



## “The voice of SMEs in Europe”

### Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

## ECAP: enhancements are needed to help SMEs become greener

**Brussels, 8 October 2007.** UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, welcomed the Environmental Compliance Assistance Programme (ECAP) announced by the European Commission today (Monday). According to UEAPME, the Commission showed a good understanding of the challenges facing SMEs wishing to limit their environmental footprint and striving to comply with the existing (and often complex) environmental rules. UEAPME was pleased by the policy mix suggested, which includes well-designed rules, accessible environmental tools, awareness raising campaigns, targeted information and focused financial assistance. UEAPME regretted, however, that these actions were not specifically targeted towards micro- and small businesses, which suffer the most from the current situation. Moreover, it stressed the lack of a unified budget line and deemed the actions foreseen in the training area as totally insufficient.

*“The European Commission resisted the temptation to point the finger at SMEs without suggesting concrete measures to redress the situation”,* said **Guido Lena**, Environmental Policy Director at UEAPME. *“On the contrary, it acknowledged that micro- and small businesses are often not fully aware of the environmental impacts of their activities and do not have the necessary legal and environmental expertise to cope with environmental legislation. We fully share the ‘hands on’ approach that the EC is planning to use to shift the European economy to more sustainable production and consumption patterns, although some aspects of the ECAP programme must be further improved”,* he continued.

Mr Lena then went on to comment on the main features of ECAP. Better regulation is of course one of the key aspects: the administrative burden of compliance must be seriously reduced at EU, national and regional level, but the Commission missed one key point by not committing itself to ensure that environmental legislation is also understandable and takes into account SMEs’ specificities. Different kinds of voluntary environmental management schemes should also be further promoted. Their success so far has been quite limited, said Mr Lena, to the point that only 5% of all SMEs use them. UEAPME therefore supported the Commission’s intention to make EMAS (the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) more attractive for SMEs, for instance by reducing inspections and reporting requirements on registered businesses.

Innovative technologies and practices, wrote the EC, should also be encouraged to improve SMEs’ environmental compliance. To this end, the ECAP communication recalls a series of funding opportunities currently available through programmes such as LIFE+ and the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), the Guidelines for State Aid for environmental protection, the new Cohesion Policy instruments for 2007-2013 and others. A single budget line would have been a better solution, commented Mr Lena, since each of the listed sources applies different criteria to different actors.

Finally, UEAPME was not impressed with the Commission’s plans on environmental training for SMEs, which are limited to the organisation of a series of capacity-building seminars and to the creation of a network integrating Euro Info Centres and other information sources. UEAPME expected a clearer commitment from the Commission on this crucial point. Ensuring local assistance to small businesses in co-operation with SME organisations and public authorities, said Mr Lena, is the key to achieve progress in the training area.

*“The European Commission has put on paper a long awaited and very ambitious programme, to which we contributed and which can be considered as a good starting point. We call on the EU policymakers to improve it as far as SME-friendly legislation, financing and training are concerned, and we trust that Member States will then ensure a rapid adoption and implementation”,* concluded Mr Lena.

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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 84 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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