

Interview with Eurochambres' Sustainability Committee Chair, Antonia Bozic Cerar, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia

What is the main priority of the Sustainability Committee for the remainder of 2024?

On one hand, the primary focus will be on overseeing the completion and implementation of the extensive new green legislation. Concerns have been raised that these legislative requirements may increase administrative burdens and costs, thereby hindering competitiveness. Beyond the financial implications, additional administrative demands will significantly impact both SMEs and authorities, which are already struggling with limited human resources to handle new demands and enhanced information and reporting requirements. The successful, practical implementation of the Net Zero Industry Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act, through expedited permitting and investment, is crucial. These measures could pave the way for economic growth, improved environmental performance, and a prosperous society. However, they must be complemented by a broader competitiveness agenda.

On the other hand, the upcoming EU elections and the formation of the new commission will be a key focus. The 2024-2029 EU term must address the increasing number of regulations that are burdening businesses and restricting their ability to plan and invest. Policymakers need to be as flexible, innovative, and adaptable as entrepreneurs. Specifically, Eurochambres is advocating for a comprehensive review of the Green Deal legislation to ensure it aligns with goals of economic growth and competitiveness.

What are your expectations for the next commission's mandate concerning sustainability?

The business case for the green transition must be strengthened. Financing sustainability will only be possible if Europe's economy remains competitive in global markets. Achieving this requires an abundance of low-carbon energy at competitive prices, as well as accelerated investment in new infrastructure and technologies. This necessitates joint efforts, common consensus, and broader support from society. Therefore, EU sustainability policies need refinement to support both large and small businesses in transitioning to green practices competitively. Policymakers should develop a comprehensive European strategy that ensures the availability of sustainable energy at stable, competitive prices and aligns EU industrial strategy with climate policies, considering the needs of businesses.

What are the key policy measures you believe are critical for achieving climate neutrality without compromising our competitive advantage in the global market, and how can we balance these two objectives effectively?

Recognising that industrial production in Europe is crucial for societal benefit is essential. We need a robust industrial base if we are to not only survive, but also thrive and maintain the lifestyle most Europeans have become accustomed to, with high expectations for healthcare and social benefits. The Industrial Emissions Directive, along with greenhouse gas trading, has proven to be effective in reducing pollution and improving resource and energy efficiency within European industry. However, with rising energy costs, plants that have been investing

in best available technologies and enhancing their environmental performance for over a quarter of a century are losing their competitiveness in global markets. This is particularly true for energy-intensive industries, where materials produced in Europe with lower carbon and environmental footprints are losing market share to cheaper materials with higher impacts. This shift undermines both our prosperity and environmental goals.

In what ways can European chambers of commerce and industry play a pivotal role in supporting the green transition of our economy?

A successful green transition will transform society as we know it. Economic stakeholders play a pivotal role in this process as they must be the drivers of change. Therefore, it is crucial to broaden the stakeholder engagement process in the development of future climate policies. The chamber network, strategically positioned at the intersection of society, policy, and business, plays a critical role. It effectively bridges the gap between political climate objectives and actionable strategies for businesses of all sizes and sectors. Chambers of commerce and industry often act as the first point of contact for the business community, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises seeking guidance on green transition initiatives. Maximising this opportunity would be beneficial for all parties involved.

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