



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Guimarães Council: SMEs urge Member States to deliver on reforms

- **European Employment Strategy and Open Method of Coordination positive; goals must now be reached**
- **Flexicurity must not be used as scare card; active ageing and undeclared work other key priorities**

Brussels, 6 July 2007. The process of coordinating social and employment policies at European level has been a positive development in the last ten years, although many Member States are far from achieving the quantitative and qualitative targets they agreed upon, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation. On the occasion of the informal meeting of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs in Guimarães, which comes to a close today (Friday), UEAPME assessed the current coordination tools and urged all Member States to deliver on each of the existing integrated guidelines for growth and jobs.

“The launch of the European Employment Strategy ten years ago and the application of the Open Method of Coordination to employment and social affairs have been milestones on the road to a better coordination and visibility of social and employment policies”, said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General. *“In particular, the Open Method of Coordination has proved its worth as a new mode of governance, facilitating the convergence of national policies while at the same time respecting the diverse economic and social backgrounds in the 27 Member States”,* he continued.

Participants to the informal meeting were asked to comment on both the content and the methods and tools available to further improve coordination. As far as the process is concerned, Mr Müller stressed the need to maintain the existing priorities, and insisted on the fact that all guidelines must be given equal footing in all Member States: *“It makes little sense for any self-respecting government to cherry-pick targets and ignore the hardest to achieve, although this might seem an easy way out to postpone structural reforms.”* UEAPME also called for more detailed EC reports on the guidelines' implementation at national level and for a better involvement of national social partners in the different phases linked to the “national reform programmes”.

On the content side, UEAPME singled out “flexicurity” as a key priority. It welcomed the Commission's initiative to launch a debate on common principles, which should be integrated by each Member State in their national reform programmes. The aim should be to find a tailored response to the challenges faced by employers and workers in their labour markets. Mr Müller regretted, however, the recent misuse of “flexicurity” as a scare card by some trade union representatives: *“Opposing flexicurity means ignoring the structural changes in our economy, hampering competitiveness and blocking the creation of new companies, new jobs and the opening up of new markets in Europe.”* The application of the Open Method of Coordination to flexicurity should help in better defining and implementing reforms.

UEAPME also highlighted the importance of further strengthened cooperation in promoting active ageing and tackling undeclared work, which will contribute to reinforce the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy.

“A stronger coordination and a better focus on the existing guidelines and priorities would unleash the job and growth creation potential of European crafts and SMEs. We call on Member States to actively pursue the targets they have pledged to achieve in order to reap the benefits of the efforts made in the last ten years”, 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.

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