



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

From EU25 to EU27: opportunities and challenges ahead for SMEs

- **Assistance for SMEs and SME associations in Bulgaria and Romania must be provided**
- **Slovenia joining Eurozone an example of good collaboration between State and businesses**

Brussels, 21 December 2006. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union on 1 January 2007 was welcomed by UEAPME, the European SME employers' organisation, which praised the efforts made in the last years by the Governments of both new Member States in order to meet the membership criteria. UEAPME warned, however, that SMEs and SME organisations in Bulgaria and Romania will need support both at national and EU level to make the most out of their countries' membership to the European Union and reap the benefits of global markets.

“Bulgaria and Romania can be a real added value for the European Union as a whole”, said **Luc Hendrickx**, UEAPME Director for Enterprise Policy and External Relations. “However, small businesses in both countries need proper assistance in order to fully express their potential. At national level, the legal and political framework for SMEs and SME representative organisations must be strengthened. At EU level, assistance measures for the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* in Bulgaria and Romania are needed”, he continued.

According to UEAPME, national representative business associations must play a key role in facilitating the integration of SMEs from new Member States in the EU internal market. These organisations should be fully involved in national decision-making processes, and act as a link between small businesses and public administration by providing high-quality advice and membership services, as agreed upon in the European Charter for Small Enterprises.

UEAPME urged the European Union to provide new Member States with measures facilitating and speeding up the adoption and the implementation in Bulgaria and Romania of the entire body of EU law. Assistance should be given not only to the public administration, but also to small businesses and SME organisations, especially in the form of training. In this respect, UEAPME suggested that part of the Structural Funds be dedicated to business support measures.

UEAPME also congratulated Slovenia for being the first EU10 country to join the Eurozone on 1 January 2007. The careful groundwork done in preparation of the euro changeover will ensure a smooth transition, according to UEAPME, which stressed the good collaboration between businesses and public administration and the efforts made by SMEs in order to be ready for the new currency.

Finally, UEAPME urged the European Union to finally agree on a comprehensive and predictable strategy for further enlargements. “The accession of Bulgaria and Romania is an historical moment for the European Union. After the completion of the fifth enlargement round, however, it is high time to develop a clear and consistent policy for the remaining candidate countries”, concluded Mr Hendrickx.

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EDITORS' NOTE: UEAPME is the employers' 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. UEAPME members in Bulgaria are the Nationale Handwerkerskammer Bulgarien (ABV) and the Union for Private Economic Enterprise (UPEE). The National Council of Small and Medium Sized Private Enterprises (CNIPMMR) is UEAPME's Romanian member. All three organisations will become Full Members of UEAPME as of 1 January 2007, which will give them the right to vote at future UEAPME General Assemblies.

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