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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Focus on economic growth must be supported by Social Agenda and Sustainable Development Strategy

Brussels, 9 February 2005 UEAPME, the European association for small and medium business and crafts, has called on the Commission and member state Governments to remain committed to refocusing the Lisbon Strategy on economic growth, following the publication of the reviews of the Social Agenda and the Sustainable Development Strategy today (Wednesday).

“The recommendation of the Commission to focus the Lisbon Strategy on jobs, growth and innovation was a timely step to adapt to the economic realities in Europe,” said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General. “It is important to ensure that this focus is supported by all European policies and the reviews of the Social Agenda and the Sustainable Development Strategy, published today, seem to be consistent with this.”

Bringing the Social Agenda into the framework of the Lisbon agenda is a positive development, which should improve consistency between EU economic and social policy. The explicit linking of the review to the overall mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy is important in this regard.

UEAPME welcomes the proposal to revamp the European Employment Strategy this year, ahead of schedule. However, the proposed revamp must be consistent with and support the new drive for economic growth and jobs, and build on the report of Kok Taskforce, *Jobs, Jobs, Jobs*. UEAPME is concerned that some of the proposed social legislation, such as the Data Protection Directive, will increase the already-onerous administrative burden on SMEs. Any new legislation must adhere to the principle of better regulation, reiterated in last week’s Lisbon review.

The review of the Sustainable Development Strategy also recognises that the successful implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, with its new focus on jobs and growth, will contribute to the achievement of sustainability in Europe. This is a welcome step, which will facilitate more coherent policy-making in the EU.

It is important to ensure that the recommendations of the review, such as those on improving energy efficiency, do not entail increasing the regulatory and administrative burden on SMEs. The burden of red tape in Europe is damaging for SMEs and must be reduced, not increased. The recommendation to increase the use of market-oriented procedures for improving energy must go hand-in-hand with attempts to reduce labour costs and lead to fiscal neutrality.

“The acceptance of the need to support the refocused Lisbon Strategy is a welcome trend in both of the reviews. If the European Union is to progress towards the Lisbon goals, there is a need to ensure a much greater consistency between the various policy areas,” concluded Mr Müller.

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