



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

“Reform Treaty” must become the dawn of a new era

Brussels, 19 October 2007. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, congratulated the Portuguese Presidency of the EU and warmly welcomed the agreement on the “Reform Treaty” reached by the EU leaders at the Lisbon summit overnight. Despite its persistent shortcomings on taxation policy, which is still subject to unanimity, and regardless of its weak wording on economic policy, the new text is the best possible answer to unlock the two-year stalemate that followed the failure of the ill-fated EU Constitution in 2005, and it will hopefully give to Europe the self-confidence it lost back then, according to UEAPME. Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller** delivered the following analysis of tonight’s deal:

“The new ‘Reform Treaty’ agreed upon last night is the response to questions that have been left unanswered for the past ten years, ever since the Amsterdam Treaty made a first attempt to improving Europe’s decision-making structures. It is not time to concentrate on the quarrels that preceded the Summit, it is now time to look at the bigger picture: the Reform Treaty will increase both the room for and the speed of manoeuvre of the European institutions, and strengthen the European Union’s voice on the global arena. We hope it will become the foundation charter of a new, self-assured Europe in the coming years.”

Mr Müller then went on to comment on the SME-specific aspects of the new text. The relevant extension of the number of issue subject to qualified majority voting is a first positive development – however, the EU leaders stopped short of including taxation policy in the list. *“This vital policy area is all too often subject to minority blockades that are particularly unhelpful for small businesses. EU leaders overlooked a good chance to rectify the situation in this respect”*, commented Mr Müller.

Secondly, the Treaty reconfirms and strengthens the role of the European Social Dialogue, of which UEAPME is a recognised part. *“European Social Partners have repeatedly proved that they can fruitfully exchange opinions and deliver concrete input to policymakers at European level. The Treaty rightly acknowledges our role, and it motivates us to keep up the work we have been doing in the past years”*, stated Mr Müller.

Thirdly, the new “Reform Treaty” puts an end to years of incertitude and sterile Euro-sceptic polemics over services of general interest, by reconfirming that that every public authority is free to decide which services of general interest it wants to provide, and how it wants to do it, provided that it acts within the framework of the “acquis communautaire”.

No improvements were made by the EU leaders on economic governance, regretted UEAPME. The imbalance between the EU powers on economic governance and its say on monetary policy is all too evident, said Mr Müller. *“The EU mandate on economic governance must be strengthened to match its control of the monetary aspects. Crafts and SMEs need a stronger EU, not a weaker European Central Bank as some Member States seem to suggest between the lines”*.

“Europe cannot afford another slow and painful approval. EU leaders have set the ball rolling tonight – it is now up to Europe’s governments and citizens to keep up the positive momentum. A swift ratification process will ensure the dawning of a new era in 2009, when many of the changes foreseen by the new Treaty will come into force. This is an opportunity that cannot be missed under any circumstances”, 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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