



*"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"*

## Waste Directive compromise less than ideal for European SMEs

Brussels, 17 June 2008 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, was left unimpressed by the European Parliament's second reading compromise vote on the Waste Framework Directive, which took place in Strasbourg today (Tuesday). Despite a somewhat softer stance, MEPs confirmed the introduction of legally binding, EU-wide quantitative targets that will be particularly burdensome for small enterprises in some countries and sectors. Moreover, the Parliament renounced to a proposal for a consultative "Waste Forum" open to all stakeholders, and left important procedural aspects to be dealt with through "comitology" behind closed doors. On the positive side, the compromise text now includes a clear definition of "by-products", which are excluded from the scope of the Directive, and foresees a simplified "waste list" that will be of great use for SMEs.

*"Despite some last-minute cosmetic changes, the compromise reached today is far from being a sufficient answer to the reality of Europe's SMEs", said Guido Lena, UEAPME Director for Sustainable Development. "While the impact of the quantitative targets introduced today remains largely to be seen, the burden will predictably fall disproportionately on smaller businesses, especially in countries lacking proper facilities or in sectors such as construction", he continued.*

Under the terms of the institutional agreement confirmed by today's vote, Member States will have to reach a 70% target on the reuse and recycling of non hazardous construction and demolition waste by 2020. While not opposing targets in principle, UEAPME repeatedly questioned the method used to come up with this figure, which was introduced arbitrarily by the Parliament's rapporteur and is only backed by a fragile impact assessment carried out hastily and subsequently to justify this decision. However, MEPs softened their original intentions by clarifying that "other material recovery methods" and backfilling operations will count towards the 70% target. Regardless of this last-minute addition, small businesses in countries lacking proper recycling facilities will be placed at a competitive disadvantage, said UEAPME, all the more so if they deal with significant quantities of waste in their everyday activities. *"The compromise text makes reference several times to the importance of good recycling networks for household waste. However, it pays no attention to the same issue for small businesses, which need facilities available at a reasonable distance from their place of work. This is not always the case at the moment, since large differences remain between and within Member States in this respect",* said Mr Lena.

Negative news for SMEs also came from the confirmed deletion of a consultative forum between the EU, Member States and all relevant stakeholders, the so-called "Waste Forum", which would have been of great help to improve the Directive's implementation and address possible problems at a very early stage. Moreover, the Parliament clarified the status of "end-of-waste" materials, but left the decision on how to implement in practice this definition to "comitology" instead of favouring a more open and transparent approach as requested by UEAPME, thereby losing a valuable policy contribution.

Positive news came conversely from a better, more refined definition of "by-products", which are now excluded from the scope of the Directive, and from the adoption of a simplified "waste list" providing SMEs with simplified guidance on how to recognise and deal with hazardous waste. *"The compromise text as it stands after today's vote certainly does not live up to the expectations we had when the revision process began, and the minuses definitely outnumber the pluses. UEAPME will now closely follow the implementation of this compromise and its impact on the related 'daughter' directives, although the whole process has clearly started off on the wrong foot",* concluded Mr Lena.

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**EDITORS' NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 86 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

Cristina Marongiu, Deputy Director for Sustainable Development, Tel. +32 (0)2 230 7599, Email: [c.marongiu@ueapme.com](mailto:c.marongiu@ueapme.com)  
Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer, Tel. +32 (0)496 520 329, Email: [pressoffice@ueapme.com](mailto:pressoffice@ueapme.com)