

Britain's European Puzzle

By David Goodhart, editor of the monthly political affairs magazine "Prospect"

Over the past decade the European Union has become far friendlier to British interests, both economically and politically. Yet over the same period Euroscepticism in Britain has gained ground. The EU's constitutional treaty codifies the new pro-British EU, but people either do not know this or do not believe it.

If you suggested to the average British voter that the cost-benefit analysis of Britain's EU membership produced a far more favourable result in 2004 than it did in 1973 they would certainly not believe you. And yet it is self-evidently true.

In 1973 Britain's fortunes were at a low ebb. France and Germany were more economically successful and politically self-confident and, of course, Franco-Germany politically dominated the EEC (as it then was). The economic rules had been designed to benefit small farmers and successful manufacturers, neither of which were very numerous in Britain. Moreover, the EEC offered to the big continental European countries not only the prospect of peace and reconciliation but a balm to wounded national pride and an antidote to national humiliation. Europe restored national pride and unity with an internationalist rhetoric. But none of this really applied to Britain, and most Britons had a sense that the limited pooling of sovereignty with Europe was a net loss.

The contrast with the position today in the EU could hardly be more dramatic. Enlargement to an EU of 25 has not only killed the federalist ambitions of the late 1980s it has dethroned Franco-Germany, a partnership which can agree on less and less. And in an EU of 25 there is no conceivable project for significant further integration that would win the support of all member states. The one possible exception being defence and security, where British exclusion is unthinkable. Furthermore, the single market has expanded aggressively to cover services which, through companies like Vodafone, is far more central to the British economy than agriculture or manufacturing. Active British membership has ensured that EU directives benefit us. Had Britain not been a member of the EU, our financial sector would still have been bound by the original provisions of the investment services directive, which, before the amendments insisted upon by British negotiators, would have cost British firms an estimated £200m.

So thanks to some highly effective civil service and private sector lobbyists Britain now helps to shape an organisation in which English is the dominant language; where market rules rather than political intervention shape the economy; where recent rounds of enlargement provide London with more allies than ever before; and where European defence policy aspirations are tied to the continued primacy of Nato, rather than to ambitious schemes for the EU to act as a counterweight to the US.

The constitutional treaty is little more than an attempt to codify this "Anglo-Saxonisation" of the EU as many people in France contemptuously describe it. And yet the British don't see it like that at all. Only 30 per cent of voters say they will vote for the treaty in a referendum that is due in the spring of 2006. As the EU has become friendlier to British interests, Euroscepticism has gained ground. What explains this paradox? It may be partly that Euroscepticism is now about things other than Europe: about the growing importance of "identity" issues across the whole EU: about the scepticism towards elites of all kinds, which is especially damaging to the EU as it is unavoidably a complex, elite-dominated project; and about a lazy, anti-political negativity fed by the national media.

But there is also a more obvious culprit – our own national politicians. When even pro-European politicians have not tried to explain the benefits of EU membership it is not surprising that most people think that there are none. They are going to have to start getting the message across soon otherwise Britain might find itself the only country not to endorse a constitution that locks in exactly the kind of Europe most British people want.

Please Note: Articles published in this Newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of COBCOE.



The magazine of COBCOE

SPRING 2005

A UNIQUE POTENTIAL

by COBCOE President
Sheena Campbell-Royle

Survival of the most deserving!

Since its inception in 1973, COBCOE has developed to represent a unique forum and mouthpiece for the interests of its Members across Europe. And now, in welcoming and representing the wider Europe, COBCOE has a stature and significance that demands attention both from European Governments and the EU as well as other key agencies.

This development has not always been easy, and, of course, I am well aware of the financial and staffing pressures that British Chambers work with. But I believe we are now reaching a point where some of the more exciting potentials are achievable, offering benefits of influence and 'profile' which should have real value for everyone.

A watershed in business/government linkages

It is no secret that Britain has taken a strategic decision to reduce its resource in dozens of consulates in Europe and Latin America, in order to allow increased emphasis on 'high-stress' areas such as the Middle East. The front page of The Times newspaper on December 15th 2004 described it as the 'biggest shake-up of the Diplomatic Service for years' and predicted that 'trade promotion can be handled by local staff with business connections'.

I'm pleased to be able to confirm that of course COBCOE is in contact with UKTI on these issues aiming to bring UK government into closer touch with the people running British business interests in Europe. And through our network of Members we are uniquely organised to play a knowledgeable, reliable and influential role... with a manageable centralised structure.



