



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

UEAPME elects Andrea Benassi as new Secretary General

Brussels, 8 November 2007. The General Assembly of UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, unanimously elected Mr **Andrea Benassi**, currently Director for European Integration and Foreign Markets at the Italian crafts organisation Confartigianato, as new Secretary General today (Thursday). Formerly Director of the Brussels office and Head of the International and EU Relations department at Confartigianato, Mr Benassi takes over from Hans-Werner Müller, who served as Secretary General at UEAPME for the past fifteen years and whose term of office finishes at the end of December. In his acceptance speech, Mr Benassi thanked Mr Müller for his outstanding efforts at UEAPME and stated that the recently announced “Small Business Act” will be the first priority of his mandate.

“Taking over from Hans-Werner Müller is by no means an easy task”, commented the newly-elected Secretary General. “Thanks to the intense work carried out under his guidance, UEAPME is now a respected business organisation and the sole voice of crafts and SMEs in Brussels. UEAPME has changed as much as the EU in the last fifteen years – ensuring continuity through change will be my main goal in the years to come.”

Mr Benassi then went on to comment on the main policy challenges ahead for UEAPME. He stressed that he will seek the advice and rely on the experienced staff of UEAPME to analyse in detail the main dossiers facing SMEs. He also announced that he will prioritise the “Small Business Act”, which the European Commission is planning to release in 2008. *“The Small Business Act is an excellent opportunity to bring SME policy to the next level, a chance that cannot be wasted by producing yet another paper tiger. I will follow closely the policy developments in this respect, with the aim to ensure that the final text is an authoritative and workable answer to the needs of European crafts and SMEs”,* commented Mr Benassi.

Mr Benassi also announced his intentions to review the organisation's knowledge of the world of SMEs, from crafts to medium-sized enterprises, by pinpointing their shared values, perspectives and requirements in the EU27. Moreover, he insisted on the need to strengthen the organisation's “vertical” action, by reinforcing the integration with European SME sectorial organisations and building on the achievements of UEAPME's sister organisation NORMAPME.

Finally, a reliable and up-to-date flow of information between UEAPME and its members is another key element of a successful organisation, said Mr Benassi, who stressed the necessity to reinforce UEAPME's capacity to collect and analyse data from members as a basis to build a stronger stance in Brussels.

“I am convinced that the transition period between Mr Müller and me can be used as a catalyst to enable UEAPME to provide workable answers to the policy challenges ahead. I look forward to working with the Board of Directors, all the UEAPME members and of course the EU institutions in this respect”, concluded Mr Benassi.

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EDITORS' NOTES: Andrea Benassi is currently Director for European Integration and Foreign Markets at the Italian crafts' organisation Confartigianato, a position he has occupied since October 2005. He previously served as Director of Confartigianato's Brussels office from October 2001 to September 2005 and as Head of Confartigianato's Office for International and EU Relations from June 1999 to September 2001. A member of the Advisory group for Internationalisation at the Italian Ministry for International Trade and a Development Cooperation SME Expert at the Italian Foreign Office, Mr Benassi also sits as expert in a number of Committees and Technical Groups at UN and EC level. Mr Benassi holds a degree in Economics from Rome University “La Sapienza” and an MBA from the STET - Reiss Romoli School. A biographical note on Mr Benassi, including his CV and high-resolution pictures, will be soon available on the UEAPME website.

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: Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer, Tel. +32 2 230 7599

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