

Czech Business Today

Antwerp agreement: European Industrial Deal to complement Green Deal

European industrial leaders embraced the Antwerp Declaration on 20th February 2024, advocating for a European Industrial Deal to complement the Green Deal and focus on supporting industry in the EU. The declaration aims to enhance competitiveness by promoting sustainable and innovative technologies, particularly in energy-intensive sectors like the chemical industry. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attended the meeting, emphasizing the need for strategic actions to bolster industrial infrastructure, internal market support, raw material security, and industrial innovation within the EU.

Signatories from the Czech Republic include the Confederation of Industry of Czech Republic, the Steel Union, the Czech Association of the Petroleum Industry and Trade, The Confederation of Employers and Business Association of the Czech Republic, The Czech Chamber of Commerce and also the SUAS GROUP. *"The goal of the initiative is to highlight the rapidly deteriorating competitiveness of the European industry. Concerns arise not only from development in energy-intensive sectors such as steel, paper, and chemicals but also from the situation in related industries, such as the automotive industry,"* said Daniel Urban, the general director of the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic and chairman of the Steel Industry Union.

In addition, declaration, highlights the importance of reducing bureaucratic

barriers to industrial development within the EU. The upcoming Commission is urged to prioritize coordination in achieving these goals, akin to the approach taken for the Green Deal.

Originally concentrated in the chemical industry, the declaration now boasts over 800 signatories from 20 industrial sectors, with around 550 companies and over 170 associations. It extends beyond chemical industries to encompass all industrial sectors and promotes the transfer of scientific knowledge to industry.

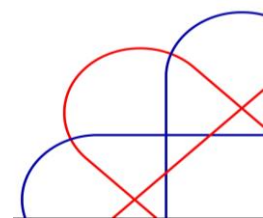
The declaration may be deliberated upon by EU heads of state and government at the European Council in April, serving as an opportunity for European industry players, including Czech entities, to influence the EU's future actions. For Czech firms, the declaration presents a chance to advocate for increased industrial roles within EU member states. Additionally, it offers opportunities for Czech signatories to connect with like-minded industry representatives across the EU.

In addition, Czech Association of Petroleum Industry and Trade (ČAPPO) has joined the declaration.

"ČAPPO perceives the Antwerp Declaration as a crucial document for further rational initiatives of the European industry, prioritizing the preservation of competitiveness. We believe that there will also be a change in perspective on the Green Deal within the EU. ČAPPO unanimously joined this declaration," stated Václav Loula, spokesperson for ČAPPO, emphasizing the urgent need for the EU to conclude an industrial agreement alongside the Green Deal.

The Antwerp Declaration outlines ten urgent measures to aid European industry while maintaining the climate goals outlined in the Green Deal. With 973 organizations from 25 sectors endorsing the declaration, including numerous Czech industrial associations and companies, its influence continues to grow. The success of the Antwerp Declaration hinges on pressure from EU member states, particularly major economies. Ultimately, the Antwerp Declaration signals a shift towards prioritizing industrial competitiveness within the EU's policy agenda, alongside environmental sustainability objectives.

Sources: The Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, iDnes, businessinfo, echo24, Czech Association of Petroleum Industry and Trade, The Czech Chamber of Commerce



20 years of EU membership: Czech Republic's journey of growth and unity

Over the past two decades, the European Union has served as a cornerstone of stability, prosperity, and security for the Czech Republic. However, the journey has not been without its challenges. In the last five years alone, the EU has faced considerable obstacles, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which tested its resilience and unity. Despite these trials, the Czech Republic has leveraged its EU membership to navigate through turbulent times and achieve significant milestones.

The Confederation of Industry of Czech Republic mentioned that domestic companies recognize the benefits that the Czech Republic's membership in the European Union has brought them. Most notably, they appreciate the open borders and the associated easier mobility and free movement within the European Union. However, entrepreneurs also see room for improvement in the functioning of the EU in the future. Since the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, companies are increasingly concerned about the growing level of regulation and bureaucracy. These findings emerged from a survey conducted by the Confederation among 139 companies. Almost 85% of Czech businesses perceive EU membership as highly beneficial, particularly appreciating open borders and easier mobility within the. Over half value easier access to the EU market for exporting products, while 35% appreciate being part of a strong single market. Overall, 89% firms confirm better performance due to the free EU market, but express concerns about increasing regulations and bureaucracy. They urge for a more proactive role of the Czech Republic within the EU. Regarding the euro adoption, 77% of firms support it, expecting benefits such as reduced administrative burden and improved currency stability

Most believe the Czech Republic should adopt the euro within five years. Firms also utilize the common European labor market, with 55% hiring people from other EU countries. Moreover, in the course of 20 years in the EU, CEBRE, the Czech business representation to the EU, was established and represents Czech businesses in Brussels.

As for 20 years in the EU, there are countless other benefits for individuals and companies. EU membership brings advantages such as consumers benefit from strong protections, including refunds for unwanted products and compensation for travel disruptions. In employment, workers enjoy rights such as safety protection and equal opportunities. Free movement allows work anywhere in the EU without permits, ensuring equal social and tax benefits. EU citizenship grants freedom to live, work, and study across member states. Economically, the EU is the world's second-largest trading block, offering access to a market of over half a billion consumers. Cohesion policies aim to reduce regional disparities and promote sustainable development.

During crises, the EU provides coordinated assistance through mechanisms like the Civil Protection Mechanism.

Among other things, at the conference of The Czech Chamber of Commerce on 20 years in the EU, the president of the chamber said: *"After 20 years in the EU, we are at a crossroads in the middle of Europe. So the question arises as to whether, as the Czech Republic, we are now standing at that crossroads."*

For the following years, the priorities of the Czech Republic in the EU are the reduction of the bureaucratic burden, amendments to the Green Agreement such as the Antwerp Declaration, revising the objectives of the Green Agreement and many others.

