Dear CEOs and BusinessEurope Vice-Presidents,

We warmly welcome you to the 11th edition of the CEOs Dialogue Event.

The event will take place this year while the European Union is facing multiple and major crises. The Ukrainian war, the energy crisis and the high level of inflation are putting tremendous political and economic pressure on companies and our societies. In this very challenging context, direct discussions between key EU policy makers and business leaders are more than ever crucial to weather together successfully these crises. The CEOs Dialogue event provides a valuable platform for such discussions. We therefore thank very warmly the European Commission and especially EVP Dombrovskis, the host of this event, and his team for making this possible.

Companies of all sizes across Europe are facing the prospect of an extremely challenging winter. Both business and consumer sentiment has fallen dramatically during the summer as companies are increasingly unable to further absorb high energy and raw material costs. Against this backdrop, we now expect EU growth of only 0.5% in 2023, compared to the 2.1% we expected in the summer. We expect euro area inflation of 8% in 2022, falling moderately to 4.9% in 2023.

Amidst current discussions over crucial legislative files, the EU institutions must therefore pay extra attention to the needs of businesses, whose competitiveness is the backbone of European prosperity.

First and foremost, urgently finding ways at EU level to mitigate the impact of crippling energy prices faced by European business is a matter of survival. There is a real danger that energy-intensive industries in particular relocate outside of Europe. New and targeted EU-wide emergency measures are therefore essential to rapidly and effectively lower the energy bill of EU business.

The prolongation of the Temporary Crisis Framework, the revision of the EU economic governance and the preservation of the Single Market in its turbulent 30th anniversary are also of prime importance for the competitiveness of the European economy. In addition, while the twin green and digital transitions are very much needed to ensure both the sustainability of our economic model and the competitiveness of our industries, we need to get them right. In this regard, companies have high expectations on the levels of investment in digital connectivity, the roll out of transformational 5G or the finalisation of the fit-for-5G package files.

On the international front, beyond the Ukrainian crisis, the EU needs to embrace an ambitious trade policy to transform the current geopolitical challenges into opportunities. Diversifying our sources of supply as well as maintaining good and balanced relations with our major economic partners are indeed of the essence if Europe wants to remain a leading global actor.

Together with you, we look forward discussing these crucial issues with our high-level speakers, who are eager to hear your views. For your convenience, this policy document provides you with a brief overview of their profiles and contains BusinessEurope’s key messages per speaker. We hope you will find a helpful basis for our exchanges.
Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PROFILE

- 2019 – present: President of the European Commission
- 2013 – 2019: Federal Minister of Defence, Germany
- 2009 – 2013: Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs
- 2009 – 2019: Member of the German Bundestag

BUSINESSEUROPE KEY MESSAGES

1 European companies urgently need emergency measures and some regulatory breathing space. The current energy and economic crisis is dramatically exacerbating the risks of Europe’s deindustrialisation with many companies relocating partially or totally their production outside Europe. European firms therefore need urgently new and targeted EU-wide emergency measures, in particular to effectively lower their energy bills. In addition, competitiveness should be the cornerstone of any discussion on all EU pieces of legislation.

2 Better regulation, reduction of burdens on businesses and assessment of policy impacts on international competitiveness are even more important in times of the multi-layered crisis. “Business-as-usual” in regulation is not an option at all. Only a partial offsetting of burdens under the announced ‘in-out’ principle in regulation is not balancing enough, especially as its application has not brought tangible results yet. Businesses call for reinforcement of the better regulation culture in the Commission and also hope that a promising announcement to establish a ‘competitiveness check’ for all the policy and legislative initiatives will urgently address the accumulated challenges.

3 In view of the very challenging geopolitical environment, the EU needs to embrace an active trade policy as trade agreements are key to support the EU’s economic growth and global competitiveness. The impact of the war in Ukraine is bringing a renewed sense of urgency to our bilateral trade agenda. To support our economy and global competitiveness we need diversification both in terms of supplies of key raw materials but also to look for alternative markets for our exports. Trade agreements are in that respect essential.
Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People and Trade

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PROFILE

- 2019 – present: European Commission Executive Vice-President responsible for an Economy that Works for People and Trade
- 2016 – 2019: European Commission Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union
- 2014 – 2016: European Commission Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue
- 2009 – 2014: Prime Minister of Latvia

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2. We welcome the close cooperation between the EU and the US in these turbulent and uncertain times. In particular, we welcome the strong coordination in the response to the war in Ukraine in the area of sanctions, export controls and overall support to Ukraine. This renewed commitment to deepen the Transatlantic relationship should also lead us to find permanent solutions for the steel/aluminium and aircraft subsidies’ disputes and a negotiated solution that addresses the discriminatory provisions included in the US Inflation Reduction Act, e.g. Electric Vehicles and batteries.

