



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Leipzig Charter will fail unless SME dimension is considered

Brussels, 25 May 2007. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, welcomed the adoption of a “Charter on Sustainable European Cities” at the Leipzig informal meeting of Ministers for Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion today (Friday). The document aims to set up common principles and strategies for urban development policy. UEAPME deplored, however, the lack of consideration for SMEs in the text, and urged the EU Member States to properly take into account the role and needs of small businesses when formulating concrete proposals on the Leipzig charter implementation in the coming months.

“Crafts and small businesses are the cornerstone of the social and economic structure in urban areas. Fostering their presence and understanding their importance is the key to achieve a successful urban policy”, said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General. *“The Leipzig Charter shows Member States’ commitment to initiate a political debate on urban policy, which we can only welcome. However, we are afraid it will become a missed opportunity unless its shortcomings on SME policy are quickly redressed.”*

Commenting on the specific recommendations made in the Leipzig charter, Mr Müller identified a number of areas in which progress is needed. First of all, the document suggests making greater use of “integrated urban development policy approaches”, for which the involvement of all stakeholders is deemed to be “essential”. However, UEAPME was not consulted in the run-up to the text, which now shows deficiencies in the understanding of the economic tissue in urban areas. Mr Müller expressed its regret on this point, but also reiterated UEAPME’s availability to collaborate with Member States in making the most out of the text.

Secondly, greater clarity is needed on the chapter dealing with “strengthening the local economy”, said Mr Müller. Measures to secure the economic stabilisation of urban areas, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, cannot overlook the role of SMEs and should facilitate both their continued existence and the start-up of new businesses, which by definition begin as small enterprises. *“No urban policy is successful if it fails at keeping cities alive and attractive for new entrepreneurial activities”*, continued Mr Müller.

Finally, UEAPME called on Member States to come up with SME-friendly and effective implementation measures. *“We trust that the EU Member States will consider crafts and small businesses as part of the policy process needed to protect, strengthen and further develop European cities. Neglecting this chance would be both politically unwise and economically unfair”*, concluded Mr Müller.

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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. More information: <http://www.ueapme.com>

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