

European Business Summit 2017: What to expect

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Event Coverage

This year's European Business Summit is an opportunity to take part in stimulating debates on the future of Europe.



This year's European Business Summit is an opportunity to take part in stimulating debates on the future of Europe | Photo credit: Fotolia

Current and future concerns facing Europe's business community will come under the spotlight at a high profile event later this month. These and many other questions are due to be debated at this year's European Business Summit (EBS) in Brussels.

Other pressing matters up for discussion at the showpiece get together of the great and good from the business world include cyber security and whether the EU energy union is able to address Europe's key energy challenges.

Participants at the two-day event (22-23 May) at the city's prestigious Egmont Palace will be joined by several keynote speakers, including German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, European Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, BusinessEurope President Emma Marcegaglia, European Parliament President Antonio Tajani and BusinessEurope Director General Markus J. Beyrer.

Over the years, EBS has grown to become the largest debating and networking platform in Europe and this year's summit will be 17th edition since its inception.

Some 200 high-level speakers, including 10 Commissioners, international CEOs, MEPs and civil society representatives will meet to debate the role the business community can play in shaping the future of Europe.

Jobs and skills, energy, digitalisation, European security, Brexit, migration are on the EBS agenda. Other key issues such as trade and investment liberalisation, key competitiveness drivers for businesses, will also be the subject of debate.

Held annually in Brussels, the 2016 edition of EBS attracted 2400 delegates, including eight European Commissioners and the presidents of the European Commission, Parliament and Council. With representation from over 250 companies, the summit later this month is designed to provide an engaging exchange of ideas and perspectives.

In recent years, Europe has navigated unprecedented challenges posed by the financial crisis, regional conflicts, refugee crises, a changing political landscape and most recently, Brexit.

Questions have also been raised about the effectiveness of the EU institutions and their capacity to adapt. The 2017 summit, themed around 'What's next for Europe', will address these and other challenges and seek to find solutions.

Amit Bajaj, CEO Europe at Tata Consultancy Services, commented, "This year, Europe will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the treaty of Rome where the European Economic Community was first established. In recent decades the region has seen tremendous growth and prosperity, driven in large part by a progressive and innovative business community.

"As we look forward there are undoubted challenges ahead but also many opportunities. Probably the single largest opportunity is digital economy where the European Commission estimates growth of €415bn a year if steps can be taken to support digital business."

The two days are split into various sessions including, on day one, a debate called 'Protecting our individual freedom'. This session, featuring Philippe De Backer, the Belgian state secretary for social fraud and privacy, aims to show how security is a "central component of business continuity and citizens' trust."

Another session, also on the first day, will debate Europe's trade strategy and new foreign policy agendas such as the so-called 'America First' and 'Global Britain'.

Many argue that such modern-day trends underline the necessity for the future EU27 to forge a new geopolitical and trade strategy. With the US moving closer towards protectionism and Asia increasingly taking centre-stage in the international trade market, the argument is that Europe needs to position itself in this new world order.

One question the EBS will try to answer is how policymakers and business leaders can strategically coordinate to establish a European trade strategy to generate new market opportunities for businesses.

One of the highlights of day two of the summit promises to be a session on skills and migration. Over the last few years a rising number of migrants from third-countries have come to Europe and this roundtable will focus on how to mobilise employers for the integration of recently arrived migrants, and in particular refugees.

Dimitris Avramopoulos, the European commissioner for migration, home affairs and citizenship, and Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for employment, social affairs and skills, are among the participants in this dialogue.

As recent events have highlighted, the Trump administration in the US brings with it a lot of uncertainties - and opportunities - and another session will focus on current and future EU/US relations. Daniel Gros, director of the Brussels-based think tank, Centre for European Policy Studies, and Nicholas Hodac, governmental programmes executive at IBM Europe, are among the speakers.

The future of industry in the EU will be the focus of a separate session chaired by Alexander Affre, director of industrial affairs at BusinessEurope, the Brussels-based organisation that represents the business community at EU level. BusinessEurope president Emma Marcegaglia added, "EBS 2017 will debate how to bring the EU forward after the victory of a pro-European French president, what new narrative to boost support for the EU and what must Europe do to strive in a new world".

Other speakers at this year's summit will include Pierre Moscovici, the Commissioner for economic and financial affairs, Commission first Vice-President Frans Timmermans and Jean-Pierre Clamadieu, CEO of Solvay. The EBS event was founded by the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium and started out as a small gathering in the lobby of a hotel. An EBS spokesperson said, "With 2200 participants and 200 speakers the 2017 edition promises to be as stimulating as ever."

About the author

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