



## **“The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

### **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

#### **Small businesses’ access to public procurement must be improved at all levels**

**Brussels, 25 October 2006.** European crafts and small businesses need better access to public tenders, according to UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation. Speaking at a debate on SMEs and public procurement at the European Parliament’s SME Intergroup in Strasbourg today (Wednesday), UEAPME Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller** recommended the adoption of a number of instruments to support and simplify the participation of SMEs in public procurement markets at national, European and international level (1).

The issue of a better involvement of small businesses in public tenders has been in the spotlight lately, due to recent discussions on innovation and “smart” procurement at EU level as well as to the ongoing revision of the agreement on public procurement (GPA) at the WTO. “New actions would significantly increase SMEs’ contribution to competitiveness and improve job creation in Europe through public procurement”, said Mr Müller. “Public procurement can also play an important role in promoting innovation and fair competition, which would benefit public authorities in return.”

The public procurement market accounts for 16% of the EU GDP, approximately 1.500 billion EUR. Access to this market for SMEs varies significantly across Member States, with regional-based tendering structures generally performing better than centralised ones. Mr Müller insisted on the need to avoid measures discriminating against SMEs, such as the use of “general contractors” or excessive tender sizes and burdensome requirements on pre-financing in public-private partnerships (PPPs).

At national level, UEAPME urged Member States to divide tenders into smaller lots whenever this is feasible. For instance, technical parts of a project should be awarded separately from other aspects. Contracting authorities should use “smart” public procurement to encourage innovation and find innovative solutions if appropriate.

At European level, Mr Müller invited the European Commission to elaborate a Communication about the importance of SME participation in public tenders, which should be accompanied by recommendations at the Competitiveness Council. He also suggested the launch of a study to analyse the current situation in the EU Member States, in order to identify best practices and come up with workable recommendations.

At international level, UEAPME highlighted the need to redress the existing asymmetry between Europe and its main trading partners, most of which asked and obtained the exclusion of their SMEs from the scope of the GPA at the WTO. **Jean-François Roubaud**, President of CGPME, the French SME employers’ organisation, backed UEAPME in this respect. He stressed the need to focus on innovative SMEs and create a level playing field for small businesses worldwide, either at WTO level by revising the GPA agreement or by bilateral and unilateral actions.

“Fair and workable rules on SME participation in public tenders should be a matter of concern for Member States, for the EU and for the WTO. We trust that our comments will be useful for the ongoing debate, and we look forward to hearing from all actors involved”, concluded Mr Müller.

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(1) See UEAPME position paper: [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos\\_papers/2006/061020\\_SMEProcurement\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2006/061020_SMEProcurement_EN.pdf)

**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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