Sources: The Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, European Commission, The Czech Chamber of Commerce



CEBRE was founded in 2002 by the three most important Czech business organizations – Czech Chamber of Commerce, Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, Confederation of Employers' and Entrepreneurs' Associations of the Czech Republic with kind support of the Ministry of Industry and Trade via its Trade promotion agency CzechTrade.

The Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic pushes for enhanced digital skills amidst market demands



Representatives from the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP ČR) and the Czech Society for Cybernetics and Informatics (ČSKI) signed a Memorandum on Monday, April 22nd, in Prague, outlining cooperation in advancing the digital competencies required and expected by the job market.

In order to maintain competitiveness and further develop the Czech economy and society, the enhancement of not only professional but also user digital competencies is crucial. SP ČR and ČSKI agree that both current and future employees, as well as self-employed individuals, need to be adequately prepared for the digital revolution we are currently experiencing. While ČSKI, as the national guarantor of the international concept of digital literacy and skills ECDL/ICDL, possesses hard data, SP ČR can leverage its extensive network of member entities to provide this data to firms and critically assess the efforts and activities of individual ministries and the government in this field.

Practical ECDL tests in the education sector currently highlight a mismatch between the Ministry of Education's efforts to reform the education system regarding information and communication technologies in primary and secondary schools (the so-called small revision of the Framework Educational Program from 2021) and the results of these efforts regarding the practical user digital skills of school graduates.

The data from internationally standardized ECDL tests indicate a significant decrease in the number of high school graduates equipped with user digital skills to such an extent necessary for successful entry into the job market. Because the international concept of ECDL primarily focuses on certifying user digital skills, we can only speculate whether this trend is a consequence of the widespread prioritization of teaching professional digital competencies, often utilized by only a relatively narrow group of students who have the potential to find professional employment in this field," says Prof. Olga Štěpánková, President of ČSKI.

"In light of the significant changes in job performance requirements and user needs, we perceive the Ministry of Education's efforts to develop students' professional digital skills as ineffective if not effectively complemented by teaching the necessary range of user digital competencies," adds Mgr. Milena Jabůrková, MA, Vice President of SP ČR for Digital Economy and Education. This will be the first area the memorandum signatories will focus on.

Source: The Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic



FLASHNEWS

The Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade helps Czech companies acquire skilled workers from third countries

With a shortage of labor in the job market, Czech companies will receive assistance from a new service offered by the CzechTrade agency called "Economic Migration Support." The main goal of this service is to help Czech companies secure qualified foreign workers, thus strengthening the competitiveness of the Czech economy. "Czech companies, as well as foreign investors, have long been calling for more opportunities to employ skilled workers from abroad. The Qualified Employee Program is designed to help them with this, but we want to focus more on countries where attracting foreign labor has been challenging in the long term. That's why we are launching this service, focusing primarily on countries such as Georgia, Armenia, Serbia, and Montenegro," says Minister of Industry and Trade Jozef Síkela.

CALENDAR

31.5.2024 CZECH STREET PARTY

Join us at the Czech Street Party on May 31st in Brussels, Place de la Monnaie, as we celebrate 20 years in the EU!

We warmly invite you to be a part of this exciting event. Don't miss out! Company [ARICOMA](#) will also be in attendance.

See you there!

The future European single market needs a new geopolitical focus



The strategic rethinking of the EU single market is now a necessity. The world is not the same as it was 30 years ago - the single market needs to be adapted to the new international landscape, former head of the Italian government Enrico Letta said at the EESC plenary session debate on 20 March 2024.

Presenting the key idea behind his High-Level Report on the Future of the Single Market, Mr Letta, the current president of the Jacques Delors Institute, stressed that the future single market needed to have a geopolitical approach and focus on Europe's strategic autonomy and pillars such as defence, telecommunications, energy and finance.

'The geopolitical landscape is now totally different to what it was 30 years ago. The mission today is to consider what consequences the new world scenario has for the single market and its future. We need to have a new approach and include matters such as defence and enlargement,' he said.

EESC president Oliver Röpke stressed that the success of the single market could not just be measured in economic terms, but must also mirror European citizens' hopes and wellbeing: *'At the*

EESC, we believe that the single market is fundamentally about people - and the right to move also means the freedom to stay.'

Mr Letta pointed out that the single market was both about people and for people. Economic competitiveness had to go hand in hand with social protection, and the freedom to move and the right to stay were part of the same freedom: *'Brain drain is having a devastating impact in some countries. We have to address the freedom to stay and freedom to come back. Today it is a one-way ticket only, and this is affecting competitiveness and creating a big problem in Europe.'*

Source: David Sventek, member of the European Economic and Social Committee of the EU



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The Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade will support energy-saving measures in companies.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic announces the II. call of the Energy Savings activity from the Operational Program Technology and Applications for Competitiveness (OP TAK). Small, medium, and large enterprises will be able to obtain up to approximately 750 million CZK for investment projects. *"Energy savings are a way to reduce energy costs, increase our energy security, and better protect the environment. Moreover, reducing energy consumption is an important part of the modernization of the entire Czech energy sector and the phased coal phase-out. For the competitiveness of Czech companies, it is crucial that they effectively implement energy-saving measures. That's why we have prepared a call from the Operational Program Technology and Applications for Competitiveness to support projects focusing on energy savings. This includes the installation of solar panels, heating technologies, or equipment for rainwater utilization,"* says Minister of Industry and Trade Jozef Síkela.