



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

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50 years of European integration: celebrating past results, answering current concerns

Brussels, 22 March 2007. EU leaders will meet in Berlin next Sunday to celebrate Europe’s 50th anniversary. According to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, the unprecedented period of peace, stability, economic development and integration that followed the 1957 Treaty of Rome is a testimony to the EU’s influence and an incentive to pursue further achievements in the future. The EU and its Member States, however, should work hard to regain the confidence they have lost, with recent polls worryingly showing that almost half of the EU citizens is afraid of the future and thinks that life has got worse since their country joined the EU.

Reflecting on the European Union’s past accomplishments and future challenges, UEAPME Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller** remarked: *“Thanks to the past 50 years, Europe is now one of the most secure and prosperous regions in the world. My generation is perhaps the first that has not experienced war in Europe during its entire lifetime. We are the witnesses of the success of policymakers and millions of businessmen who believed in the European project.”*

Mr Müller singled out the internal market as the cornerstone of the modern European Union. Free trade and free movement of goods within the Union not only created new jobs and additional wealth, but also helped in overcoming national divisions and creating a truly European spirit. The internal market, according to the latest surveys, is the most widely recognised and distinctive aspect of the EU both for citizens and businesses.

Speaking about the recently completed enlargement process, Mr Müller said that it was the most ambitious process the EU has ever undertaken and accomplished, as it ultimately led to overcome the East/West division. He stressed the need for further cooperation to ensure full integration of the new Member States and their civil society, including small businesses and their representative organisations, into the EU system.

Celebrating past results, however, should go hand in hand with concrete commitments for the future. This is particularly true at a time when Europeans seem to have lost faith in the added value and effectiveness of the EU. *“Despite major achievements such as the single market and the enlargement process, the European Union is now showing worrying signs of fatigue and a growing number of people are afraid of the future. Both issues must be tackled as soon as possible”*, continued Mr Müller.

The growing citizens’ disaffection for the EU must be respected, recognised and dealt with in several ways. At the outset, as scepticism is strictly linked to the overall economic performance, the first step should be to stabilise the European economic outlook and foster durable growth and social cohesion. People’s support for the EU would be most definitely won back by new perspectives for job and income creation. Additionally, a true European spirit of cooperation and solidarity is needed, with Member States clearly backing long-term shared objectives instead of national goals driven by short-term and narrow-minded political agendas.

“Crafts and small businesses have always been at the forefront of the EU’s performance, from the EU6 in 1957 to the EU27 in 2007. They are willing and ready to support the European project in the years to come, as long as all stakeholders work towards an economically, socially and politically sustainable Union”, concluded Mr Müller.

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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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