



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Regional Policy: focus must be given to SMEs in less developed rural areas
says UEAPME**

Brussels, 16th February 2004. In a letter sent to the European Commission today and in advance of the 3rd Cohesion Report to be published on Wednesday, UEAPME, the European Employers Association for Crafts, Trades and SMEs, urged the Commission and Member States to support the growth of crafts and SMEs in the development of less favoured rural areas.

“It is crucial that decision-makers do not ignore the importance of the growth of small business networks in less-favored rural areas. Indeed, these areas, especially within the new Member States, could experience a significant regeneration through small business activity and non agricultural development,” said **Hans-Werner Müller**, Secretary General of UEAPME. The SME association therefore supports the Commission’s actions to develop SMEs, especially small enterprises and services in these areas.

Furthermore, UEAPME stressed the need to recognize the economic and social importance of crafts and SMEs, in particular small businesses, for European Regions. Regional policy is an important mechanism by which enterprise policy can be delivered. In this context, the association considers that the Charter for Small Enterprises should be used at regional level as the basis for competitiveness and growth. In addition, the ten recommendations made in the Charter should be included in future regional plans.

Finally, given the importance of crafts and SMEs in these countries, UEAPME believes that Structural Funding should be directed towards the development of existing SMEs and growth of start up initiatives.

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