Photo taken at Brussels Chamber Luncheon during visit in September 2004

Opportunities for adding value

But this is just one example of the opportunities COBCOE is exploring. Last September in Brussels we held a remarkably successful seminar examining the detailed workings of the EU and the influence that was available via COBCOE. It was attended by some of our Member chambers most active in the area of public affairs, and many were pleasantly surprised at the 'added value' that strength in numbers can achieve. This is a key 'added value' area for many businesses, and one in which we will be doing a good deal more work for the future.

And what about cross-country marketing and sponsorship? As you'll see from this issue, British Airways correctly sees COBCOE as a great communications channel... this is just the tip of the iceberg.

Contributors

I'm particularly grateful to Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, for her thoughts on this year's important and significant UK EU Presidency for this issue of LINKS. And for a stimulating 'alternative' personal viewpoint, we can offer a fascinating contribution from David Goodhart, editor of the monthly political affairs magazine 'Prospect'. I hope you find them enjoyable and challenging.

Together we can deliver more!

In COBCOE we truly have an extraordinary resource of great relevance and value. Many of our Member Chambers are already seeing expanded opportunities, and although the costs and priorities are always an issue, they will not stand in the way of real progress!

Member Websites

www.cobcoe.org.uk

British Chamber of Commerce in Belgium
www.britcham.be

British Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic
www.britishchamber.cz

Franco-British Chamber of Commerce
www.franco britishchamber.com

British Chamber of Commerce in Germany
www.bccg.de

British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
www.bhcc.gr

British Chamber of Commerce in Hungary
www.bcch.com

British-Icelandic Chamber of Commerce
www.chamber.is

British Chamber of Commerce for Italy
www.britchamitaly.com

British Chamber of Commerce in Latvia
www.bccl.lv

British Chamber of Commerce in Lithuania
www.bccl.lt

British Chamber of Commerce in Luxembourg
www.bcc.lu

British-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce
www.bncc.no

British Polish Chamber of Commerce
www.bncc.no

British Portuguese Chamber of Commerce
www.bilateral.biz

British Romanian Chamber of Commerce
www.brcc-ccbr.org

The British Chamber of Commerce in the Slovak Republic
www.britcham.sk

British Chamber of Commerce in Spain
www.britishchamberspain.com

British Swedish Chamber of Commerce
www.bscc.info

British-Swiss Chamber of Commerce
www.bscc.co.uk

British Chamber of Commerce in Turkey
www.bcct.org.tr

British Chamber of Commerce in Czech Republic is “Best in Europe”

The Czech-British Chamber of Commerce was chosen as the COBCOE ‘Chamber of the Year’ for 2004.

The award, which identified the Chamber in Czech Republic as the best from 23 British Chambers, recognises its substantial growth, influence and achievements over the past six years.

From the three candidates that made the final round, the British Chamber of Commerce Czech Republic was chosen by the judges to receive the prestigious ‘Chamber of the Year’ award. It was presented in March 2004 by COBCOE (the Council of British Chambers of Commerce in Continental Europe) to the Chamber's Executive Director, Simona Kalvoda, at a dinner held at the Institute of Directors in London, in the presence of the Minister of State for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs, Mike O'Brien, MP.

For 2005 the Award will be extended with new categories to better reward and reflect the outstanding work being done:



- Chamber of the Year
- Best Single Event
- Best Membership growth
- Best Sponsorship achievement.

The winning submissions will be showcased on the new COBCOE website as from late April 2005.



When travelling to the UK for business, British Airways is the airline to choose. With over 550 daily departures from Europe to the UK, operating from 54 airports in 29 countries, BA offers the choice and flexibility business passengers need.

This summer sees the launch of brand new services to London Gatwick and Bristol. These include Split in Croatia, Thessalonica in Greece and Vilnius in Lithuania, with additions to the Bucharest and Sofia schedule. The new routes to Bristol will operate from Zurich and Milan.

British Airways is committed to responding to changing customer needs; the new summer schedule and changes in Club Europe are two demonstrations of this.

Club Europe passengers will have recently noticed changes to the cabin with new soft furnishings and photographs. This combined with new food options and BA's high standards of customer service makes Club Europe a unique experience.

