



## **“The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

### **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Wim Kok recommendations are “too broad, too weak” to help Europe out of economic lethargy**

**Brussels, 04 November 2004** The Wim Kok report fell in the very same trap it was trying to avoid: propose an overloaded and conflicting set of priorities which are neither concrete nor compelling enough, UEAPME, the European crafts and SMEs employers association said. During a meeting between the European Social Partners, Mr. Kok, the EU Troika and the Commission today, the association said that the recommendations made by the Wim Kok Task Force are unlikely to bring the needed impetus to kick-start the Lisbon Strategy.

“We are disappointed by the report. On the one hand it rightly recognizes the need to focus on economic growth but on the other hand its recommendations do not support it as much as we would have liked. It is time that all stakeholders realise that a strong economy is a pre-condition for keeping our social and environmental standards” **Paul Reckinger**, UEAPME’s President said.

The association also argues that many of the proposals made are too focused on big enterprises and not enough on SMEs, which remain the first provider of employment in Europe. This is particularly true for the measures regarding R&D and innovation, which emphasize primarily on research centres, mobility of scientists and the high tech segment of the market.

However, UEAPME strongly supports the proposal made by the report to draw up national action plans, create partnerships for reforms at national level and make governments accountable for implementation. “These are excellent contributions regarding the methodology to implement the Lisbon goals, but now we need to put a strong focus on the right priority: Economic growth”, Reckinger commented.

The association now hopes that Member States will start implementing the vital measures to foster economic growth, such as:

- Undertake the necessary steps to foster business investment. As the latest Commission economic forecast showed, only a sustained investment wave would unleash Europe’s growth potential.
- Create measures to facilitate the access to finance for SMEs
- Carry out the necessary labour market reforms in order to be able to compete in a globalized market (implementing the measures of the first Kok report)
- Carry out the necessary social protection systems reform to “make work pay”

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