



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

SBA: Competitiveness Council conclusions must be endorsed by Heads of State *Action Plan must become part of the European Economic Recovery Plan*

Brussels, 2 December 2008 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, welcomed the conclusions on the Small Business Act adopted by the Competitiveness Council yesterday (Monday). According to UEAPME, the document sets the right priorities for a serious and effective SME policy, especially when it comes to access to finance and the reduction of administrative burdens. UEAPME also appreciated the introduction of a specific action plan as an annex to the Council conclusions, which should become part of the European Economic Recovery Plan. UEAPME stressed, however, the need to promote the document at the highest possible political level. The organisation called therefore on the European Heads of State and Government to formally endorse the work of the Competitiveness Council at their next meeting in Brussels on 11 and 12 December.

Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** offered the following comments:

"The conclusions adopted yesterday at the Competitiveness Council are a positive signal for European SMEs. Ministers have fully embraced the 'Think Small First' principle and showed a clear understanding on what must be done to improve SMEs' access to finance, reduce administrative burdens and tear down barriers to the completion of the internal market."

"The action plan endorsed yesterday is an additional reason for satisfaction. It shows that Member States are aware of the difficulties SMEs are facing and of the positive role that the Small Business Act can play to tackle the current economic downturn. The action plan must become part of the European Economic Recovery Plan, which will be adopted by the European Council next week."

"An endorsement by Heads of State and Government is not a matter of form, but a matter of substance: the Small Business Act must be promoted at the highest political level to fully gain the recognition it deserves. Failure to do so would mean a return to the status quo and dramatically reduce the impact of the Small Business Act on European SMEs. Member States must not let this happen."

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 83 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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