



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

### **Press Statement**

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

#### **EC communication on “Global Europe” sadly lacks SME focus**

**Brussels, 4 October 2006.** The communication on “Global Europe: Competing in the World” released by the European Commission today (Wednesday) is a pertinent analysis of the many challenges that the EU faces at macro level, according to UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation. However, both the study and the subsequent action points fail to mention, let alone address, the impact on European small and medium-sized businesses, especially as far as non-internationally active SMEs are concerned.

“The Commission document is a very good attempt at streamlining external trade policy to stimulate ‘growth and jobs’ in Europe”, said **Luc Hendrickx**, UEAPME Director for Enterprise Policy and External Relations. “This exercise would definitely benefit from a greater attention to Europe’s SMEs and to the impact of external trade on them. Less than 10% of SMEs in Europe are active internationally, mostly in the EU internal market only. The effects of external trade are more often a challenge than an opportunity for small businesses, for instance when multinational retail chains enter a national market or when European crafts face unfair competition from third countries.”

Referring to the “internal priorities” set by the Commission in the communication, Mr Hendrickx remarked that “the private sector in general and small businesses in particular are completely absent from the proposed action points. While the broad objectives are to be welcomed, it is not clear so far how the Commission intends to carry out its proposals in practice.”

As far as the “external priorities” are concerned, Mr Hendrickx would have welcomed more attention in the document for the “new EU neighbourhood policy”. “Commercial relations with bordering countries such as Mediterranean States are of the utmost importance for European SMEs. Their geographical proximity makes them more attractive and easier to reach as a partner for EU small businesses”, he added.

“We look forward to reading the policy proposals arising from this communication, to which we will respond with a detailed position paper. We hope that the forthcoming EC actions will focus on capacity building for SMEs, access to innovation, support to internationalisation and a better uptake and awareness raising on IPR-related issues. Concrete and workable policy proposals are needed to ensure that the benefits of a renewed external trade agenda are passed on to European SMEs”, concluded Mr Hendrickx.

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**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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