



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

## Small Business Act: SMEs put forward ideas on an inter-institutional agreement

Brussels, 16 September 2008 – An inter-institutional agreement (IIA) between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council is the best way to put into practice the policy principles of the recently launched "Small Business Act", according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation. To speed-up this debate on an IIA, which already started at the Informal Competitiveness Council in July (Jouy-en-Josas), Secretary General Andrea Benassi put forward a wording proposal for an IIA that should serve as a basis for negotiations in the coming months (1), speaking today at a round table discussion organised in Brussels by BusinessEurope. The text stresses once again the importance of translating into action the "Think Small First" principle and contains pledges from the EU institutions to increase consultation with representative stakeholders, carry in-depth impact analysis studies, improve the quality and reduce the volume of legislation affecting SMEs. A swift signature of such an IIA would demonstrate Europe's commitment to small businesses, stressed Mr Benassi, who called for a standalone, independent text to be agreed upon as soon as possible.

*"The European Commission has put forward in the Small Business Act the idea of making of the EU a world-class environment for SMEs. The IIA text we are presenting today aims to open a serious debate on how to transform this vision into action. This process must start from a clear commitment by all the European institutions, followed by Member States to ensure that the same principles are then applied in the national and local arena",* said Mr Benassi.

One of the options under discussion to implement the SBA principles at EU level is to amend the existing inter-institutional agreement on better lawmaking, which was signed in 2003. This is not an ideal solution, stressed Mr Benassi. First of all, better legislation is indeed a very important issue, but it is only one aspect of the Small Business Act, which deals with a number of other questions as well. Moreover, the IIA on better lawmaking lacks by definition a specific focus on SMEs, which is crucial to achieve the objectives of the Small Business Act. A standalone, independent IIA on the Small Business Act is therefore a better alternative, continued Mr Benassi, who went on to illustrate some of its points.

First of all, the three institutions must formally recognise the need to **reduce administrative burdens** for SMEs. They should also call on Member States, regional and local authorities to ensure that SMEs are not obliged to provide them with any information or data that is or should be already available within their administrations ("only once principle"). Secondly, **impact assessments** must pay specific attention to SMEs, particularly small and micro enterprises, in a more systematic way for all pieces of legislation. Where co-decision applies, the European Parliament and Council could, on the basis of jointly defined criteria and procedures, have impact assessments carried out prior to the adoption of any substantive amendment, either at first reading or at the conciliation stage. Thirdly, the three institutions must seek a wider involvement and build on the expertise of **representative SME organisations** in the policymaking process to ensure the relevance of the measures proposed as well as their efficient implementation, and should call on Member States to do the same. Consultation results should be made public and the minimum consultation period should be extended.

Other points touched in the UEAPME proposal are the "**safeguard clause**", by which the three institutions engage themselves in ensuring that EU legislation does not hamper the competitiveness of SMEs; **commencement dates** agreed with all relevant stakeholders; greater **transparency** and accessibility in the provision of information to SMEs at every stage of the legislative work, and last but not least the formal commitment by the three institutions to anchor the "**Think Small First**" principle in policymaking, from regulation to public service.

*"We hope that our concrete suggestions will kick off an EU-wide debate, starting from the Competitiveness Council meeting at the end of the month. We trust that an inter-institutional agreement on the Small Business Act can be reached before the end of this Parliament's and Commission's term",* concluded Mr Benassi.

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(1) [http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos\\_papers/2008/080904\\_SBA\\_IIA\\_proposals.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2008/080904_SBA_IIA_proposals.pdf)

**EDITORS' NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 87 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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