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~~Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort~~

**Conference "Equipped for CSR"**

**Brussels, 4 December 2008**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to participate in this event as it represents an important stage in the strategy of corporate social responsibility that my colleague Günther Verheugen and myself launched in March 2006.

*(1 News of CSR and pertinence of the Alliance's initiative)*

In the context of the current crisis, the Commission offers concrete responses: in its communication of 26 November it outlines a European framework of action in response to the financial crisis:

- Make our instruments more efficient in the service of social equity and environmental efficiency;
- better anticipate risks by improving regulation of the economy and global finance.

Such are the challenges of the European Union today. These are also the challenges faced by companies.

In this context, the presentation of the results of some twenty workshops on CSR launched by the European Alliance at the end of 2006 is particularly pertinent.

Allow me to briefly recall the facts.

In 2006, the Commission gave a new impetus to CSR, following the midway review of the Lisbon strategy.

It concerned activating the public private partnership at the European level. The link established by the communication in March between CSR and sustainable growth was not new, but it was reconfirmed politically: we had in fact made a contract of trust with the economic actors so that they would develop their potential.

The European Parliament moreover supported this approach, by arranging with the Alliance, in its resolution of March 2007, a meeting in 2008.

It is this meeting that the Alliance honours today with the first overall presentation of its results. These results are not necessarily definitive, but today's conference gives us, for the first time, an overall view of the work that has been carried out for almost two years.

**My colleagues, in particular Günther Verheugen and Louis Michel, and I have had the opportunity to follow the progress of several workshops over the last two years.**

**I mention as examples, because they concern subjects which are fundamental to me as Employment Commissioner:**

- the laboratory on responsible supply chain management responds to our objective of guaranteeing decent work for all.**
- but also the laboratory dedicated to creating skills for employability is directly involved in the initiative of the Commission of the same name.**

**It is obvious that our objectives must be shared by all of the actors, failing which our political priorities shall not be achieved.**

**I shall not take stock of the dozen or so themes that were selected by the Alliance in 2006, themes which result from the political priorities of the March 2006 communication.**

**This work has enabled the highlighting of good practices and the proposal of operational tools which are sorely needed today: in a difficult economic context, the sharing of tools is vital for CSR; to survive CSR must demonstrate its economic efficiency.**

**I would like to mention in particular work done on the theme of the fight against global poverty, as well as the work on the evaluation of extra-financial performance, which concerns the essential subject of transparency.**

**Action on the promotion of diversity, the laboratory on demographic change, the laboratory on recruitment and the ethical management of migrant workers, as well as on financial inclusion or on wellbeing at work also deserve to be mentioned, since they particularly reply to my political priorities.**

**If today's conference allows the results to be shared, they then need to be communicated.**

**Certain challenges for the European strategy on CSR need to be mentioned.**

### ***(2.Future challenges)***

**The renewed social agenda adopted in July underlines that Europe must be active faced with the current challenges: demographics, energy and climate change, migration, internationalisation of employment and upheaval of the international division of work.**

**CSR is one of the objectives of this new social agenda. The Commission also undertakes to pursue a dialogue with all the actors on this theme.**

**Pursue a dialogue: in fact it is our first challenge.**

**To move forward, a consensus must be found at the European level. We shall convene the multiparty European forum in February 2009. We have asked all the actors to present the results of their initiatives since 2006.**

**This concerns companies' initiatives, notably through the Alliance, initiatives of social partners, of NGO's, but also of representatives of universities and investors, who have been part of the multiparty European forum since 2007.**

**The Commission and the Member States shall also contribute to these results. This Forum shall contribute to the promotion and the sharing of the wealth of European action on CSR.**

**CSR is a central element of the European social model. CSR is an ever growing and more complex subject. The way in which the French Presidency approached the subject clearly illustrates this evolution: six conferences were organised on this theme, in various subjects: environment, work and employment, financial inclusion, socially responsible development and investment.**

**The last conference, which was closed by Messrs. Barroso and Sarkozy, developed the idea that, in the context of the current crisis, relations between finance, economy and society need new rules, socially responsible investment being a lever for sustainable development.**

**To keep an overall view and to advance technically is a challenge for the future. The workshops appear to us to be a good tool to meet this challenge. The continuation of successful coordination is therefore essential on this point.**

**But on which themes must we concentrate?**

**For us, the major themes are still the promotion of diversity, access to work for all, decent work; these are the priorities that we identified in 2006.**

**I would add that the question of the integration of migrants in work and the question of financial inclusion, which implies the responsibility of the banking sector, are essential.**

The first is linked to the demographic evolution and to migratory tendencies. The latest statistics of Eurostat show that in 2006, three million five hundred thousand people moved to a European country. Of these, one million eight hundred thousand were not citizens of the European Union.

The theme of financial inclusion implies the participation of the banking sector. The crisis tends to aggravate inequalities and initially effects the most fragile populations, the least qualified on the fringes of the labour market. Access to credit is an essential factor in local development, in favour of which the Commission is increasing its actions.

Our last challenge is that of the global dimension of CSR: defence of decent work for all, fight against the informal economy, which denies access to social protection for almost half of the planet's population.

The EU must make the large emerging countries share in the practices of European companies. To this end, there are several means of action:

- the action that you take as companies that are present in various countries in the world.

- the action that we take: indeed, CSR is an increasing part of our political dialogue and cooperation with, in particular, China, India, Latin America and the Caribbean. I shall also recall that employment, social cohesion, governance and decent work are part of the European Consensus of December since two thousand and five (2005).

Finally, I would add that it is important that the European Union actively participates in the current process of regulation in the field of CSR at a global level.

In this respect, the 27 Member States supported the renewal in June 2008 of the Special Representative of the United Nations on the creation of a general framework for human rights and multinational companies. Furthermore, the Commission and the Member States take part in the ISO 26000 process, which is preparing an optional instrument on CSR at a global level.

In my opinion it is necessary that all the representative actors at the European level be involved in this process, which will result no doubt in guidelines between now and 2010. It is an arena of global multiparty negotiation in which we all have an interest in defending and sharing the European approach and values on CSR.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your results are the fruit of a shared reflection and approach. But do not forget that the CSR concept can only be universal if it is seen as a tool to encourage competition in all the regions of the world.

I thank you for your attention.