



## “The voice of SMEs in Europe”

### Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

#### Stuttgart conference highlights importance of direct dialogue and common views

- **Small business perspective must be shared and mainstreamed across all policy areas**

**Brussels, 17 April 2007.** The 4<sup>th</sup> European conference on Craft and Small Enterprises came to a close today (Tuesday) in Stuttgart, Germany. More than 1000 delegates attended the event, which provided an excellent opportunity for dialogue between business organisations, entrepreneurs and decision makers at European, national and regional level. UEAPME President **Georg Toifl** delivered the closing speech, welcoming the conference results and highlighting a number of areas for future policy work (1).

Mr Toifl stressed that the challenges faced by European crafts and small businesses will only be solved by a good collaboration between small businesses and policymakers, and insisted on the need for a common understanding and a stronger focus on European crafts and small businesses, as shown by the conference results. These challenges are not limited to enterprise policy, but touch on other policies such as education and training, taxation and trade: mainstreaming awareness on small business needs across all areas is therefore essential.

*“I am deeply impressed by the extraordinary number of participants and by the quality of the discussions in the last two days”,* said Mr Toifl in its remarks. *“This shows the importance of direct dialogue between small businessmen, their representative organisations and policymakers at national and EU level. Crafts and small enterprises, including family-run and small owner-run businesses, are the core of European society and the driving force of social cohesion and regional economic development. They need efficient support services until a better regulatory environment enables them to walk on their own feet”,* he continued.

Since the last Craft and Small Enterprises Conference in Milan in 1997, crafts and small enterprises have been confronted with demographic change, globalisation and technological development. They quickly came to understand, explained Mr Toifl, that these challenges can only be tackled by working on the quality of their products and services. Structural reforms within the enterprise and workable support policy measures are thus deeply needed. This is particularly true for issues such as training, education and lifelong learning; innovation and access to finance; and better regulation at national and EU level.

Mr Toifl pointed out that crafts and small businesses are the first to thrive on a better regulatory environment, and reminded participants that the EU Member States already committed themselves to pave the way to their further development in several occasions, including the signature in 2000 of the European Small Business Charter and the 2006 Spring Council, which focused on the “think small first” approach. He highlighted that a flourishing business environment can only be achieved through cross-sector policy actions. The European Commission’s DG Enterprise and national Enterprise Ministries have of course enterprise policy as their core business. However, they should also protect the interests of crafts and small businesses with their colleagues, urged Mr Toifl, who put forward UEAPME’s willingness to collaborate and provide expertise in this respect.

*“A proper understanding of the role of crafts and small businesses in Europe is a precondition for the right policy decisions. UEAPME, as the sole European craft and SME employers’ organisation, is ready to engage in dialogue at all levels to make this a reality. We trust that the outcomes of the fruitful debate we had in Stuttgart will not be neglected, and we look forward to taking stock of their effects at the next conference, which should possibly take place in less than ten years from now”,* he concluded.

\*\*\*\*\* END \*\*\*\*\*

(1) Available in German: [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/stuttgart\\_2007/070417\\_Schlussfolgerungen\\_Toifl.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/stuttgart_2007/070417_Schlussfolgerungen_Toifl.pdf)

**EDITORS’ NOTES:** 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.

Further information: Luc Hendrickx, Director for Enterprise Policy and External Relations, Tel. +32 2 230 7599  
Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer  
Email: [pressooffice@ueapme.com](mailto:pressooffice@ueapme.com) Web: [www.ueapme.com/pressroom/](http://www.ueapme.com/pressroom/)