

# UEAPME Newsflash

## UEAPME calls for solid Small Business Act at EC hearing

The European Commission organised on 6 February a public hearing on the “Small Business Act for Europe” (SBA) due for adoption in June. This high-level event, which gathered more than 200 participants at Centre Borschette in Brussels, was attended by Vice President Verheugen, Mr Tomaž Jeršič from the Ministry of the Economy of Slovenia, Mr Othmar Karas MEP and closed by President Barroso. Secretary General Andrea Benassi spoke at the event. He reinstated UEAPME’s calls for a solid, legally binding document based on the “think small first” principle, which must provide added value for all future legislative initiatives. A bland repackaging of the existing rules is by no means sufficient to achieve the Commission’s ambitious aims, insisted Mr Benassi. The reactions to Mr Benassi’s speech were positive, with Vice President Verheugen stressing that the European Commission will “aim high” in its forthcoming proposal, and President Barroso reconfirming his “personal commitment” to the SBA.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## Toifl speaks at “Enterprise Europe Network” launch

President Georg Toifl spoke on 7 February at the launch event for Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), an EC initiative that combines and builds on the former Innovation Relay Centres and Euro Info Centres to provide information and advice on EU matters to EU companies, in particular SMEs. Mr Toifl said that business support services such as EEN are essential for SMEs, since they provide high quality information on opportunities and regulations, especially in other Member States. He praised the “no wrong door” design of EEN, by which all information is available in all the entry points. For countries where EEN contact points will be run by government agencies, Mr Toifl called for a strict collaboration between EEN and representative business organisations that already have knowledge and structures in place. Finally, he stressed that while EEN can indeed provide the Commission with regular feedback on EU policy, this can by no means replace the consultation of representative business organisations.

➤ [Read more](#) on EEN or contact [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## ECOSOC conference discusses renewed Lisbon strategy

The European Economic and Social Committee organised on 7-8 February a high level conference on the renewed Lisbon Strategy. Economic and Fiscal Policy Director Gerhard Huemer spoke in a panel dedicated to the Integrated Guidelines and the Community Lisbon Programme. Although the renewed Lisbon Strategy is starting to deliver and the integrated guidelines have improved coherence and ownership, some shortcomings remain, stressed Mr Huemer, since Member States still indulge in “cherry-picking” among the objectives and Social Partners are not always sufficiently involved in programming and implementing. While the integrated guidelines cover all relevant policies and should not therefore be changed, some special challenges such as budget consolidation and labour market reforms deserve special attention, said Mr Huemer, who then commented on a number of Lisbon-related policy issues such as the Small Business Act, energy policy, SEPA, venture capital, IPR, market access and defence measures.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Gerhard Huemer](#)

## UEAPME promotes SMEs as cohesion policy drivers

UEAPME recently replied to a consultation launched by the European Commission on the future of the EU Cohesion Policy in the light of the “Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion” adopted in May 2007. In its position paper, UEAPME welcomed the EC report as an excellent analysis of the progresses made in order to reach economic and social cohesion, as it describes in detail the economic, social and territorial situation in the 268 regions that compose the European Union. It also stressed the importance of both SMEs and business representative organisations as central characters for the local territory. UEAPME then elaborated on the effects on cohesion policy of issues such as restructuring, climate change and demographic change, as well as on the role of cohesion policy as a driver of the Lisbon strategy and of sustainable development.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Cristina Murciano](#)

## Mobility: SMEs request dedicated line for apprentices

UEAPME published this week a concept paper on how to foster the mobility of apprentices and young people in initial vocational training, calling on the forthcoming French Presidency to support the establishment of a specifically dedicated sub-programme under the so-called “Lifelong Learning Programme” and alongside the existing Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig. Although tangible progress has been made in the field thanks to Leonardo da Vinci, this programme does not allow overcoming the current limited participation of apprentices and companies from the craft sector. This is caused by its inflexible structure, despite some efforts to improve it, and by its non-adaptation to the necessity of a long term and stable exchange programme of apprentices with the support of strong networks of intermediary bodies. UEAPME therefore called for a mobility programme dedicated and clearly tailored to the needs of apprentices and young people in initial vocational training.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

## UEAPME bids farewell to Oliver Loebel

After more than ten years at UEAPME, Oliver Loebel stepped down this week as Sectoral Policy Director to pursue a new career path as Secretary General of BING, a federation that represents the rigid polyurethane insulation industry. Mr Loebel joined UEAPME in 1997 after working with the European Commission as a seconded national expert. His portfolio of responsibilities at UEAPME included a number of key sectors such as transport, construction, cosmetics and healthcare. Secretary General Andrea Benassi and all the staff at UEAPME would like to record their appreciation for Oliver's outstanding work in the past ten years, and wish him all the best for his future career. UEAPME will soon announce Oliver's replacement.

## From Andrea Benassi's agenda: VP Verheugen

Secretary General Andrea Benassi met on 5 February the European Commission's Vice President **Günter Verheugen**, ahead of the hearing organised by the EC on the "Small Business Act for Europe" (*see above*). The SBA was the key issue discussed at the one-hour-long introductory meeting, which was characterised by a warm atmosphere. Mr Benassi insisted on UEAPME's request for a legally binding act, which Mr Verheugen took note of. The Commission's Vice President agreed with the need to make as many of the SBA features as possible compulsory both for the European institutions and for Member States, a concept which was echoed at the EC hearing the day after. Mr Benassi stressed the need for a paradigm shift in the SBA as far as smaller businesses are concerned: these realities represent the vast majority of all European companies and should therefore be treated as the rule rather than as the exception. Finally, the Secretary General encouraged Mr Verheugen to pursue the efforts started in 2005 to reduce administrative burdens for all enterprises, which is particularly beneficial for SMEs.

- For [questions](#) on Mr Benassi's agenda, please contact the [UEAPME Secretariat](#)

## FORWARD PLANNING

### KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- European conference on fashion and innovation (Milan, 15/02, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- Business-University Forum (Brussels, 28-29/02, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- Conference on Migrant Entrepreneurship – Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (Brussels, 05/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- European Commission conference on the European Private Company (Brussels, 10/03, contact [Maria Cimaglia](#))

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