



## **“The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

### **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

#### **European standardisation: “think small first” is the real key for success**

- **Existing norms must be simplified to be implemented by SMEs**
- **SMEs to participate systematically in drafting future standards**

**Brussels, 17 October 2006.** Standardisation policies should increase their focus on the reality of small businesses, according to UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation. Speaking at a conference on “European standardisation – a key for the success of SMEs, skilled crafts and trades” organised by the European Commission yesterday (Monday), UEAPME Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller** outlined the main difficulties faced by SMEs, above all micro-enterprises, in implementing standards. He suggested that simplified wording and implementation manuals for existing standards would encourage the adoption by SMEs, while future norms should be drafted only after taking the needs of smaller businesses into consideration.

“Micro-enterprises, which represent 92% of all European enterprises, lack time, staff and money to properly take up present standards”, said Mr Müller. “Furthermore, they often have a limited say on the way standards are currently adopted, which results in burdensome rules that fail to take into account the specific characteristics of SMEs.”

According to Mr Müller, SMEs fully understand the importance of standards for their businesses, as they allow companies to compete on a level playing field regarding technical specifications. The current situation, however, leaves SMEs with the difficult role of having to apply standards in their everyday production activities while being unable to participate systematically in drafting the future norms. This means that standards have not yet fully realised their potential – and that they are currently overlooking their largest prospective client in Europe.

Mr Müller praised the European Union for rightly supporting the “weaker players” such as SMEs, through assistance to NORMAPME for instance. He insisted, however, on the fact that “the means available at the moment are clearly insufficient to support SMEs’ presence in every instance.” As far as Standardisation Committees are concerned, an improvement of the system would aim for a balanced representation by increasing the number of SME experts and officially limiting to a reasonable percentage (around 20-25%) the maximum total representation of any type of stakeholder.

The European Commission announced its intention to table a proposal for a regulation before the end of the year. “We trust that the Commission will consider the needs of micro-enterprises in its document. A widespread adoption of simplified standards by SMEs would significantly improve the competitiveness of individual companies and consequently unleash the potential of the European economy as a whole”, concluded Mr Müller.

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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 81 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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