



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE:

New SME policy programme must be more than just rhetoric

Brussels, 10 November 2005 UEAPME, the European small and medium business organisation, has welcomed a Commission Communication future SME policy, published today (Thursday), but has expressed concern that it will be meaningless unless it followed by real initiatives.

“Streamlining SME policy instruments into one strategy will hopefully add some coherency to EU and national policy but, ultimately, actions speak much louder than words. While it is positive that Commission is looking to take a more hands-on role in guiding SME policy in the EU, merely restating policy priorities will be of limited importance. There is a need for the Commission to set out concrete proposals to realise these priorities,” said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General.

The five action areas outlined by the Commission reflect pretty well all the priorities for SMEs, which have been noted in previous policy documents, like the Charter for Small Enterprises. However, there seems to be some confusion as to how to interpret these. The Commission acknowledges the need to apply the ‘think small first’ approach to policy making but UEAPME is concerned that the Commission has failed to understand what this means.

“The Commission explicitly proposes initiatives like longer transition periods for SMEs or even exemptions. This misses the point. Given 99% of all enterprises are SMEs, legislation should be designed with consideration of these businesses to the fore from the outset. New laws should not be so complicated that exemptions for the vast majority of businesses are necessary,” continued Mr Müller.

“Commissioner Verheugen wants to promote and raise the profile of SMEs to stimulate entrepreneurship but proposing legislative exemptions for SMEs sends the wrong message. Exempting small businesses from important environmental or social legislation this would necessarily create a negative public impression of SMEs.”

Strengthening consultation with SME stakeholders in the policy-making process will be a welcome development but the Commission should ensure this process is properly targeted.

“Hopefully this communication signifies that the Commission will take a more hands-on role in guiding SME policy in the EU. Until now most of the responsibility lay with the Member States, which has yielded mixed results for small businesses,” concluded Mr Müller.

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EDITORS’ NOTE: UEAPME is the employer’s organisation representing the interests of crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 78 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across the whole of Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with nearly 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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