Customers can experience the benefits of BA's e-services throughout the journey process, from booking their ticket online to checking-in either online or at the self-service kiosks at the airport.

BA's revolutionary fare explorer allows customers to make instant trade offs between price and schedule, so that they are able to make the best choice for their needs and budget. The “manage my booking” function on ba.com allows customers to view and make changes if necessary as well as reserve a seat or special meal.

In addition to all of this, passengers flying out of 27 of BA's European airports can also print their boarding pass at home or in the office that means they can go straight to security when arriving at the airport. This has been welcomed by BA passengers and continues to be rolled out across airports in Europe.

Customers benefit from convenient schedules and centrally located airports when flying with BA. The aim is to make the most of the working

NEW WEBSITE ARRIVES

COBCOE launched its new website (www.cobcoe.org.uk) in February.

The redesign focuses its attention on two key areas: giving the site a more European and professional feel and improving the navigation of the site, thereby making it easier to find the increasing amount of content which the site contains.

A completely new feature is also introduced on the new website: a discussion forum where all COBCOE members can, in a password protected area, post new developments or new ideas and queries. This will allow members to freely exchange their thinking to help further the success of British Chambers around Europe.

The site will be regularly updated and developed with news and upcoming events to ensure a complete and informative online meeting and reference point for all COBCOE members.

The site was designed and produced by web agency Daydream (www.daydream.pt) who are also responsible for the current redevelopment of the British Portuguese Chamber of Commerce site, amongst others.

FLY THE FLAG!



day so when arriving at Heathrow, customers are only minutes away from the Heathrow Express. Fifteen minutes later they are in central London!

BA offers one of the most comprehensive worldwide schedules, operating to 168 airports in 75 countries. After travelling to London in Club Europe, customers can then experience a flat bed in Club World. British Airways was proud to be the first ever carrier with a flat bed in business class and continues to be a leader in this field.

COBCOE wishes to thank BA for its kind sponsorship of this newsletter.

Chambers Review of the year 2004

BRITISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN SPAIN



Re-launch cocktail - from left to right: H.E. Mr. Stephen Wright, C.M.G., Mrs Wright, Mr Montes del Pino (Chairman of the Madrid Committee), Mrs Montes del Pino and Mr English (President of the BCCS)

In the past six months the British Chamber of Commerce in Spain has seen not only the launch of a new logo and corporate image, but also the re-inauguration of the Chamber in Madrid. In May a reception was hosted by the British Ambassador to Spain, H.E. Mr. Stephen Wright, C.M.G. at the residence for Chamber Members and the business community of Madrid. At this event the Chamber was also pleased to welcome Jorge Montes del Pino, President of Rolls Royce International S.L., as the Chairman of the newly founded Madrid Committee.

It has continued to organize prominent events in Madrid, including Business Luncheons, with keynote speakers such as Luis Javier Navarro O.B.E., President of BP Group España, and Javier Gómez Navarro, the Ex-Minister of Tourism. From January to July 2004 BCCS organized a total of 26 events, with an emphasis placed on helping businesses to promote themselves and network. These included Sectorial Lunches and Business Luncheons, with keynote speakers such as Jaume Pages, Director General of the International Forum 2004 and other events from topical seminars to social gatherings, and as usual the annual Barcelona Golf Tournament, which was retransmitted on Canal Golf +.

THE BRITISH-SWISS CHAMBER of COMMERCE IN 2004

The BSCC has certainly been on the move in 2004. In October, the BSCC Central Office moved to new larger offices in the Seefeld area of Zurich. This enables the Chamber to offer its members a meeting room and hot desk at very competitive rates.

In 2004, the BSCC Public Affairs Commission expanded its membership and activities in Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the UK. Led by Howard Rosen CBE, the PAC works with

governments at all levels to influence decision-making to the benefit of members. It has institutionalised its links with parliamentarians and has become a true core competence of the Chamber.



Gala Dinner with HE Simon Featherstone, HM Ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein

The Chamber hosted over 70 very successful events in 2004, featuring such high profile speakers as HRH the Duke of York, Prince Andrew, CVO, ADC, Special Representative for International Investment and Trade, Swiss Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey, Digby Jones, Director General of the Confederation of British industry, Sir William Castell, Vice President of the General Electric Company and President & CEO of GE Healthcare, and The Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of London, Alderman Finch. In addition, the Chamber welcomed speakers Jean-Pierre Roth, President of the Swiss National Bank, Malcolm Knight, General Manager of the Basel-based Bank for International Settlements, and Dr. Ulrich Gygi, CEO of Swiss Post, and launched a representation in Manchester to support BSCC members and raise the Chamber's profile in the North-West of England.

