



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

SME organisations key for a successful Euro changeover in new Member States

Brussels, 19 October 2007. Only a carefully prepared changeover plan involving small businesses and their representative organisations will ensure a smooth switch to the Euro in the new EU Member States, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation. Speaking at a conference on [“SMEs and the Euro”](#) organised by the European Commission in cooperation with UEAPME yesterday (Thursday), Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller** warned that the first and overall successful changeover wave in 2002 must not become an alibi to let the guard down in the next round. On the contrary, the lessons learned back then on the importance of information and collaboration with SMEs must not be underestimated.

“It is surprising how little talk there is about the introduction of the Euro in new countries now compared to 2002”, said Mr Müller. *“Although there are a number of sensible reasons to expect an easy and smooth changeover, I strongly believe that the preparatory work must be as serious now as it was in that case.”*

According to Mr Müller, the knowledge and experience gained in 2002 are a first reason for optimism. Secondly, Euro coins and Euro notes are already widespread and relatively well known all over Europe. Thirdly, many of the new Member States already experienced a changeover to a new currency in the beginning of the 1990s. However, such positive signs could also generate apathy, fatigue or in some cases opposition to a new conversion, which must be tackled using the instruments that proved successful in 2002. European SMEs played a key role then, said Mr Müller, especially those operating in the retail sector due to their proximity with citizens and customers. Equally important were the consultations at top level – during the whole preparatory period and afterwards – between National Banks, Governments, business organisations and consumer organisations.

Public authorities and banks must learn from the difficulties and problems encountered during the first wave, according to UEAPME. *“There is an extensive knowledge base about practical problems and solutions available. Our enterprises, citizens and consumers in new Member States expect from public authorities and banks that they prepare properly and avoid the problems we have encountered in the past. While they don’t have to reinvent the wheel, they must definitely ensure that it rolls smoother this time”,* commented Mr Müller.

Investing in efficient and timely communication to explain the necessity of the changeover is of the utmost importance, said Mr Müller, who suggested using the European structure of UEAPME members and other social partners to set up contact points for all questions concerning the Euro. *“An additional network will only result in additional costs without providing better information because of lack of contacts with the basis”,* said Mr Müller, who thanked the EC for considering UEAPME as a key partner when setting up Euro Team, a group of specialists in economic and financial affairs able to speak in public on all aspects of the single currency.

The important role of business organisations in preparing their members and informing the public in general must also be underlined and acknowledged. Therefore, UEAPME asked the EC for proper financial support for representative business organisations. Moreover, business organisations will have an even more important role in avoiding unjustified price rises. The debate about possible effects of the Euro changeover on the level of prices is figuring prominently in the media and is a key concern for the public. *“Although no significant influence of the introduction of the Euro on inflation has ever been demonstrated, the public’s attitude is quite reluctant in this respect”,* said Mr Müller. UEAPME therefore recommended the implementation of fair pricing initiatives by the business community, coupled with all the necessary legal instruments to prevent abuse.

“A successful changeover will largely depend on how it is communicated and on how it is perceived by the business community and by consumers. We trust that the switch to the Euro in the new Member States will help closing the gap between Europe and its citizens, instead of widening it”, 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 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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