

Only written word is valid.

**Speech of Vladimir Spidla, European Commissioner for  
Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**

European MarketPlace on Corporate Social Responsibility, November 29, 2007 –  
Brussels, Belgium

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is my pleasure to speak at the European Marketplace for the third time.
- This meeting is devoted to responsible innovation in enterprises and I would like this conference to be a place where proof of CSR is delivered, since a great deal of experience is being presented here.
- This market is a forum where enterprises pool their experience and a place where they try to come up with new solutions together.
- **Coming up with solutions together** is the approach of the Commission that guided us when we supported the setting up of a **European alliance for corporate social responsibility** to develop the potential for innovation and exchange between enterprises to promote sustainable development in Europe and in the world. The presentation today of the thematic laboratories' initial results demonstrate the Alliance's value added.
- CSR in the sense that we mean it in Europe is not simply going beyond existing law. It is more ambitious and aims at seeing enterprises genuinely seek to **integrate in their strategic operations** the means for achieving long-term social and environmental aims which will be beneficial for society as a whole.
- **This is the approach which the Commission advocated in its Communication of 2006.** It wanted enterprises to develop their potential in the interests of the revised Lisbon strategy objectives.
- The Commission set out **policy priorities** for corporate social responsibility. And I am delighted to find these priorities being examined by the laboratories whose first results will be presented to you today.
- **These laboratories aim to achieve the objectives of the European Employment Strategy** and, at global level, to fight against poverty and for decent employment. These

goals are, just to mention a few: employability, well-being at work, integration of diversity, grass roots work to combat poverty, the UN Millennium goals and social corporate responsibility in the subcontracting chain.

- **We can now see that setting public long-term objectives produces results.** We see that in 2006 unemployment, albeit still far too high, has reached its lowest level for ten years, while we made progress towards our employment goals.
  
- **This complementarity between public and private objectives** shows that the partnership which the Commission sought to launch in 2006 is working.
  
- Without a public-private partnership we have little chance of facing up to the challenge of European social cohesion.
  
- **By way of example, of where we need innovation and public-private partnership:**
  - **Facing the demographic challenge** means that we must prepare ourselves for a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. This **diversity** will be a win-win situation at both European and global level where societies accept and encourage the benefits of diversity. This makes **equal opportunities** a key issue in our societies and hence in enterprises.
  
  - I have been pleased to see that impressive progress has been made in this domain. Last year, I made a strong plea for enterprises to integrate diversity policies into their overall strategies, and today I note that two laboratories, one on ethical restructuring and a second on the management of diversity, are dedicated to reporting this progress. Hopefully these laboratories will show how we together can build on this progress. Promoting equal opportunities for all is central to the Commission's vision for social inclusion, and there is high potential for this work to benefit from a European initiative exploiting the synergies between the ongoing developments in enterprise and at European level.
  
  - **To face the challenges linked with Europe's position and interests in the world**, the EU has undertaken to work towards more inclusive globalisation and emphasised this at the last European Council on the external dimension of the Lisbon strategy. There is common ground between the external dimensions of the Lisbon strategy and promotion of decent employment and fairer globalisation.

- These are the challenges which we must meet and which you too must face up to.

- **Coming up with solutions together is a way of linking innovation and dialogue.**

The experiences presented today show how activities can have a mutually positive effect. I believe bringing stakeholders, both internal and external, together remains one of the main issues for corporate social responsibility and enterprise governance.

- **Dialogue and discussion** are one of our European democracies' strengths, the benefits of which cannot be underestimated.
- **In 2007 the Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament encouraged us to identify the levers** of corporate social responsibility in an extended Europe and beyond. They emphasised that competitiveness on cost posed a real challenge to meeting the objectives of decent employment.
- Corporate social responsibility was also a priority for the countries of the G8 at Heiligendam in June 2007 and the Commission will monitor the process initiated there. DG Employment is organising a conference together with the Portuguese Presidency on the global dimension of corporate social responsibility on 7 December. I hope that this conference will contribute to the debate in progress at global level and will shed light on European activities.

### **Conclusion**

- I would like to conclude, ladies and gentlemen, by wishing you a rewarding day under the double banner of innovation and exchange. I will be closely watching the results of the thematic laboratories and look forward to their ongoing work in 2008.