BRITISH-SWEDISH CHAMBER of COMMERCE

50th Anniversary Seminar at Nybrokajen 11 followed by dinner & dance at Vinterträdgården, Grand Hôtel

Tuesday September 7th was D-day for the BSCC. Exactly 50 years before, to the day, the British-Swedish Chamber was founded with a big banquet dinner at the Grand Hôtel and Marcus Wallenberg became the Chamber's first Chairman. The BSCC celebrated its big day with a seminar on Britain, Sweden and Europe to which guest speakers, EU Commissioner Chris Patten, The Rt Hon Kenneth Clarke and former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt were invited to share their views on the topic.

Moderator was the British Ambassador to Sweden Anthony Cary CMG who presided the seminar after Chamber Chairman Jan Carlzon's welcome speech. The seminar was held at Nybrokajen 11 and followed by dinner dance at nearby Vinterträdgården, Grand Hôtel.

Leading personalities from British and Swedish business and society were present and the attendance from the Swedish Royal Household of HRH Princess Lilian and Princess Christina with husband Tord Magnuson added an extra touch of glamour. This was topped up by the



Hélène Olsson and HRH Princess Lilian

fact that HRH The Duke of York had flown in from the UK to attend the dinner. During dinner Chairman Jan Carlzon spoke of the Chamber's important role in promoting businesses between our two countries and Secretary General Hélène Olsson highlighted the Chamber's networking



HRH The Duke of York speaking at the Jubilee dinner

opportunities and active calendar of events. In his speech The Duke of York said he was impressed by the Swedes' linguistic skills and enjoyed being the UK's Special Representative for International Trade & Investment.

Stockholms Studentsångare entertained during dinner and orchestra Ambassadeur encouraged everyone to dance until long after midnight.

BRITISH-POLISH CHAMBER

BPCC 1st Annual Conference & Exhibition

Launching a high-profile annual event for a chamber can be a stressful and risky enterprise – but if done well, can form the cornerstone of a series that can be repeated year after year. The British Polish Chamber of Commerce held its first Annual Conference & Exhibition just days before Poland joined the EU (21–22 April 2004). The event's subtitle – 'Poland – the EU – Business: The Big Picture' – explains the purpose of the conference – to brief members and other foreign investors in Poland about what Accession will mean to the way they run their companies. After a keynote speech by the President of the National Bank of Poland, Professor Leszek Balcerowicz, the conference heard presentations on subjects such as competition policy, EU funding, public-private partnerships and mid- and long-term macroeconomic prospects from BPCC members.

Next year, the BPCC plans to go a step further – by linking the event to a number of inbound trade missions from the UK, arranging face-to-face meetings for British firms with pre-qualified Polish companies. A 'meet the buyer' element will be added to the Exhibition, and a series of seminars in Polish about doing business with the UK and UK companies will be arranged to attract greater visitor numbers. The event will be staged in Warsaw on 21–22 March 2005.

“An event such as this is a lot of work, but results in enhanced prestige for the Chamber and its members”, says Barbara Stachowiak-Kowalska, BPCC executive director, whose outstanding work for the Chamber was recognised in the New Year Honours List with the award of the MBE. Congratulations!

Office move

The Chamber has also recently moved to new, improved offices in Warsaw. The 'public' areas of the premises include lounge areas for informal business meetings and a well stocked resource library containing information brochures on the many aspects of doing business in Poland. Plans are also underway to provide an internet connection point to allow access to the BPCC's informative web page (www.bpcc.org.com). More formal meeting and conference areas are also available for use by visitors via prior arrangement.

THE BRITISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR ITALY

Centenary Year 2004 ... A remarkable achievement.

The Year 2004 marked the Centenary of the British Chamber of Commerce for Italy.

The Chamber wishes to thank all its Members who actively supported the many activities and initiatives throughout the year.

Gabriele Albertini, Mayor of Milan, held an inaugural speech in January to celebrate the opening of the BCCI Centenary Year, while Claudio Ranieri, formerly Manager of Chelsea FC, entertained our Members during the London Centenary Lunch in March. Sir John Shepherd gave a British answer to the frequently asked question: “What are diplomats for?” during the Cagliari Meeting in May and, last but not least, the Chamber concluded its wide spectrum of social activities with the Genova Jubilee Week-End at the end of May, a two-day guided tour of historical Genova.

