



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

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Stronger, more coherent EU competitiveness policy will help Europe meet the Lisbon challenge, says UEAPME

Brussels, 26 February 2004 “Rendering the competitiveness policy more coherent at EU level is crucial to getting the Lisbon Process back on track” **Paul Reckinger**, President of UEAPME, the European Crafts and SMEs employers association, told Mr. Bertie Ahern, Irish PM in a meeting in Dublin today. Ahead of the upcoming Spring Summit, UEAPME stressed the need for EU decision makers to make policy making more coherent in order to create the right regulatory framework for Crafts, SMEs and business in general and revitalise the Lisbon Strategy.

So far this strategy, and consequently the delivery of its reform package, has been hindered by measures in the Social and Environmental field that have imposed greater burdens on businesses. “On the one hand the Commission proposes elements that go in the direction of creating the right environment for business like the Directive for Services in the Internal Market, but on the other hand we see the emergence of regulations likely to impose high burdens on enterprises like the REACH proposal. Policy-making has to be better articulated!” said Mr. Reckinger.

UEAPME therefore fully supports the Irish Presidency initiative to encourage a more competitiveness- minded policy making within the European Commission. The association also argued that the intrinsic weaknesses of the Open Method of Co-ordination were also contributing to the delivery gap of the Lisbon reforms. Therefore, UEAPME has called for stronger, more compelling instruments to be created in order to re-energise the Lisbon strategy.

At policy level, UEAPME fully endorses the Irish Presidency focus on creating more and better jobs in the European Union in line with the recommendations of the Wim Kok report. The association shares the Irish presidency view that higher employment rates are vital to engendering economic growth in Europe and it therefore supports all measures that foster the creation of new jobs (reduction of VAT rates, reduction of non-wage labour costs for entrepreneurs).

Finally, the Craft and SME representative association called on the Irish Presidency to ask for more commitment by Member States with regard to the necessary “make work pay reforms”. Currently, many national social protection systems are dysfunctional and tend to discourage people from entering the labour market. Therefore, all Member States must unreservedly start undertaking a revision of the benefits criteria of social protection systems to encourage people to look for a job.

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