



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Corporate Social Responsibility: European SMEs warn public authorities against additional binding regulations

Brussels, 14th November 2003. UEAPME, the European SME employers’ association, reiterated its refusal for formal, legal binding regulations in the framework of the debate on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at the “Third European Conference on CSR” in Venice today. The conference, which was organised by the Italian Presidency, focused on the “Role of Public Policies in promoting CSR”.

“Public authorities in Europe have the very important role of formulating policies that stimulate socially responsible behaviour amongst enterprises. But they must know the difference between stimulating CSR and imposing burdensome procedures and expensive audits. The latter would prove to be one additional burden too much for Europe’s SMEs” **Hans Werner Müller**, UEAPME’s Secretary General, said at the conference.

During his intervention, Müller stressed that the primary goal of public authorities in the framework of CSR is to create an environment in which enterprises and SMEs in particular are able to act in accordance with the CSR principles. UEAPME’s Secretary General also highlighted the role of public authorities in assisting SMEs on how to better display the CSR practices they already perform. “Small enterprises are aware of the role they play in the society because they are embedded in local communities. But most of the times SMEs do not realize that they are actually carrying out CSR practices. Therefore, public authorities have the task of helping entrepreneurs integrate CSR on a more conscious level in their management” Müller commented.

Furthermore, UEAPME asks forum participants to take the inherent characteristics of SMEs into account. The association rejects the idea of applying current CSR tools and approaches, such as exhaustive reporting, to SMEs because these tools were created for large enterprises and would be unfeasible for SMEs. “If public authorities want SMEs to implement the principles of CSR, then they have to fully grasp the fundamentals of small businesses which are totally different to those of big enterprises.” Müller concluded.

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