



## ***“The voice of SMEs in Europe”***

### **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

### **Spring Council conclusions: will they really make a difference for SMEs?**

**Brussels, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006.** The conclusions reached today (Friday) by the Spring Council were given a mixed reception by UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation. UEAPME welcomed the new and broader approach towards all types of SMEs, including micro-enterprises, traditional companies and the whole life cycle of businesses. However, it warned that these promising statements must now be followed by concrete measures, otherwise they will not change the daily life of Europe’s SMEs.

“We appreciate the efforts made by the European Council, particularly regarding issues such as the assessment of administrative costs, the reduction of compliance costs and speeding up procedures”, said **Hans-Werner Müller**, Secretary General of UEAPME. “On the other hand, the decisions taken today will change very little for the single entrepreneur, if they are not transferred into a strong set of concrete measures for growth and jobs in Europe.”

European SMEs have repeatedly asked for effective actions to follow the “SME rhetoric” in the speeches of EU policymakers. As far as the negotiations on the EU budget are concerned, the risk of cuts to the most important programmes for SMEs, such as CIP and FP7, was noted but not clearly refuted. These programmes, together with structural funds and national sources, are necessary to provide SMEs with sufficient financial means. The deepening of the internal market, another priority, will not happen unless the Services Directive becomes a reality and the burden of cross-border compliance costs in the tax systems is reduced.

“As a Social Partner, UEAPME and its national members are determined to continue our collaboration with policy institutions and stakeholders at all levels, in order to achieve an optimum economic setting for SMEs as set by the Lisbon agenda”, continued Mr Müller. “It is now up to Member States to demonstrate the same kind of commitment, by ensuring a proper legislative follow-up to their promises. The support from small businesses to the European integration project can only be expected if entrepreneurs can clearly see the added value of Europe.”

UEAPME hopes that the first promising signs of SME-friendly policy measures, such as reviewed business impact assessment measures or simplification projects, will now pave the way to a larger series of concrete measures to improve the economic environment in which European SMEs operate. “More concrete measures need to be brought on the table, in order to show a real commitment to an effective EU SME policy”, concluded Mr Müller.

\*\*\*\*\* End \*\*\*\*\*

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

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