The BCCI Legal and Tax Committee has been extremely busy in organising a number of round tables and seminars in Milan and Rome. Main seminar and round tables organised covered a number of subjects, “The Italian citizen in the UK and the British citizen in Italy: opportunities of fiscal planning” (in collaboration with Withers LLP) in January, “The role of independent directors - a comparative approach Italy/UK” in February and “E-Commerce Law: threats and opportunities” in March (in collaboration with Lovells), “Italian Taxation of Individuals – How to avoid possible pitfalls for foreigners” (in collaboration with KPMG) in May and the conference “Tremonti Tax Reform: Tax aspects of extraordinary transactions” in June.

The Centenary reception at the House of Lords in London on October 6th started the celebrations which continued with the Centenary Concert on October 25th at the Conservatorio in Milan and the Gala Dinner at the Società del Giardino on November 23rd in the presence of HRH Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, rounded off an extraordinary year.

BRITISH ICELANDIC CHAMBER

Led by Chairman, John Quitter, the British-Icelandic Chamber of Commerce celebrated its seventh year of activity with an Annual General Meeting at the Embassy of Iceland in the UK on 30 November. The AGM was unusually well attended with a standing room only audience, and the speaker was Sigurdur Einarsson, Executive Chairman of Kaupthing Bank.

This crowned an eventful year for BICC, which has seen its membership grow both in Iceland and in the UK, propelled by an extraordinary bout of investment activity by Icelandic companies in the UK. The major newspapers in the UK scarcely let a day pass by without noting the level of takeover activities by Icelandic companies and banks in the UK, and this has led in turn to a general fascination with all things Icelandic from the thermal baths to the avant garde cinema to the attractions of Reykjavik as a tourist destination. The BICC would of course like to lay claim to all these successes, but it is true that our members in Iceland are very active pursuing UK investment opportunities.

Our golf tournaments have become a recognised event for business networking, we

are in process of preparing a book by an Icelandic journalist focussing on the experience of Icelandic companies in the UK, and we are hosting a tour to Europe's largest building and construction project in the East of Iceland for companies interested in energy efficiency. All in all a successful 2004 and a great start for the New Year.

BRITISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN LITHUANIA

"Breakfast Technical Briefings" have been recently launched in chamber's monthly programme and are being held in Shakespeare boutique Hotel located in a beautiful old town of Vilnius. Main objective of those meetings is to help the members keep abreast of changes in the law that affect how business is done in Lithuania and assist the companies in solving their business related problems more effectively through the topics discussed during breakfasts. Breakfast Technical Briefings already gained high interest from the BCC Members and non-members alike for the right format and timing of the Breakfasts. All participants found that a free access to the presentations after the events is extra beneficial.



BCC Members and Guests at newly launched Breakfast Technical Briefing

British Chamber of Commerce in Lithuania celebrates its 5th Anniversary. In May 2004 the British Chamber of Commerce in Lithuania held its 5th Anniversary reception. Over 200 additional guests were invited to the recently opened glass showroom for Jaguar, Land Rover, Volvo and Renault located in Vilnius, capital city of Lithuania. The honorary guests at the Reception were the then Acting President of the Republic of Lithuania, Artūras Paulauskas accompanied by members of his office, and HE British Ambassador Colin Roberts. The other guests represented British, Lithuanian and international companies, Governmental bodies and non-governmental institutions, business associations and Foreign Embassies in Lithuania.



From right to left: H.M. British Ambassador Colin Roberts, the Former Acting President of the Republic of Lithuania Artūras Paulauskas, the Former Chairman BCC Hugh Thomas

Newly launched website!

www.bcc.lt site information is available not only to BCC members but also to an unlimited number of visitors. Visitors to the new website find a calendar of upcoming past events event with photos, chamber's newsletter BCC paper accessible in pdf format, information about chamber company members, Lithuania headline news, country profile and more.

New Initiative for BCC Members in Lithuania – Discount Scheme “Members to Members”

The discount scheme “Members to Member” has been recently launched by the Chamber. This is an internal discount scheme operating only between BCC members

Today, within chamber's constantly growing membership is seen to be the right time to initiate the discount scheme, to encourage members to use more services provided by the BCC membership.

