



PRESS RELEASE

**UEAPME and ETUC working together for the first time
to help implement the social acquis in SMEs through social dialogue in the
CEECs**

A few months ago, the European association for small and medium enterprises, UEAPME, and the European Trade Union Confederation, ETUC, launched for the first time a bilateral project supported by the European Commission that aims to support efforts by employers and trade unions (members of ETUC and UEAPME) to implement the EU social acquis in SMEs in the central and eastern European countries (CEECs).

The conclusions to be discussed in the final seminar on April 5th in Brussels highlight

- the willingness in the CEEC countries to further develop better bilateral relationships between the social partners representing SME's and the trade unions,
- the necessity of creating the pre-conditions in order to encourage the development of a more autonomous social dialogue at all levels,
- the need to improve the situation of the trade unions and to enhance direct participation of SME representative organisations in the bilateral dialogue at national level in the CEECs, which are often under-represented.

All the parties agreed on the fact that the social dialogue has to be considered not as an end in itself, but as a tool for overcoming economic and social challenges, and notably for contributing to the adaptation to the new economic and social environment resulting from the implementation of the European social acquis.

Several major issues were raised in particular the challenges facing employers and workers in SMEs in the CEECs in specific areas such as working conditions, health and safety at work, training, adaptation to the new employment legislation and labour law, as well as implementation of workers' rights.

This joint contribution of UEAPME and ETUC comes at the right time in the enlargement process as the candidate countries prepare to enter the EU and to speed up the compliance of their legislation to EU legislation in this area.

The project consisted of national round tables organised by UEAPME and ETUC and their national affiliates in four countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Slovenia). In these round tables special attention was given to identifying and integrating an analysis of the current problems in the employment and social field faced by employers and workers in these countries in SMEs.

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For further information please contact:

ETUC: Penny Clarke - Tel. 02 224 04 07/46

UEAPME: Liliane Volozinskis - Tel. 02 230 75 99