

European CSR Alliance: what it is about and how to join

Background

On 22 March 2006, the European Commission published a new communication entitled “Implementing the partnership for growth and jobs: making Europe a pole of excellence on corporate social responsibility (CSR)” (full text: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/csr/policy.htm>). At the same time, together with members of the business community and support from business organisations such as UNICE, UEAPME and CSR Europe, it launched the European Alliance on CSR.

In the EU-level debate, CSR is considered a practice whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with stakeholders on a voluntary basis, beyond what is required by legislation and contractual obligations.

The communication sets out how the European Commission will promote voluntary CSR through various initiatives. More important, it expressly calls on individual businesses in their capacity as key CSR players to develop activities and **make Europe a centre of excellence on CSR**. The European Alliance on CSR has been created in this spirit.

The Alliance is expected to contribute to the promotion of CSR throughout Europe and to the EU's goals of growth, jobs and sustainable development. It will therefore cast a light on innovative corporate CSR practices, stimulate new ones, further ease private initiatives in this area, and enable networking, the exchange of experiences and knowledge and the development of joint projects between companies and their stakeholders.

Nature of the Alliance

The Alliance is **directly addressed to individual businesses**. More than forty companies have so far expressed their support for the Alliance (view [list](#)). The Alliance remains open. Any business, whatever its size, can become involved.

The Alliance is a partnership between businesses and the Commission and not a formal grouping. It does not involve specific rules or requirements, a charter, signatures or heavy processes. The Alliance is a political umbrella, not a legal instrument.

The European Commission will not directly manage the Alliance. It relies on the **support of business organisations**. Business organisations such as UNICE and its members will help coordinate matters in relation to the Alliance, keep track of developments and activities and communicate them. They will generally act as an interface between Alliance companies and the EU institutions. They will also foster contacts between companies supporting the Alliance and interlink those that wish to work together.

How to join?

If you are interested and a company based in the EU, you are invited to **express your support**, at any moment in time, **to UNICE's member federations** in the EU country where your headquarters are established (**contacts**). National federations will keep you informed of developments and opportunities in relation to the Alliance. They will also take note of and communicate your particular interests when it comes to participating in certain activities or developing specific initiatives. They will generally ensure liaison with the European level and organise the necessary information flow.

What is expected from businesses that become involved in the Alliance?

Companies that express support are expected to

- have active CSR policies or the wish to develop CSR activities;
- be ready to participate in the work of the Alliance;
- be ready to engage in dialogue and the exchange of ideas around their CSR activities;
- be ready to provide information and feedback on CSR activities and achievements at regular intervals.

As the partners of the Alliance will be taking stock through high-level meetings, companies that support the Alliance will be invited to share, on a regular basis, information about what they have done to contribute to the Alliance. National and European-level business organisations will coordinate and prepare these meetings with Alliance companies.

What opportunities does the Alliance create, what are the benefits for your company?

The Alliance will

- give higher visibility to companies' CSR activities;
- create networking, capacity-building and peer review opportunities;
- provide a market place of ideas and practices and contact with CSR experts from across Europe;
- enable debates and the exchange and dissemination of good practices;
- lead to the creation of new partnerships;
- demonstrate the value of voluntary business engagement and the difference it can make;
- foster a high-level dialogue with the European Commission on CSR.

The companies involved in the Alliance will have the opportunity to discuss and determine for themselves their contribution to the Alliance and the activities they wish to engage in. However, a number of priority areas for action have been suggested in the CSR communication (see below) and these will merit particular attention.

Networking activities

Among the key activities to be developed within the Alliance will be so-called "laboratory meetings". "Laboratory meetings" will bring together interested companies and their stakeholders, with a view to exploring and develop joint projects in a number of priority areas. The priority areas are:

- fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in sustainable technologies, products and services which address societal needs;
- helping SMEs to flourish and grow;
- assisting enterprises to integrate social and environmental considerations in their business operations, particularly in the supply chain;
- improving and developing skills for employability;
- better responding to diversity, equal opportunities and demography challenges;
- improving working conditions, also in cooperation with the supply chain;
- innovating in the environmental field with a special focus on eco-efficiency and energy-saving in the product and service development process;
- enhancing dialogue and engagement with relevant stakeholders;
- further addressing the transparency and communication challenge to make non-financial performance more understandable and better integrated with financial performance;
- operating in an equally socially and environmentally responsible way outside of the EU.

The "laboratory meetings" have not yet started. More information on planned meetings will be available on these web pages soon.

Other topics CSR Alliance companies can address

In addition, the European Commission's CSR communication highlights that individual companies' CSR policies can contribute to a number of policy objectives, such as:

- more integrated labour markets and higher levels of social inclusion;
- investment in skills development, lifelong learning and employability;
- improvement in public health through voluntary initiatives (e.g. in the area of food);

- better innovation performance;
- more rational use of resources and reduced levels of pollution;
- fostering a more positive image of businesses and cultivating more favourable attitudes towards entrepreneurship;
- respect for human rights, core labour standards and environmental protection standards, especially in developing countries;
- poverty reduction and progress towards the Millennium Goals.

The Alliance will also focus on companies' contributions in these areas. The above topic lists are however neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. The Alliance will make it possible to focus on initiatives in other areas, which are deemed challenging by companies and their stakeholders.

High-level stock-taking meetings

High-level meetings of the CSR Alliance will be organised at regular intervals with the European Commission, to communicate results and take stock of achievements.

Useful links

UNICE press release

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/csr/index_en.htm

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/index.htm

CSR Europe

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UEAPME