TURKEY

A Cocktail Party was held by the British Turkish Chamber of Commerce on the 28th July 2004 to introduce the New Consul General to members. The glamorous venue was the poolside of the Princess Hotel in Ortakoy, and it was, of course, a great success.

The party started at 6.00 pm and continued until 8.30 pm. New Consul General, Ms Barbara Hay who found time in a really busy schedule to attend the party, met guests individually, and all of the attendees were very impressed by her kind interest. They had an opportunity to discuss common issues related their business in the friendly atmosphere accompanied with drinks and the delicious snacks served by the hotel. It is generally agreed that these events are significant in terms of bringing members together, helping them to network and creating productive environment to share their experiences.

LUXEMBOURG

The British Chamber of Commerce for Luxembourg has had an active and successful year 2004. In April the Chamber finally moved into splendid new offices in the new headquarters of the Luxembourg Chambre de Commerce.

The Chamber has held numerous business and social events over the year, including the ever-popular Driving Safety Day, at which participants learn some theory then go out on the track in their own cars and put it into practice, some with more success than others.

Another event that proved very popular was a site visit to Luxembourg-based Cargolux Airlines, Europe's largest all-cargo airline, at which participants were given an insight into the freight business by a member of senior management, followed by a tour of the cargo centre and ending up with a visit of the flight deck of a 747 freighter aircraft.

A highlight of the year was a gala dinner with HRH The Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, organized together with eight other international chambers of commerce in Luxembourg (American, Chilean, Chinese, French, Italian, Nordic, Spanish and Swiss). With the proceeds of this event, a donation of €5,000 was made to the Grand Duchess' foundation.

The calendar of events for the year also included a Summer Dance with entertainment provided by opera singers from London's Covent Garden, a Golf Day & Prize-Giving Dinner, and a full programme of speaker's lunches as well as three business forums. The year ended on a festive note with the traditional Christmas Lunch with guest speaker HM British Ambassador Mr James Clark.



From left to right; Ms Barbara Hay- New Consul General, Mr Duncan Blake OBE – Chairman of BCCT, and members

THE BRITISH-HELLENIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

During a notable 'Olympic' year for the BHCC, a number of highlights stand out.

An important conference "Greece: The Regional Economic Centre in SouthEast Europe" was sponsored by National Bank of Greece, attended by 120 people and was held at the Four Seasons Hotel in London. The focus of the event was to promote Greece as a central location to do business in the Balkans.



Cherie Blair

The BHCC charity Champagne Ball was held on 18 June around the pool at the Athens Hilton. It was attended by 170 people and sponsored by many companies, and in keeping with the Olympic year, raffle proceeds were donated equally between the British and Hellenic Paralympic Associations. Both Association Presidents attended. The purpose was to bring to people's attention the extraordinary capabilities of disabled sports people and the efforts needed to raise funds to allow them to compete at international level.

A Business Lunch with guest speaker Cherie Blair was organised during her private visit to

Greece in her capacity as Patron of SCOPE and of 31 other charities. The lunch was an exclusive event attended by 60 people (including the wife of the Greek Prime Minister) and held at the luxurious, newly renovated Grande Bretagne Hotel, Athens.

And in London a Conference entitled "The Hellenic Tourism Industry: Prospects for Business" was held at the InterContinental Hotel and attended by 100 people. It was sponsored by the Hellenic Tourism Company, and with the success of the Olympic Games, the Greek Minister of Tourism was in London to promote general tourism to Greece.

BCC GERMANY

Membership growth

A year of hard work and energy from the BCCG team led by Director Andreas Meyer-Schwickerath, delivered a significant upturn during 2004. Membership development is very positive, with over 150 new members and sustaining members by December resulting in a net growth of ca. 12%. The quality of events, services and publications were substantially improved. The BCCG website shows over 100,000 page hits and over 3000 visitors monthly on average.

Major events successes

A series of events were organised on a national and international level. The first very successful event was held in new cooperation with the German – British Forum on June 16, with the title "Is Anglo-Saxon Capitalism the Right Way for Germany". The conference drew over 200 guests to the Industrie Club Düsseldorf. Speakers included Lord Hurd of Westwell, and Chairman German British Forum; Dr. Christian Horn, as well as Norbert Strohschen, President BCCG and many other eminent names.

