



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Urban policy: Portuguese Presidency must redress Leipzig Charter’s shortcomings

Brussels, 10 October 2007. No urban policy will ever succeed if it fails at keeping cities alive and attractive for new entrepreneurial activities, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation. In a position paper published today (Wednesday), UEAPME elaborated on the key features of a workable and SME-friendly urban policy in the light of the actions foreseen by the “Charter on Sustainable European Cities” adopted at the Leipzig informal meeting of Ministers for Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion in May 2007 (1). UEAPME also put forward a series of practical measures to foster SMEs’ presence in urban areas, and insisted on the need to set up a dialogue platform on the implementation of the Leipzig Charter.

“The majority of European citizens live in urban areas, which also host two thirds of all European SMEs. The very presence of small businesses from all sectors in cities and city centres is a crucial element of the economic tissue and of the character of a European town”, said UEAPME Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller**. *“It is therefore unthinkable to leave SMEs and their needs aside when elaborating common principles and local strategies for a successful urban development policy”,* he continued.

Despite their obvious differences, European cities are characterised by common features and development problems, wrote UEAPME. The European level can therefore function as an important forum for discussions and exchange of best practices in the area of urban development. Debates at European level can raise the awareness of urban development problems in individual states, encouraging them to develop targeted programmes for cities. However, the implementation of such measures can only be discussed at local level, in line with the subsidiarity principle. It is particularly important that the local administrations’ scope of action is maintained, considering that it is at this level that problems can be better identified and solved. Measures taken at all stages, insisted UEAPME, will only achieve concrete results if all stakeholders, including SMEs, are properly consulted.

Commenting on the specific features of the Leipzig Charter, UEAPME agreed on the necessity to develop a coordinated “baukultur”, where State, regional and local authorities as well as citizens and businesses concur to build up a process of planning and construction. Urban sprawl with remotely located shopping centres and workplaces must be avoided as much as possible, wrote UEAPME. Special attention should be paid to deprived neighbourhoods within the context of the city as a whole. In this context, small businesses can play a significant role, since entrepreneurial action initiated on the spot by SMEs is often successful in stabilising deprived areas.

UEAPME and its members included in their position paper a list of possible actions that could be considered in order to help crafts and SMEs operating in urban areas. First of all, SME representative organisation must be better involved in the elaboration of urban policies. This could be achieved by creating dialogue platforms at EU, national and local level, in order to build on the expertise of crafts and SME representatives at all levels. Secondly, integrated urban planning mechanisms should be put in place in order to improve the financial and real estate opportunities available for SMEs in urban areas. Finally, sector-specific policies such as urban transport should be integrated into a general and coherent policy framework.

“The Portuguese Presidency of the EU will organise in November an informal Council meeting on Territorial Cohesion and Regional Policy. We hope that this meeting will be an occasion to redress the shortcomings of the Leipzig Charter, and we trust that our comments will be useful to put SMEs at the heart of the forthcoming EU Urban Policy”, concluded Mr Müller.

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(1) http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2007/071010_pp_urban_policy.pdf

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.

Further information: Cristina Murciano, Regional Policy Adviser, Tel. +32 2 230 7599

Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer

Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com - Web: www.ueapme.com/pressroom/