



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

Commission’s proposals to tackle unemployment set the right priorities

SMEs particularly pleased with new targets on vocational training and joint EIB-EC micro-credit scheme

Brussels, 3 June 2009 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, welcomed the set of measures proposed today by the European Commission to tackle the effects of the current economic crisis on employment in Europe. According to UEAPME, the European Commission focused on the right priorities and struck the right balance between actions on the supply side and on the demand side of the economy. UEAPME was particularly pleased with the Commission’s proposal to boost vocational training, which now includes an ambitious quantitative target of 5 million apprenticeships before 2010, and with the suggested joint EIB-EC micro-credit scheme for loans to micro enterprises, although it warned that its implementation phase will be crucial.

Employment and Social Affairs Director **Liliane Volozinskis** offered the following comments:

“Today’s communication comes after weeks of discussions between the EU institutions and the European Social Partners, an Extraordinary Employment Summit and three preparatory seminars in which UEAPME participated. The European Commission has clearly taken our messages on board, emphasising the importance of flexicurity to modernise labour markets and focusing on the right priorities to safeguard employment during the present downturn. The European Council should endorse this ambitious plan.”

“The demand side of labour markets rightly gets more attention than usual and companies’ difficulties are taken into account. The Commission’s calls to reduce non-wage labour costs, decrease the burden of social security and promote entrepreneurship and self-employment are a welcome change of language from previous communications, which often focused exclusively on the supply of labour.”

“On the supply side, improving skills to better meet labour market needs is a clear priority for SMEs, which find it hard to recruit qualified workers, all the more so in the present downturn. The Commission has set an ambitious target today, by calling on Member States to guarantee that at least 5 million young Europeans have access to apprenticeships until the end of 2010. We are certainly pleased with the EC proposal since vocational training is one of the best ways to get a job. However, we wonder how this target can be reached without support measures for crafts and SMEs, which are the main providers of apprenticeships and may be less than likely to host apprentices at this time of reduced economic activity.”

“The suggested joint EIB-EC 500 million EUR micro-credit fund clearly has the potential to facilitate access to finance on one hand and to promote the creation of new businesses on the other hand. However, its success will largely depend on the willingness of intermediary institutions to pass on the EU funds to the potential recipients. Our experience so far shows mixed results in this respect, which does not bode well for the success of this scheme.”

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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/>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Liliane Volozinskis, Employment and Social Affairs Director, Tel. +32 (0)2 230 7599, Email: l.volozinskis@ueapme.com
Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer, Tel. +32 (0)496 520 329, Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com