A further GBF Conference in cooperation with BCCG on a technology theme was held in London, in October and 'Modernising the economy – What can Germany learn from Thatcherism?', is on January, 26th, 2005, in Berlin to be followed by BCCG's first annual New Year's reception at the British Embassy. Full details are on the BCCG website.

The Annual General Meeting was successfully held in Leipzig on June 11 with a keynote speech by David Marsh, Partner Droege & Comp and former Chief Correspondent of The Financial Times, and in time for the state visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip to Germany in November, and at the suggestion and encouragement of the BCCG, the German newspaper "Die Welt" (which has over one million readers) published a special supplement on Great Britain and Germany, as a "Welt Report". It is the first time for many years that they have featured this topic.

'British Days' were successfully held in Frankfurt/Kronberg, Krefeld and Hamburg, resulting in a very successful auction of an original print donated by HM Prince Charles, raising over 5000 Euro for the benefitting cause.

British Czech Republic Chamber of Commerce

Starry Night in the Czech Republic

The long expected, and yet longer planned, Starry Night Christmas Gala Dinner of the British Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic took place on Saturday, 4 December 2004. The venue was very exclusive – the Slovansky dum in the centre of Prague.

Amongst the 300 guests, there were mostly members of the Chamber, their friends and families, however we had some more 'prominent' guests as well. One of them was the newly appointed Ambassador to the Czech Republic, Ms. Linda Duffield.

The night started with a children's choir singing Christmas carols, which was followed by served four-course dinner. After that, we had an exciting auction with large proceeds going to charity. More cash for charity was raised during the Cow Parade – a silent auction of ceramic cows produced by mentally disordered people.

The night continued with charity roulette, and wild disco dancing until early morning hours.

HUNGARY – INVESTMENT CLIMATE BAROMETER

In May 2004 The British Chamber of Commerce in Hungary together with Synovate Hungary carried out a survey in association with other European national bilateral chambers of commerce operating in Hungary that gathered the opinion of 240 senior managers of foreign companies.

The aim was to investigate their opinion regarding the Hungarian business environment, especially vis-à-vis other countries in the region, and their views regarding Hungary's EU accession. The most important factors driving investment into Hungary are the perceived benefits to foreign investors, a well-developed financial sector and high quality of management according to the respondents. Hungary is perceived strong in terms of having a well-developed financial infrastructure, high quality of managements but weak in terms offering benefits to foreign investors.

There is room for improvement in terms of infrastructure and transparency of the business environment, which are also important drivers for future investment. Foreign investors agree that Hungary's accession to the EU will have



positive effects on the Hungarian economy especially in terms of improved infrastructure, more financing options and better quality of public services. Investors, at the same time, are somewhat concerned about the new competition and legal uncertainty. The most important help the government can give businesses is more predictability.



The Role of Government in Europe

From Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade & Industry

The first thing that strikes me about COBCOE is how long some of your members have been working in Europe. Indeed some Chambers of Commerce have been successfully representing British businesses in Europe for over a hundred years.

It's an impressive record, and one that poses an important question for us in Government – namely how can we add value to what you are already achieving?

The UK will hold the rotating UK Presidency of the European Union for 6 months from July next year, so it is a question of particular relevance at this time. Our Presidency presents an excellent opportunity to shape the European agenda and we at DTI are putting much thought into what we would like to achieve.

First of all, we are determined to get rid of unnecessary red tape. We are currently working with our partners in Europe to identify the most burdensome regulations and find ways to simplify them or, if possible, abolish them altogether.

Secondly, we want a European economy that creates more jobs. That means one where businesses can flourish and expand. We also want a labour market which is flexible and dynamic, so that the choice of available jobs is as great as possible. And flowing from that choice, people will have the freedom to balance their working and home lives in a way that suits them.

A third priority is research and innovation. European science and technology are second to none, but we have a poor track record in turning bright ideas into money-spinners. If we are to compete in the global economy, we need greater co-operation between scientists and the business community and an environment where businesses can get access to the finance they need.

Our fourth objective is a Europe which is open for business with the rest of the world. Too often the instinct to protect our industries and markets has held sway. And at the end of the day, we always end up paying the price – through higher taxes or more expensive products.

If we achieve these aims, then I believe that we will have laid the foundation for a more competitive Europe. My hope is that in successfully completing this job, we will have made yours – promoting and supporting trade links between the UK and Europe – that much easier.

