



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UEAPME welcomes Irish Presidency approach to making Europe more competitive

Brussels, 08th January 2004. In a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland Ms. Mary Harney in Brussels today, UEAPME, the European SMEs employers’ association, praised the Irish Presidency’s approach for making Europe more competitive and its agenda for SMEs.

“We are pleased to see that the Irish Presidency has given such an importance to subjects that European SMEs have been putting forward for many years now: making enterprises more competitive, undertaking labour market reforms, rendering employment more attractive and less burdensome and cutting the red tape” said **Paul Reckinger**, UEAPME’s president.

The European SME association was happy to see that the Irish Presidency shares the same sense of urgency as UEAPME with regard to the implementation of the measures proposed in the Wim Kok report on employment. “It is good to know that the current presidency perceives that it is urgent for governments to actually take the political decision to implement the labour market reforms we have been talking about for years,” Reckinger said.

Amongst other issues, UEAPME and the Irish Presidency believe that it is essential that labour markets should be made more flexible and that employment has to be made worthwhile for citizens across Europe. With regard to the latter, UEAPME argues that it is urgent for national governments to reform the social protection systems and in particular the contribution/benefit schemes. Such measures would also be beneficial to the fight against undeclared work.

As regards the Lisbon Strategy, UEAPME supports the Irish presidency’s aspiration to increase the importance of the Competitiveness Council in European policy making. Indeed, as the entrepreneurial aspect of sustainable development has been often left behind in EU policy-making in recent years it is necessary to enhance its position in view of the Lisbon goals.

Finally, as regards the current debate on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the Irish Minister has supported UEAPME’s plea that CSR should remain a voluntary instrument for enterprises.

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