

CSR EUROPE: CREATING SHARED VALUE

CSR Europe outlines new strategy, leadership and action plan

10th June, BRUSSELS, Belgium – Today, CSR Europe, the European Business network for Corporate Social Responsibility, hosted its annual General Assembly event. The theme of this year, “Value creation as the new challenge for sustainable businesses in 2020 and beyond,” provided the backdrop for CSR Europe to launch a new strategy aimed at helping companies in their progress on simultaneously enhancing social and business value.

Changing Expectations: shifting the frontiers of CSR

Despite the financial crisis, sustainability has stayed firmly on the agenda and expectations from both political and consumer groups have increased. Ken Mehlman, Head of Global Public Affairs at KKR, puts this down to the increased transparency of the internet *“Companies today are in a goldfish bowl.”* This view was further supported by Sam Mountford, Director of Global Insights at Globescan *“Companies today are facing doubled transparency and there is a boom of people mentioning independent internet sources from blogs and other social media channels.”*

Opening the Conference, Celia Moore, Chair of CSR Europe’s Board of Directors and Director of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs at IBM, highlighted this by saying *“These changing expectations converge to create enormous opportunity for businesses to become more effective, efficient, transparent and agile.”*

Stefan Crets, CSR Europe’s newly appointed Executive Director (April 2011), further explained how CSR has shaped modern business development: *“Corporate responsibility is about placing social and environmental considerations at the very heart of the company’s strategy and operations. Forward-looking companies are increasingly leveraging sustainability as a source of innovation and new business opportunities. Recent years have also seen a growing interest in how companies, policymakers and other stakeholders can work together to develop CSR as a way for business to contribute to sustainable development and societal wellbeing. It is in this space that CSR Europe will further support its members: not only by providing insights and allowing for companies and stakeholders to share best practices, but also by creating a platform where companies can work together in a practical way to innovate their business models.”*

Working together to increase sustainable value creation towards 2020

It is against this background that CSR Europe launched its ‘Enterprise 2020’ initiative in October 2010. Based on a shared vision of the enterprise of the future, ‘Enterprise 2020’ is a new reference initiative for companies committed to developing innovative business practices and working together with their stakeholders to provide solutions to emerging societal needs.

“Corporate social responsibility is a significant pillar of Europe’s economic and social future and a key element in ensuring sustainable growth. We welcome Enterprise 2020 as a significant contribution to engaging businesses and stakeholders in co-building practical solutions in support of the Europe 2020 strategy”, said Antonio Tajani, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for enterprise and industry, in his endorsement of the initiative.

Thomas Lingard, Global External Affairs Director at Unilever is positive about the value from CSR Europe membership. *“CSR Europe is uniquely placed to host the conversation between progressive business and the European institutions on how the greatest challenges of maintaining responsible and sustainable economic growth within environmental limits can be achieved.”* He adds *“Never has it been more urgent for leading organisations to be part of this conversation.”*

European Commission gears up to launch new strategy on CSR

As the European Commission gears up to launch a renewed strategy on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), issues such as supply chain, human rights and transparency disclosure will take on greater focus at a pan-European and international level.

With the European Commission's CSR Communication due out in July, CSR Europe has the chance to influence the direction of EU policy on CSR through meaningful engagement with policymakers. *"The EU institutions need the input of CSR practitioners and CSR Europe members are ideally placed to provide it"* Jan Noterdaeme, CSR Europe's Senior Advisor on External Relations. Indeed, Viola Groebner, Director for "Industrial policy and economic analysis," DG Enterprise and Industry, European Commission seemed to agree and took the event as an opportunity to thank CSR Europe on its input on the new EU communication on CSR.

A new start for CSR Europe

"This is an exciting time for CSR Europe, with a new Executive Director and newly elected Board of Directors, CSR Europe now has the strong leadership necessary to shape and support the Enterprise of the future" highlighted Celia Moore, Chair of CSR Europe's Board of Directors and Director of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs at IBM.

Indeed, the organisation is optimistic about the newly elected Board of Directors, *"It is with great pleasure that I extend a warm welcome to new members of the Board of Directors,"* said Stefan Crets, *"with high-level representatives across a wide range of both regions and sectors, I am confident that together we are ready to take on the many opportunities and challenges that lie ahead."*

Stefan's move to CSR Europe is certainly seen as a positive one and has created a new wave of excitement for the organisation. For example, on Stefan's appointment to the organization, Mallen Baker wrote in his acclaimed blog: *"I got to know Stefan a little during the couple of years I spent on the CSR Europe Board representing its national partner network. Enough to know that this was a character that will bring credibility and weight to the position."*

Having adjusted to the economic crisis and changing expectations on CSR, CSR Europe is now looking towards the future and it seems as though this new leadership, strategy and action plan has left the organisation with a distinct air of positivity.

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About CSR Europe

CSR Europe is the leading European business network for corporate social responsibility with around 70 multinational corporations and 28 national partner organisations as members. CSR Europe is a platform for connecting companies to share best practice on CSR, innovating new projects between business and stakeholders, and shaping the modern day business and political agenda on sustainability and competitiveness. The organisation was founded in 1995 by senior European business leaders in response to an appeal by the European Commission President Jacques Delors. It has since grown to become an inspiring network of business people working at the very forefront of CSR across Europe and globally. More information: www.csreurope.org

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