

UEAPME Newsflash

PIN-SME event at CeBIT discusses ICT SMEs' potential

Secretary General Andrea Benassi spoke at a conference organised on 5 March by PIN-SME at CeBIT, the world's largest ICT trade fair in Hannover, Germany. The [event](#), entitled "How can Europe foster its ICT SMEs?", featured speakers from the European Commission, SAP and PIN-SME member organisations. Mr Benassi singled out new technologies such as e-invoicing, the uptake of "e-skills" and SME-friendly standards as the main opportunities and challenges ahead in the ICT sector for Europe's small companies. Firstly, e-invoicing has a great cost-cutting potential, said Mr Benassi, but interoperability across Europe must be guaranteed. Secondly, "e-skills" must be further improved and promoted both for ICT practitioners and users. Thirdly, standardisation in the ICT sector could indeed be useful for SMEs, but small companies must be properly involved in the drafting process, which should balance the interests of all stakeholders.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Sebastiano Toffaletti](#)

CSR high level meeting: UEAPME presents SME actions

The European Alliance for CSR held its second high level meeting in Brussels on 4 March. The meeting, which was attended by Commissioners Verheugen and Spidla, aimed to review progress of the Alliance activities during the last year and to share views on CSR and competitiveness in the context of EU policy. The [Alliance Progress Review 2007](#) was also unveiled. Secretary General Andrea Benassi, speaking at the event, described two of the activities put forward by UEAPME in the field. In fact, UEAPME recently issued a [compendium](#) collecting 50 good practices carried out by its members and individual SMEs in the field of diversity and in the fight against all forms of discrimination. Mr Benassi also touched upon the EC-funded [project](#) currently run by UEAPME to support intermediary business organisations to assist their members in implementing CSR principles. Finally, Mr Benassi stressed the increasing demand from SMEs for concrete tools, tangible instruments and solutions to tackle the challenges of sustainable development.

➤ Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

Small exporters need tailored information and advice

The Robert Schuman Foundation organised on 4 March a workshop entitled "[Is Europe supporting its companies to export?](#)". Enterprise Policy Director Luc Hendrickx spoke at the event. He welcomed the latest EU initiatives and developments in the field, such as the EC's DG Trade Market Access Strategy, the recently set up Complaint Register and the adoption of the so-called "Guardans report" at the European Parliament, which calls among other things for a stronger focus on SMEs. Mr Hendrickx also stressed that, while not all SMEs are bound to become exporters, their potential remains largely untapped and their degree of internationalisation can be improved both within and outside the EU. Good market conditions, trade defence instruments and bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations are indeed important. SMEs, however, also require tailored information, quality advice and efficient export tools. Finally, Mr Hendrickx put forward UEAPME's requests for a "train-the-trainer" programme to form trade promotion officers for SMEs.

➤ Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

UEAPME replies to EU Investment Bank on SME finance

UEAPME issued this week its comments on the first draft findings and conclusions of an SME consultation launched by the European Investment Bank in 2007, which came to a close at the end of February. According to UEAPME, the [EIB document](#) is a very helpful and well-balanced contribution to the ongoing discussion on SME finance and its analysis allows drawing realistic and reasonable conclusions for future policies and instruments. UEAPME fully shared the main findings of the EIB, i.e. that the administrative burden linked to EIB's products must be reduced to increase their attractiveness for SMEs, which also require new instruments between classical loans and equity. UEAPME noticed, however, some shortcomings in the report from an SME perspective. For instance, the document uses an extremely narrow definition of innovation, which does not cover the reality of the overwhelming majority of innovative SMEs. The European Investment Bank is due to release its final conclusions on the SME consultation in April.

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

Working Group tackles impact of EU food law on SMEs

The UEAPME Working Group on Foodstuffs met in Brussels on 28 February. Among the key items on the agenda was a presentation by Professor Bernd van der Meulen, from the Dutch University of Wageningen, on the quality of EU food law and its impact on businesses. According to Prof. van der Meulen, the excessive regulatory burden place on food-producing SMEs in the EU could be one of the causes of its less than ideal performance in the past years. Information about legislation also plays a key role. Other issues discussed included the EC plans to regulate the provision of food information to consumers, the Annual Management Plans of the Food Safety Directorate of the EC's DG Health and Consumer Affairs, and reports from a number of food-related standardisation technical committees. The UEAPME Working Group on Foodstuffs will meet again on 26 June.

➤ Contact: [Ludger Fischer](#)

From Andrea Benassi's agenda: Karas, Schleyer

Secretary General Andrea Benassi met this week a leading MEP and the Secretary General of UEAPME's member ZDH, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts.

06/03: Mr Benassi joined business organisations Eurochambres and Eurocommerce in a meeting with **Othmar Karas** MEP, President of the European Parliament's SME Intergroup. The three organisations reinstated to Mr Karas their position and expectations on the Small Business Act, and secured the SME Intergroup's support for their calls in the run-up to the publication of the SBA planned for 11 June.

06/03: on the same day, Mr Benassi met **Hanns-Eberhard Schleyer**, Secretary General of UEAPME's member ZDH, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts, and President of UEAPME's Budget Committee. The Secretaries General discussed a number of forthcoming initiatives planned for 2008. Mr Benassi and Mr Schleyer also took stock of UEAPME's state of affairs and exchanged views on the main policy issues on the agenda for the forthcoming Tripartite and Spring Summits.

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

FORWARD PLANNING

KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- [European Commission conference on the European Private Company](#) (Brussels, 10/03, contact [Maria Cimaglia](#))
- [European Social Partners seminar on restructuring](#) (Vienna, 10-11/03, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- [Tripartite Summit for Growth and Jobs](#) (Brussels, 13/03, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- [Conference on "The reduction of administrative burdens on SMEs"](#) (Bled, 17/04, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))

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