

Bundeskanzler Stocker beim European Industry Summit in Antwerpen

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.

Dear President Von der Leyen,
Dear Prime Minister de Wever,
Dear Prime Minister Schoof,
dear Vice-Presidents and Commissioners,
Dear CEOs and Businesses representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking Bart De Wever for organising this Summit. As you all know the EU Leaders of the 27 Member States will meet tomorrow to discuss how we can strengthen our competitiveness.

What can be more useful than getting a reality check on the day before.

Bart, thank you for providing us with this valuable possibility to listen to those that actually know what the situation looks like on the ground.

The companies that employ hundreds, sometimes thousands of people.

Those that know what the hard competition with China, the US and the rest of world really means.

Your success has been and still is the backbone of Europe's prosperity, of our strength and of resilience.

The European Project has always been based on economic success. Safeguarding our strength is therefore not only an economic question, it is also a deeply political task.

If we don't protect our competitiveness, we will also fail at solving all the other challenges that we are faced with.

Economic competitiveness has been my main task since I took office as the Federal Chancellor of Austria.

When I started, Austria was in a deep recession and inflation was very high. Thanks to many domestic measures we have been able to improve the situation. Today Austria has returned to economic growth and inflation has fallen to 2%.

However, Austria is definitely still not where it should be. In order to get there, we need success on the European level.

How do we get there?

I see five priorities:

Priority Number 1: Energy costs must go down.

This is Europe's most obvious competitive disadvantage.

Wholesale prices for energy in Austria are today still more than double those of five years ago even though we are capable of producing huge amounts of cheap sustainable energy. Why? Because the market forces us to always pay the price for gas which is much higher than that of all other forms of energy. This is not sustainable.

This is not just a problem in Austria. I had a meeting with the Prime Ministers of Czechia and Slovakia yesterday in Bratislava yesterday and we all agree: nothing hurts us more than high energy prices.

I see two options: We must either permanently reduce the gas price – towards pre-crisis levels – or we change the pricing mechanisms.

We should not be afraid to question the merit order system if it does not serve us any longer.

Priority Number 2: Extend free allowances in the Emissions Trading System.

We can only afford the green transformation if our industrial base is strong. The ETS path until 2034 is too steep and too ambitious.

If we do not change course, we will not make the world greener, we will only make Europe poorer.

Also here I want to underline that this not only my position. The Prime Ministers of Czechia and Slovakia have the exact same situation in their countries.

Do not get me wrong: climate change needs to be addressed and tackled. We just have to admit that the approach we took in the beginning was too extreme.

Fortunately, the trend reversal has already begun. But more will be necessary.

Priority Number 3: Complete the Single Market.

The so-called "28 regime" could facilitate access to domestic and capital markets for startups- this ambition of "thinking outside the box" is exactly what we need.

We have to continue and intensify our efforts to reduce bureaucracy and work towards real deregulation on the EU level.

Of course, many barriers exist at national level. As Member States will also have to do our homework.

We must also remove unjustified territorial supply constraints. It is unacceptable that citizens in smaller countries pay more for the same products than citizens of larger countries.

Finally we must speed up our work to complete the Savings and Investment Union. It is crazy that every single year more than 330 billion Euros of European capital are invested in the United States.

Imagine what it would mean for European innovation, entrepreneurship and jobs if that money stayed in Europe.

When should we change this if not now?

Priority Number 4: A commitment to "European Preference":

Not out of protectionism, but because European competitiveness and prosperity should be safeguarded.

We are ready to put billions of Euros into the reconstruction of Ukraine as soon as a lasting peace can be achieved, but we will also have to ensure that its European Businesses that rebuild Europe!

And finally Priority Number 5: Fair trade agreements

We need strategic trade agreements, to help our markets grow and to supply our industry with the materials and input needed to succeed.

I commend President Von der Leyen who has already made much progress in the last year, for instance in Indonesia or in India.

At the same time we must stop unfair market practices by third countries.

With that I conclude my remarks and look forward to hearing your views.

Thank you!