

Innovative Entrepreneurship Roundtable

European Parliament, 22nd January 2014



The European-Turkish Business Confederation (UNITEE) represents, at the European level, entrepreneurs and business professionals with a migrant background (New Europeans). In that respect, one of UNITEE's main goals is to bring the central asset its members possess to light. These are namely a dual linguistic and cultural background that can bring added-value to Europe's innovation and thus facilitate economic growth, helping Europe tackling some of its most severe problems.

On Wednesday, 22nd January 2014, UNITEE, in close cooperation with its German federation BUV, organised a roundtable discussion at the European Parliament in Brussels dedicated to *Innovative Entrepreneurship*. Conveyed to the event were the General Secretaries from the associations coordinated by BUV in Central, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Area, New European entrepreneurs as well as experts and MEPs for an in depth discussion on the importance of European SMEs for innovation and job creation.

SPEAKERS

Moderator: **Dr Adem Kumcu**, President of UNITEE

Önder Kurt, General Secretary of BUV

Dr Joanne Drake, Director SMEs competitiveness, DG Enterprise and Industry, European Commission

László Surján MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament. Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament

Ana Gomes MEP, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

Salvador Sedó MEP, Group of the European People's Party in the European Parliament

Ivo Vajgl MEP, Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the European Parliament

António Fernando Correia de Campos MEP, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

Manuel Lopez, Director Fibratex

Dr Adem Kumcu, President of UNITEE, opened the roundtable by outlining the course of action for the 2h long discussion.

Dr Kurt introduced the roundtable on innovative entrepreneurship by pointing out the importance of entrepreneurial diversity for the European project.

Dr Kumcu continued, during the first keynote speech, presenting the Europe 2020 strategy launched in March 2010. Almost four years after its introduction, the new strategy is of course difficult to evaluate: it did not help us to overcome the crisis so far, with a GDP that stagnated last year, unemployment rate expected to stay at 12,2% in 2014 in the euro zone, and an ongoing debt crisis. Dr Kumcu stated that Europe still has the time and the resources to turn this strategy into a success until 2020, and make it a long term achievement. He pointed out that there is a need to create an innovation-friendly environment that makes it easier for great ideas to be turned into products and services.

Mr Surján MEP continued highlighting the importance of social responsibility. He believes that for innovative entrepreneurship to blossom, an open society that is willing to take risks is needed, otherwise very few results are to be expected. He finished his speech by criticising the small percentage of European budget dedicated to Research & Innovation and the importance to change this situation.

Ms Drake started off stressing the importance of entrepreneurship. The Eurobarometer 2012 showed that only 37% of Europeans prefer self-employment to employment, compared to 51% in the US and 56% in China. Ms Drake insisted on the need to proactively increase the appetite for entrepreneurship. We have to actively engage in giving skills, knowledge and aptitudes to young people, already at a very early age at school.

In response to that, Ms Drake talked about the Entrepreneurship Action Plan launched by the European Commission in January 2013. The call for collective action between the involved stakeholders is based on 3 pillars: firstly, by providing entrepreneurial education and training both at secondary and university level. Secondly, by creating an environment where entrepreneurs can flourish and grow; thirdly, by providing role models inspiring the younger generation.

Ms Drake continued talking about migrant entrepreneurship and innovation and pointed out two reasons why migrant entrepreneurship should be encouraged: the need for more entrepreneurs, and migrants being human bridges across countries and cultures and therefore representing a powerful force for innovation across all sectors of the economy.

Ms Drake introduced three support tools offered by the European Commission: first, the programme COSME that facilitates the access to finance for SMEs thorough different financial instruments as well as the 'SME instrument' included in the Horizon 2020.

On this note Mr Correia de Campos added the Eurostars programme, as a part of the 'SMEs Instrument'.

Second, the Erasmus for young entrepreneurs, which is a programme that helps to finance the mobility and relationship-building of entrepreneurs across countries.

Finally, the Enterprise-Europe Network, an instrument that provides information to SMEs on EU funding, EU legislation, help cross-border business corporation, R&D and technology transfer, as well as aid for internationalisation outside of the EU.

The roundtable went on giving place to some practical experience from Mr Lopez, entrepreneur and owner of FIBRATEC. Mr Lopez, an entrepreneur with great international experience, explained how he went on from being bankrupt with his first business, over 20 years ago, to become a very successful entrepreneur today.

Mr Lopez highlighted the benefits of joining the entrepreneurial association GLOCALRED as a great platform for bringing together entrepreneurs from all over the world. He concluded by sharing his impressions of the two-day event: a truly enriching experience, due to new impulses and networking opportunities with other entrepreneurs.

Mr Kurt insisted on the need to find a solution on the existing information asymmetry so that information gets to entrepreneurs. He went on by highlighting the key role of entrepreneurial associations on working on effective distance between entrepreneurs and institutions, and concluded by saying that entrepreneurial associations such as UNITEE and BUV are able and ready to support European integration.

Ms Gomes MEP insisted on the definite lack of finance and criticised the fact that SMEs and their interests have been neglected while big companies were protected at the expenses of SMEs.

The EU is in a very difficult moment. Disappointment and increasingly strong populist groups to the right and left threaten Europe's unity. In the view of the upcoming elections we need to be very critical and offer correct solutions to what is going wrong.

Ms Gomes concluded by highlighting the important role of organisations such as UNITEE, as well as the importance of not wasting the competences of women entrepreneurs.

Mr Sedó MEP pointed out that we need to help SMEs to innovate and specially work against bureaucracy and administrative burdens.

There is a need to ask the financial systems, companies and administrations to invest more in start-ups, like in the US, and give support to entrepreneurship. Mr Sedó added that we need to change minds and insist on the fact that failing is not a problem. The education system, from a young age, is the starting point to create an entrepreneurial attitude and culture.

Mr Sedó concluded by recalling the strong necessity to give a positive message regarding the meaning of the upcoming European Elections 2014.



*The UNITEE Team wish to thank all the participants
for their valuable contribution to this event!*

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