



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

EC Health and Safety Strategy a step forward, with room for improvement

- **SMEs cannot cope with implementation costs, funding including Structural Funds needed**
- **Simplification efforts must focus both on legislation screening and on tools and manuals**

Brussels, 21 February 2007. UEAPME, the European Craft and SME employers' organisation, appreciated the efforts made by the European Commission in its new “Community Strategy for Health and Safety at Work” published today (Wednesday). According to UEAPME, the document rightly focuses on tackling the obstacles to the implementation of the existing health and safety rules, which provide already a comprehensive legal framework, thereby reducing the perspectives of adding new legislation in the field.

“The overall EC approach to health and safety at work is quite satisfactory, in particular when it stresses the importance of awareness raising, education, prevention, practical guidance and simplification”, said **Liliane Volozinskis**, UEAPME Director for Employment and Social Affairs. “We are pleased to see that the European Commission pays more attention to the specificities of SMEs, although a clearer stance on micro enterprises and additional targeted support measures are required”, she continued.

Commenting on the implementation of the existing legal framework on health and safety, Ms Volozinskis pointed out that the majority of small businesses in Europe will not be able to cover the costs of the investments required to comply with the strategy. This is particularly true for micro-businesses, which account for more than 90% of all enterprises in the EU, and remarkably accurate for small companies in new Member States. Against this background, UEAPME had repeatedly suggested the use of Structural Funds and other forms of financial support to encourage direct business spending in health and safety matters. Unfortunately, the EC Strategy is disappointingly vague on this point and fails to elaborate on concrete financing possibilities.

Concerning the simplification of the legal framework on health and safety, UEAPME welcomed the EC proposal to integrate this process in the National Reform Programmes foreseen by the Lisbon Strategy on Growth and Jobs. Without this obligation, Member States will tend not to translate the EC simplification efforts in their own national legislation, which is essential for small businesses. It also stressed that all aspects of simplification must be pursued. This includes screening of current and future legislation both at EU and national level, but also the development of simplified tools and practical implementation manuals.

“We believe that the Commission’s document can be a good basis for future discussion on the very important issue of health and safety at work. We trust that the spirit of the text will be translated into a set of workable initiatives to ensure health and safety at the workplace in all European SMEs”, concluded Ms Volozinskis.

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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.

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