3. It is in the interest of both the EU and China to maintain dialogues at all levels. China is a competitor and a systemic rival, but EU-China cooperation continues to be crucial in areas where multilateral solutions are needed, like climate policy and standardisation. In this unstable environment, the EU needs to define a strategy towards China that effectively protects its geopolitical and economic interests.
Margrethe Vestager, Executive Vice-President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PROFILE

- 2019 – present: European Commission Executive Vice-President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition
- 2014 – 2019: European Commissioner for Competition
- 2011 – 2014: Minister for Economic Affairs and the Interior, Denmark
- 2007 – 2014: Political Leader of the Social Liberal Party, Denmark

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2. Digital economy regulations need to be carefully calibrated to the political objectives of competitiveness of EU businesses. This year’s big package of regulations - the Digital Markets Act and the Digital Services Act - will have a maturing and lasting effect on the digital economy of Europe, and businesses of all sizes. It is important to support companies in complying, instead of leaving them to figure out what applies to them or does not.

3. Ensure that the revised EU competition policy functions effectively, encouraging growth, enabling companies to compete at global level and preventing damage to businesses in the wider economy. Markets should be defined in a realistic way, taking account of global market conditions and adopting a dynamic analysis and long-term view to assess the existence of competitive pressure. The EU should support good State aid, such as aid to reach sustainability objectives and off-set high energy prices, while fundamentally safeguarding a market driven European economy and ensuring that any distortive effects of the subsidies are limited.
Paolo Gentiloni, European Commissioner for Economy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PROFILE

• 2019 – present: European Commissioner for Economy
• 2001 – 2019: Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of Italy
• 2016 – 2018: Prime Minister of Italy
• 2014 – 2016: Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy

BUSINESSEUROPE KEY MESSAGES

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2. The EU should make a good use of its economic instruments and framework. In view of limited fiscal space in many Member States, measures to support consumers and businesses with energy costs must be temporary and well-targeted. Rapid agreement on the reform of the Stability and Growth pact can support member states in ensuring that the long-term strengthening of public finances is not unduly delayed. Effective use of public funds, notably the EU’s Recovery and Resilience Facility, is essential to boosting long-term investment growth.

3. Ensure a unified, deep and liquid capital market and an efficient and competitive banking system. Access to finance, specifically long-term debt financing and equity investment, is a pre-condition for companies to thrive and make the investment necessary to meet the challenges of energy, climate change mitigation, aging population, and economic and digital transitions. We need to reinforce and implement the Capital Markets Union to provide EU companies a genuine single market in financial services and develop complementary sources of finance to bank lending. Considering the limited availability of complementary sources of finance and the continuing dependence of companies, especially SMEs, on bank lending, additional tightening of prudential rules should not raise financing issues.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

PROFILE

• 2019 – present: European Commissioner for Transport
• 2007 – 2019: Member of the European Parliament
• 2019: Chairwoman of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, European Parliament
• 2017 – 2019: Member of the Conference of Committee Chairs, European Parliament

BUSINESSEUROPE KEY MESSAGES

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2 Multimodal and combined transport plays a central role in greening the European transport sector. It is crucial that the envisaged modal shift from road freight to lower emission transport modes goes hand in hand with a completed and effective TEN-T and cross-border interoperability as bridging the missing links remains key. How does the Commission aim to ensure that initiatives of the upcoming Greening Freight Package are backed up with sufficient and reliable cross-border transport infrastructure and compatibility to fulfil the EU Green Deal objectives?

3 Maintain high ambition regarding re-charging and re-fuelling infrastructure is crucial for the transition towards green mobility. Companies are relying on the greening of their transport processes as part of their sustainability strategies. However, in many places the lack of investments in roadside charging and fuelling infrastructure endangers this crucial part of the mobility transition. In addition to higher targets (e.g., in the AFIR) more robust enforcement and funding mechanisms will be crucial to prevent a fragmentation between faster and slower member states.

4 With regards to sectors such as aviation and shipping, targets and requirement must be in line with the growth of the supply of sustainable fuels. To maximise the growth of these markets, it is necessary to maintain a degree of flexibility on uptake and use obligations. This will allow transport providers to make larger investments in the most promising opportunities first, instead of scattering scarce capital among too many projects.
BusinessEurope is the leading advocate for growth and competitiveness at the European level, standing up for companies across the continent and campaigning on the issues that most influence their performance. A recognised social partner, we speak for all-sized enterprises in 35 European countries whose national business federations are our direct members.