



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Small Business Act last chance for EU to deliver before 2009 elections

Brussels, 23 January 2008. The plans to release a “Small Business Act for Europe” in 2008 are the last chance for the EU to deliver a concrete answer to small businesses’ needs before the Parliamentary elections and the European Commission’s renewal in 2009, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation. Speaking in front of representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission and the French Presidency at a breakfast meeting jointly organised by UEAPME and the SME Union of the EPP today (Wednesday), Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** stressed once again that small businesses will not settle for anything less than a legally binding act providing a solid basis for SME policy in the coming years. He also insisted on the application of a real “think small first” principle, by which small businesses are treated as the rule rather than the exception in policymaking at EU and national level. Mr Benassi then called on the European institutions and on the forthcoming French Presidency to close the legislative dossier by the end of the year.

“The Small Business Act is an opportunity that cannot be missed to finally shift the SME policy debate from rhetoric to action. With the 2009 elections quickly approaching, it is crucial to ensure that the file is closed swiftly”, said Mr Benassi. *“However, we are not ready to support the text if it does not respond to SMEs’ practical needs and to the challenges they face along their life-cycle”,* he continued.

In a position paper issued in December, UEAPME made a comprehensive list of objectives, criteria and principles to be included in the Small Business Act (1). Mr Benassi ran through its main requests. First of all, the text must serve as a legal basis for all further EU legislative proposals. Secondly, this legal basis should be applied to all the relevant EC policies, mainstreaming a solid “think small first” approach by which all legislation is conceived from a small business perspective from the outset. Thirdly, the diversity, specificities and needs of the different categories of SMEs should be taken into account, although the SBA should be applicable to all SMEs and only to SMEs. Fourthly, the document must leverage existing and valuable documents such as the European Charter for Small Enterprises.

Finally, Mr Benassi stressed that the UEAPME demands were based on an extensive consultation with its members: *“Our requests are not ‘made in Brussels’, but come from organisations with a long track record and a vast amount of experience in SME policy at national level. Disregarding their views would not only weaken the EC text – it would also undermine our members’ support for its adoption in their home countries. This would be the worst possible outcome and must be avoided at all costs.”*

“The European Commission’s forthcoming proposal must live up to SMEs’ expectations to really make a difference. Actions speak louder than words, and it is on actions that we will assess this Commission’s and this Parliament’s legacy in one year’s time”, concluded Mr Benassi.

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(1) Available online at http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2007/071214_pp_SBA.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 12 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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