



EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE EESC EMPLOYERS' GROUP

Autonomy through competitiveness: SMEs at the core of Europe's strategic preparedness

7 May 2026 | 15:00 - 17:00

Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Nicosia (Cyprus)



Scope

The discussion will examine how the EU's evolving focus on strategic autonomy and preparedness is reshaping the meaning of competitiveness, positioning it as a prerequisite for resilience, security, and sustainable growth. The guests will explore the central role of SMEs, both as key drivers of employment, innovation, and value creation, and as actors particularly exposed to structural constraints such as regulatory complexity, energy costs, financing gaps, and skills shortages. Particular attention will be given to how preparedness can be embedded into competitiveness policy, enabling SMEs not only to withstand shocks but to adapt, scale, and compete effectively.

Format

15.00 - Welcoming remarks:

- **Ms Sandra Parthie**, Employers' Group President
- **Mr Manthos Mavrommatis**, Employers' Group member
- **Mr Antoniou Michalis**, Employers' Group member

15.15 - Keynote Speech: European SMEs in turbulent times

- **Professor Nicos Varsakelis**, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, Greece

15.30 - Interactive panel discussion – moderated by **Ms Mira Maria Danisman**, Employers' Group member

- **Mr Michalis Damianos**, Minister of Energy, Commerce and Industry
- **Mr Demetris Georgiades**, Chairman of the Cyprus Economy and Competitiveness Council
- **Mr Michalis Persianis**, President of the Cyprus Fiscal Council
- **Ms Maria Eracleous**, Former Representative of IMF in Cyprus, Former Board Member of Central Bank of Cyprus

16.15 – Q&A and debate

17.00 - Concluding remarks



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Concept note

The EU has entered a phase in which strategic autonomy and preparedness have become central organising principles of economic policymaking. Recent shocks, including geopolitical tensions, energy disruptions, supply chain vulnerabilities, and accelerating global competition, have exposed structural dependencies that directly affect the resilience of the European economy. In this context, competitiveness is increasingly framed not merely as a growth objective, but as a precondition for autonomy, security, and long-term sustainability.

Preparedness is emerging as a complementary pillar to strategic autonomy, shifting the policy focus from reactive crisis management to proactive capacity-building. Embedding preparedness into competitiveness policy therefore requires enhancing SMEs' capacity not only to withstand shocks but to adjust and reposition quickly, making preparedness a key enabler of both resilience and sustained productivity growth.

Small and medium-sized enterprises are pivotal in this regard. As the backbone of the European economy, SMEs account for most of the employment, value creation, and innovation diffusion, yet they are disproportionately exposed to regulatory complexity, energy price volatility, skill shortages, and compliance costs. Enhancing SME productivity is therefore essential: it strengthens their ability to innovate, scale, and compete globally, while simultaneously reinforcing the EU's strategic resilience.

The Cypriot Presidency programme places competitiveness at the heart of Europe's strategic response. Ensuring that SMEs can operate efficiently, invest, and grow under conditions of increasing policy ambition is critical to translating strategic autonomy into economic reality.

Against this background, the event will explore how competitiveness-oriented policymaking can support SMEs as drivers of resilience, adaptability, and productivity, thereby underpinning Europe's broader strategic readiness.

Address: The event takes place at the Cyprus Chamber Of Commerce and Industry, located on street Georgiou Griva Digeni 38, Nicosia.