



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)



Speakers' biographies

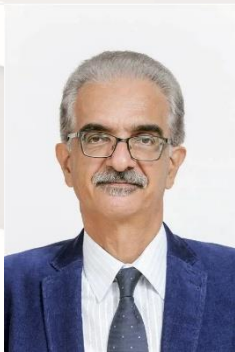
(in chronological order)

Welcoming remarks



Sandra PARTHIE Employers' Group President

Sandra Parthie is President of the Employers' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee since October 2025. She joined the EESC in 2020, and was active, among other things, in the section on the Single Market (INT). Mrs Parthie heads the Brussels Office of the German Economic Institute since March 2015, presenting economic research by the Institute to stakeholders in Brussels, often in cooperation with industry associations. Before her current role, she was Director for EU Regulatory Affairs at French multinational company Alstom S.A. with a focus on renewable energies and grid technology. Prior to that she was the political advisor and head of office of a German Member of the European Parliament, working on environmental and climate policy. Sandra Parthie holds an MA in Political Sciences, with a minor in economics from the Freie Universität Berlin. She also conducted parts of her studies at the Université de Montréal in Canada.



Manthos MAVROMMATIS Employers' Group member

Manthos Mavrommatis is an Employers' Group member born in 1957. He holds a Bachelor's degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Chicago. He is the owner of a small, family-run business and has been actively engaged for many years in the Chamber of Commerce ecosystem at local, national, and international levels. He has served as President of the Nicosia Chamber of Commerce and Industry as well as President of the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He currently serves as Co-Chair of the United Nations-supported Bicomunal Technical Committee on Trade in Cyprus.



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Michalis ANTONIOU

Employers' Group member

Mr Antoniou was born in 1964 and studied Law at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the University of Wales, College of Cardiff. He has been working with the Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB) since 1991, beginning his career as an Industrial Relations Officer. Over the years, he advanced to the positions of Director of the Industrial Relations Department and Deputy Director General, before assuming the role of Director General in February 2016. He has been a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Group I, since May 2004, following Cyprus's accession to the European Union.

Presentation of Cyprus Government policies for SMEs



Michalis DAMIANOS

Minister of Energy, Commerce and Industry

Michael Damianos was appointed Minister of Energy, Commerce and Industry on 8 December 2025. He had previously served, since 10 January 2024, as Minister of Health. He is a lawyer and studied Law (LLB) at the University of Southampton, from where he graduated with honors and received the best academic performance award. He holds a Master of Laws (LLM), specialised in International Law, awarded by the University of Cambridge. He received the best academic performance award by the Fitzwilliam College of the University of Cambridge. He holds the professional title of Solicitor, granted by the Supreme Court of England and Wales. He worked at the international law firms of Simmons & Simmons and Hogan Lovells in London, specialised in corporate, commercial and energy matters. Upon his return to Cyprus, he worked at a law firm in Nicosia and in 2010 he founded his own law firm, which bears his name. He served as a Municipal Councillor at Strovolos Municipality (2011-2016). Since 2018, he is the Vice President of Democratic Party (DIKO). Mr Damianos was born in Archangelos, Lefkosia. Originally, he comes from Polystypos, Larnaka. He is married and has two children.



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Keynote Speech European SMEs in turbulent times



Professor Nicos VARSAKELIS Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Nicos Varsakelis is Professor of Industrial Policy at the Department of Economics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. He holds a PhD in Economics from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and an MA in Economics from McMaster University, Canada. His academic career spans more than three decades, during which he has held senior teaching, research, and leadership roles. From 2014 to 2019, he served as Vice-Rector of Finance of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and concurrently as CEO of the University's property development company, overseeing financial governance, strategic planning, and asset management. He has also directed major academic units and doctoral programs and served on key research and strategic development committees. His research focuses on European integration, industrial and technology policy, entrepreneurship policy, multinational firms, and knowledge diffusion, with extensive experience at the intersection of academia, policy, and institutional governance.



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Interactive panel discussion

Moderator



Mira Maria DANISMAN
Employers' Group member

Mira-Maria Danisman is the Head of EU-office of the Federation of Finnish Enterprises (FFE, Suomen Yrittäjät), the leading business organization for Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises. FFE represents SMEs from a large variety of sectors and is also an active member of SMEunited, the umbrella organization for European small and medium-sized enterprises. Since 2020 Ms. Danisman has been a member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in the Employers' group (GR 1). Ms. Danisman has served in the Committee as the Spokesperson for EESC's Category for Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME Category). She has also been actively engaged in the EESC youth work as the Vice-president for the EESC youth group. Prior to joining FFE in 2016, Ms. Danisman has worked for the Finnish Transport and Logistics association, European External Action Service (EEAS) and Finnish permanent representations for the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) and United Nations (Geneva). Ms. Danisman holds a Master's degree in European law from University of Eastern Finland (UEF).

Speakers



Demetris GEORGIADES
Chairman of the Cyprus Economy and Competitiveness Council

Demetris Georgiades is a graduate of the London School of Economics and Political Sciences and a member of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Cyprus and of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. He is the chairman of the Cyprus Economy and Competitiveness Council, a member of the board of the Cyprus Public Audit Oversight Board and Chief Corporate officer at KANIKA Group. He held the position of the Chairman of the Cyprus Fiscal Council during the period 2014-2021 and had previously worked as a financial director at Politis Newspaper and for the Group of Companies of the shipowner Loukas Hatzioannou. He is a member of the Cyprus Economics Association and was one of the founding members of the Cyprus branch of Transparency International.



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Michalis PERSIANIS President of the Cyprus Fiscal Council

Michalis Persianis was born in Nicosia in 1978. He is the Chairperson of the Fiscal Council of Cyprus, a position he has held since 2022. His term is six years and includes full-time employment. He studied Political Science at Rutgers University in New Jersey, from which he graduated in 2002 and completed postgraduate studies in International Relations and Economics at Johns Hopkins-SAIS. He has worked in the private sector, most recently as Director of Corporate Affairs at the Bank of Cyprus, from 2014 until 2021.



Maria HERACLEOUS Former Representative of IMF in Cyprus, Former Board Member of Central Bank of Cyprus

Maria Heracleous is currently an Advisor to the Minister of Finance and a member of the Cyprus Economy and Competitiveness Council. She served as Executive Director and member of the Board of the Central Bank of Cyprus from May 2019 to May 2024. Previously, she worked at the IMF Office in Cyprus for five years, first as Senior Economist and later as Lead Economist, overseeing all aspects of cooperation between the Republic of Cyprus and the Fund. Before returning to Cyprus, she was an Assistant Professor at the American University in Washington, D.C., where she taught courses in econometrics and macroeconomics. She was also a Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. She holds a Ph.D. and an M.A. in Economics from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and an M.Sc. and a B.Sc. in Econometrics and Mathematical Economics from the London School of Economics.