

**Europe's 500 Roundtable for Growth and Awards Ceremony
Vienna, 25 November 2006**

Address by Commissioner Danuta Hübner

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure and privilege for me to speak to you today on the occasion of Europe's 500 Roundtable for Growth and the awards ceremony to honour the winners for 2006 – entrepreneurs who have made an astonishing contribution to European growth and competitiveness.

I am sure I will not take you by surprise if I say that Europe needs its entrepreneurs – men and women with ideas and the vitality to make their ideas work. Today's Round Table has put the spotlight on the need for business leaders and policy makers to work together to create the conditions needed for companies to thrive.

Before we make the awards, let me take a few minutes to tell you how we in the European Commission see our common challenges that lie ahead and how we are contributing to our common European response to those challenges.

Generating growth, jobs and competitiveness is our top priority. Without them, it will be difficult to work out solutions to the number of challenge that we are facing, ranging from global warming to security. And it is clear that we are not fully exploiting Europe's entrepreneurial potential. We need more people who are prepared to take risks and start-up their own business; we need more growth of those already existing and we must ensure that the balance of risk and reward encourages young Europeans to become entrepreneurs. Successful enterprise deserves to be fairly rewarded.

The European Commission can contribute to this in a number of ways. We have harnessed all our policies to work for growth and jobs. I have put my own policy – regional policy - at the heart of growth and jobs and innovation agenda.

Over the next seven years we will be working together in a partnership with local and regional authorities, with businesses and academic communities and with our social partners to dynamise innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of the knowledge economy. Through regional policy we can better exploit the innovation potential that only proximity of partners can generate.

You are probably familiar with our research and development programmes; and we are making every effort to make them world class and more accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Perhaps less well known is the work we do with the European financial institutions to help improve access to finance for entrepreneurs. We deploy now new financial instruments that help small businesses gain access to venture capital and new types of guarantees especially for early-stage and growth investments.

This year we have also been promoting the idea of entrepreneurship in schools by encouraging the use of mini-companies. By running them students develop a real economic activity, they have to produce and sell real products or services. They learn how to make a business plan and keep accounts, they acquire basic business skills and experience what it means to be an entrepreneur. More than 200.000 students already create mini-companies in secondary schools in Europe every year. First studies show that as much as 20% of students who took part in the experience create their own company later on.

So yes, I have this dream that one day one of them steps up to receive a Europe 500 Awards.

Dear friends,

That day will come more quickly if we create a regulatory and administrative framework that makes it easier for people to become entrepreneurs and prosper. And this is a challenge that we in the European Commission take very seriously.

The EU, its Member States and all our European partners need to consolidate the approach to regulation that ensures that the promotion of public interests is achieved in a way that supports economic progress and competitiveness of the European economy.

A key objective of the EU enterprise policy is to ensure that the regulatory environment is simple and of high quality. We want to make sure that regulation is used only when necessary and that the burdens it imposes is proportionate to its aim.

This is why the Commission has embarked on the review of those EU laws that have proven ineffective and withdraw draft laws that do not appear necessary. The EU should act where it adds value but it should act simply and effectively.

But we have to make sure that EU legislation is enforced effectively and consistently in all Member States. Companies all over Europe should be able to count on EU legislation functioning the same way in all Member States. Only then will businesses be able to use fully the opportunities offered by the internal market.

We need to keep our eyes on developments in the global marketplace. We know that the changes brought about by globalisation are a challenge for business, but they are also a great opportunity. The Commission does not believe in resisting change. You cannot switch the globalisation off. We need to manage it so as not to forego the benefits it brings. This is the way to protect and promote our security and prosperity.

This means that Europe must remain opened to the world. We should be confident of our place in the world and of the contribution we can make to it, and of the benefits we can derive from it. We tend to forget that the EU is the biggest exporter of goods and services worldwide and international trade plays a key role in the growth of European enterprises. Europe represents only 7% of the world population but our exports and imports constitute more than 20% of world trade. So, we have the most to lose if protectionism wins the day. Hence we have to

make sure that European enterprises have access to non-European markets on an equal and fair basis.

The European Commission and national governments can and should do their bit towards making all this happen. And these efforts will bring results. But we need more: society as a whole has a role to play. Our value system must evolve to foster creativity and risk-taking. That is why we have to take all our European ambitions down to the local level and get people involved.

We need also to recognize the true worth of our entrepreneurs. This evening is a small token of this recognition.

On behalf of the European Commission, I salute the winners of this year's awards. You are our shining stars. Europe will grow with you. I wish you well.

Thank you.