



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Facilitating SMEs’ access to public procurement: focus on best practices

- **European Commission’s DG Enterprise workshop tackles existing obstacles**
- **Volume of contracts, access to information, qualification criteria main difficulties**

Brussels, 22 February 2007. Better access to public procurement for small businesses can spark innovation and contribute to economic stability, according to UEAPME, the European Craft and SME employers’ organisation. Speaking at a workshop organised today by the European Commission’s DG Enterprise and Industry, UEAPME Director for Economic and Fiscal Policy **Gerhard Huemer** highlighted the key SME concerns and problems on public procurement procedures, and suggested a number of actions to improve SMEs’ presence in tenders (1).

The workshop was part of the initiatives foreseen by the Commission to facilitate SMEs’ access to public contracts, with a particular focus on the exchange of best practices. “The current public procurement rules at EU level offer a wide range of possibilities to improve tendering conditions for SMEs, without damaging competitiveness or creating unfair advantages”, explained Mr Huemer. “However, obstacles are present both at regulation and implementation level. As a contribution to the EC analysis, UEAPME screened the existing procedures and developed a list of good practices on SMEs and public contracts.”

The volume of most procurement awards, said UEAPME, is often the first difficulty small businesses must deal with. Because of their size, SMEs can only participate in tenders when the contract volume is adequate to their financial turnover. Mr Huemer suggested that tendering in smaller lots, divided either by task or by region, could improve the situation in this respect. The use of direct purchasing techniques for very small contracts should also be further encouraged.

Access to information is particularly hard for SMEs, which do not normally have the capacity to do extensive research for new tenders and generally need more time to prepare competitive offers due to staff constraints. Pre-notification should be required for European and national contracts, and both should be published in a centralised and easily accessible way. New technology could also provide effective solutions, for instance through dedicated internet portals and standardised “e-procurement” procedures.

Public contracts also tend to require an extensive number of professional, technical and economic qualification criteria, which SMEs cannot always fulfil. The creation of consortia pooling qualification requirements would solve this issue, and at the same time improve the quality of offers and reduce the average costs for tendering authorities.

Finally, Mr Huemer stressed that the increased recourse to centralised procurement authorities, general contractors and large scale public-private partnerships makes it increasingly difficult for SMEs to obtain direct public procurement awards. The tendency for SMEs is to participate as sub-contractors – fair treatment should be ensured in these cases, along with standard sub-contracting clauses aimed at compensating small businesses for their loss of negotiating power.

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(1) http://www.ueapme.com/docs/various/2007/070222_SMEProcurement_WS-DGENTER.pdf

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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