



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

European SMEs welcome Commission’s Action Plan for Entrepreneurship but ask for faster implementation

Brussels, 02 March 2004 UEAPME, the European Crafts and SMEs association welcomed the Action Plan for Entrepreneurship presented by the European Commission on the occasion of the Entrepreneurship day, a conference organised by DG Enterprise in Brussels today. The SME association backed the actions and objectives presented in the Action Plan but stressed that the plan should be implemented at a faster pace if the Lisbon targets are to be achieved.

“We totally agree with the key priorities highlighted in the Plan, but all of them have to be realised more rapidly if the EU wants to maintain its credibility and achieve the Lisbon targets on time. This means that we urgently have to allocate more financial and human resources to boost entrepreneurial activity in Europe” stated **Hans-Werner Müller**, Secretary General of UEAPME, during the conference.

In this context, UEAPME called on the Commission not to wait until 2006 –as stated in the Action Plan- to launch the key action “reducing the complexity of employment regulations for micro-enterprises”. Excessively burdensome and complex employment regulations still constitute one of the biggest obstacles preventing small and micro-enterprises from hiring new labour in Europe. Therefore, actions, which make hiring easier, have to be undertaken immediately in line with the “think small first” approach.

Furthermore, UEAPME reiterated its call for more compelling instruments to be created in order to achieve real improvements for SMEs in the five priority areas mentioned in the report. Indeed, it is important to recall that Member States will be responsible for virtually all priority areas where improvements have to be made. Past experiences have shown that instruments such as the Open Method of Co-ordination are not strong enough for this purpose.

Finally, with regard to measures aiming at boosting the numbers of entrepreneurs in Europe, UEAPME fully supports the reintroduction of the Inter-enterprise programme. With this initiative the Commission will support matchmaking events in EU regions, allowing entrepreneurs to meet strategic partners. UEAPME has repeatedly asked for the reintroduction of this efficient programme since its suppression in the Multi-annual programme.

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