From the European Commission

Corporate social responsibility: the European perspective

Vladimír Špidla, commissioner for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities explains the EU's new position on CSR

Corporate social responsibility is taking on a new significance at the European level in the light of increased global competition and the worldwide reach of many companies. Europe needs to maintain and support enterprise and creativity in business, providing a climate favourable to sustainable growth, job creation and innovation. Through corporate social responsibility, business, in dialogue with stakeholders, can help to deliver this growth in a socially and environmentally responsible manner.

Over the past 15 years, business, supported by the EU and national governments, has made ever-greater commitments to corporate social responsibility. Leading European companies are increasingly examining their stakeholder dialogue, governance and product development in the light of corporate social responsibility principles and mainstreaming these within their business processes. Small companies – the engine of European economic growth – are also making a contribution, often through the adoption of a more informal and intuitive approach.

But there is still more that can be done. The European Commission, together with business leaders, is establishing the European Alliance for Corporate Social Responsibility to give a renewed impetus to efforts in this area. Its ambition is to make Europe a pole of excellence on corporate social responsibility. The alliance is a voluntary coalition of companies that share a vision of corporate social responsibility as a business opportunity that can generate win-win solutions for both companies and society. It recognises the primacy of businesses as the primary actors in corporate social responsibility, while acknowledging the supportive role public authorities can play in facilitating an open and constructive dialogue between business, employers, trade unions and civil society organisations.



Commissioners at the recent launch of the European Alliance for CSR

The founding principle of this approach is that progress can only be achieved through commitment and mutual trust. Effective corporate social responsibility in the long term depends on a cultural change. The European Alliance for Corporate Social Responsibility is all about supporting that change within European businesses. It is about helping business develop the skills required for effective relationship building and dialogue with stakeholders, mainstreaming corporate social responsibility in the mindset of current and future business leaders as well as in their business processes, and it's about providing tools for effective analysis and evaluation of corporate social responsibility initiatives within firms.

The alliance will explore and support creative ways to exchange and disseminate best practice on corporate social responsibility in a way that is relevant and accessible to business practitioners, policy leaders, consumers, investors and the wider public. Building on work already underway, it will promote multi-disciplinary research into corporate social responsibility at the European level, with a view to providing a better understanding of its impacts on sustainable development and competitiveness. Education has a major role to play here – tomorrow's business leaders must be educated in the skills, knowledge and values of corporate global responsibility. The alliance will support the integration of these subjects into the curricula of business schools and other institutions across Europe.

Given the diversity of the European economy and the wide ranging scope of corporate social responsibility, the alliance recognises the need to engage on several priority themes: supporting the growth of small businesses; fostering innovation in technologies, products and services that meet the needs of our evolving society; helping businesses to mainstream social and environmental concerns in their ways of working, especially in supply chain operations; improving and developing skills for employability; better responding to diversity and the challenge of an ageing population; encouraging the integration of energy efficiency and environmental protection in production processes; enhancing dialogue; and improving the transparency of corporate governance. The alliance will address these priorities through "open coalitions of cooperation", in which interested companies, experts and stakeholders will, with the support of the commission, develop joint projects piloting innovative solutions and approaches.

Corporate social responsibility is vital because it mirrors the core values of our society – respect for quality of life, the environment and human dignity

Corporate social responsibility is vital because it mirrors the core values of our society – respect for quality of life, the environment and human dignity. This does not stop at the borders of the EU; we must all recognise that the uptake of corporate social responsibility here has an impact on firms all over the world. The European Alliance on Corporate Social Responsibility is an important and progressive step through which Europe can continue to lead the way in building for future generations a world in which the needs of both people and nature are respected everywhere. ■

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

Ethicalcorp.com keyword searches:
Corporate social responsibility, EU, European Alliance for Corporate Social Responsibility