

ASSOCIATIONS SEEK OPPORTUNITIES FROM CRISIS



MEMBERSHIP OF INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS CAN HELP BUSINESS TO EMERGE FROM THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, ARGUED PARTICIPANTS AT A CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS IN THE LAST WEEK OF APRIL 2009.

Urging business to use associations as a *'joint platform for being creative,'* Susanne Zaenker of AISE, an association representing manufacturers of soap, detergents and maintenance products, told the 2009 edition of Kellen Europe's annual Euroconference that the crisis presents a *'unique opportunity for associations to take the lead in proposing concrete measures to boost skills'.* *'We can be quicker and more effective than governments here,'* she argued. Echoing her comments,

Alfons Westgeest, managing partner at Kellen Europe, said associations could help business to cut costs by assuming more of their members' workload.

Calling on federations and business to work together to define *'who does what,'* Westgeest said *'associations might have to pick up work that is no longer possible in companies, rather than duplicating efforts'.* *'But it's a delicate balancing act,'* he warned.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ASSOCIATIONS TO BE 'PRO-ACTIVE'

This view was echoed by business representatives themselves. *'This is the moment for associations to make sure that they are pro-active and contributing in a business way, and not just collecting their members' ideas,'* said Hanns Glatz of German car giant Daimler, adding: *'There is an opportunity for associations to replace some of business's functions.'* Others sounded a cautious note. *'It's not OK for companies to behave differently to their associations,'* argued Christopher Burghardt, vice-president for corporate affairs at Anheuser-Busch InBev. *'I see associations as an extension of my company's arm, and we need to behave in one and the same way,'* he said.

Earning the recognition of decision-makers and the media are among the main concerns of federations at the moment, according to a EurActiv survey

EUROPE 'MORE AFFECTED' THAN US

'Europe seems to be more affected by the crisis than the US,' observed Business Europe Director Marc Stocker. Giving his reasons for this, Stocker cited Europe's higher level of exposure than America to the collapse of global trade and its higher level of corporate indebtedness. He also said Europe's fiscal and monetary stimuli were taking longer to have an effect than America's own recovery plan.

Daimler's Glatz said it was important for companies to continue their involvement with associations at a time when the EU institutions are producing a raft of important legislation. *'We are not terminating our association memberships, because environmental legislation is still coming off the pipeline,'* he said. *'There is a terrible fight within governments and the Commission between keeping business running and maintaining environmental and social standards,'* Glatz explained. *'Companies need to stay members of associations to make sure they can live with the solutions.'*

Indeed, earning the recognition of decision-makers and the media are among the main concerns of federations at the moment, according to a EurActiv survey presented at the conference. The survey found that over 40% of federations have 50-plus members, with membership levels expected to remain stable in the years to come.

POSITIONS

Warning that *'we are not completely on the road to recovery yet,'* **BusinessEurope Director Marc Stocker** said the world was experiencing *'its worst recession since the 1930s'.* *'The pool of bad loans has grown rapidly during the crisis, which will only serve to intensify it,'* Stocker continued.

Christopher Burghardt, vice-president for corporate affairs at **Anheuser-Busch InBev**, said the crisis had shown that business was turning to national governments, rather than the EU, for help. *'It's dangerous to live in Brussels and fail to look beyond the institutions,'* Burghardt warned, adding: *'Don't look too far ahead in the EU legislative agenda, because most legislation is put on ice anyway'.* But **Hanns Glatz** of German car giant **Daimler** disagreed with this assessment. *'The EU will remain important, because the Treaty of Lisbon will increase its competences further, for better or worse. Membership of European associations will continue to be of value.'*

'Corporations are being more demanding on their associations than usual in the wake of the crisis,' said **Marta Baffigo**, director of European public affairs at **Kellogg's**, who believes businesses must become more selective in choosing which associations to join: *'We are only members of ones in which*

Marta Baffigo, director of European public affairs at Kellogg's:

'You must be focused in your membership, and you must engage with your association, or you won't get anything out of it.'

we can be effective. You must be focused in your membership, and you must engage with your association, or you won't get anything out of it.'

Maarten G. Labberton of the **European Aluminium Association** warned that a protectionist trend in Europe would impact upon industry and trade associations too. *'A national focus will affect solidarity between national associations too,'* he said.

EurActiv brings together the skills of professionals with experience in EU affairs, journalism, information and communication as well as Internet technology. EurActiv relies on numerous content partnerships, as well as links to the national press and the EU institutions. This article was provided by EurActiv from www.euractiv.com/en/pa/associations-look-for-opportunities-crisis/article-181923