"The voice of SMEs in Europe"

Press Release

European ICT small businesses will speak with one voice in Brussels

Brussels, 7 December 2007. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, is pleased to announce the creation this week of the first European association exclusively focused on representing the interests of the SME community in the ICT sector. The Pan European ICT & eBusiness Network for SMEs (PIN-SME) aims at bringing ICT SMEs on the business and political scene, where so far large companies have dominated. Its founding members are national sectoral SME federations and ICT clusters from 8 EU countries, representing more than 50.000 enterprises employing around 200.000 people across Europe. PIN-SME will focus on policy issues such as software patents, ICT standardisation, e-invoicing, e-health and e-skills.

"We believe that European SMEs must speak with one voice on the development of European ICT policies – a voice that is becoming stronger today with the creation of PIN-SME", said UEAPME Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller**. *"UEAPME and NORMAPME fully support this new initiative that is rooted in the past battles fought by small businesses on software patents, which reinforce monopolisation in the software sector, damage interoperability and act as a barrier to innovation by SMEs."*

The statutes of PIN-SME were signed in Brussels on 3 December in the presence of Mr Müller, NORMAPME's Director Loucas Gourtsoyannis, Ms Françoise Le Bail, SME Envoy and Deputy Director General of the EC's DG Enterprise, Mr Paul Rübig MEP and Dr Jorgo Chatzimarkakis MEP. The PIN-SME General Assembly meeting on the same day appointed Mr Johann Steszgal from the Austrian ICT organisation UBIT and NORMAPME's Sebastiano Toffaletti respectively as PIN-SME President and Secretary General.

"The standardisation process in the ICT sector will be a key policy priority for PIN-SME", announced the newly elected PIN-SME President. *"We believe that standards are indeed useful for ICT companies operating in the internal market if they are designed according to their needs. We will work to make sure that ICT SMEs are fully consulted and their views are taken into consideration in the decision-making process."*

Mr Steszgal then went on to elaborate on the other policy dossiers PIN-SME will deal with. First of all, the attractiveness of the ICT profession in Europe must be increased. Small businesses in the ICT sector lack qualified personnel, therefore it is crucial to increase ICT-related training opportunities and foster professional mobility. Secondly, new technologies such as e-invoicing and e-health provide opportunities for ICT SMEs that are not fully exploited at the moment. As far as the current debate on "e-skills" is concerned, PIN-SME will promote ICT SMEs as the most appropriate vehicle to spread the use of ICT tools in all small businesses.

"PIN-SME aims to become a reliable and trusted partner for the European institutions and standardisation bodies, building on the expertise of its members and its parent organisations UEAPME and NORMAPME", concluded Mr Steszgal.

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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 12 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

PIN-SME has currently members in the following EU countries: Austria (UBIT), Bulgaria (BASSCOM), Denmark (it-forum midtjylland), France (GPNI), Germany (BestPractice-IT), Italy (CNA Comunicazione e Terziario Avanzato), Spain (ESTIC) and United Kingdom (UKITA). For further information on PIN-SME, please visit http://www.pin-sme.eu/

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