

11<sup>th</sup> May 2004



*“The Voice of SMEs in Europe<sup>1</sup>”*

## **UEAPME WELCOMES 3<sup>RD</sup> COHESION REPORT**

**The European craft and SME employers’ association will continue to focus on strengthening the SME priority**

UEAPME, the European SME employers’ association welcomed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohesion report discussed at the Cohesion Forum in Brussels today.

**Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME’s Secretary General commented “I am pleased with the report and hope that these initiatives are integrated with other essential SME policies like the Charter and Multi-Annual Programme for Small Firms.”

SMEs are central to following the priorities of convergence and competitiveness. It is crucial that this 3<sup>rd</sup> document enhances Entrepreneurship across Europe. An efficient partnership method involving Social partners, Business organisations and other socio-economic stakeholders should be in place. Technical assistance for business associations is needed, particularly in the new Member States.

Filippo Spanu, Chairman of the UEAPME Regional Affairs Group said “the inclusion of an SME priority is fundamental to the growth of our regions. The Cohesion Policy must focus on SMEs to help to activate SME activity in the Internal Market- especially in border regions.”

In a position paper, the organization proposes the development of enterprise networks and clustering to foster the concepts of competitiveness and innovation policies aimed at small enterprises with a focus on informal (organisational) intervention. This is especially necessary in Rural Areas where SMEs are fundamental to economic activity. A specific Interreg IV Business programme should be established bringing together Interreg cross border, Interreg transnational and interregional focusing on SME activities.

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**Note to editors:** For further information, please contact Victoria Carson on tel +32 2 230 7599

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<sup>1</sup> UEAPME (**U**nion **E**uropéenne de l’**A**rtisanat et des **P**etites et **M**oyennes **E**ntreprises / **E**uropean **A**ssociation of **C**raft, **S**mall & **M**edium-sized **E**nterprises) is the European Social partner representing craft, trades and SMEs in Europe (EU and countries applying for accession to the EU). It represents, through 75 national and European sectoral federations, over 11 million small enterprises, which employ over 50 million people.