambres – the association of European chambers of commerce and industry – represents approximately 20 million businesses in over 40 countries and via a European network of 1700 regional and local chambers. Chambers' member businesses employ over 120 million people.

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Eurochambres | Avenue des Arts 19 A/D | B-1000 Brussels - Belgium

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