



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

SME users and providers of ICT tools show the way ahead

- **An integrated and flexible ICT internal market**
- **Support measures to help smaller enterprises make the most out of ICT**

Brussels, 9 June 2006. European SMEs would largely benefit from the completion of the European internal market in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, according to UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation. Speaking at the inaugural meeting of the ICT Task Force launched by the European Commission on 6 June, UEAPME Secretary General **Hans-Werner Müller** assessed the current situation and the opportunities ahead for both SME users and providers of ICT tools.

“Over 350.000 ICT SMEs throughout Europe are providing innovative products and services to their customers. Their contribution to the evolution of the ICT industry is undeniable”, said Mr Müller. “The availability of tools such as online trading facilities and the convergence of digital networks and devices have significantly improved their way of doing business, which relies heavily on a flexible economic environment ensuring proper market access. In this respect, a stricter legislation on software patents would reinforce monopolisation and act as a barrier to innovation by SMEs.”

As far as SME users are concerned, improving support and training measures on ICT tools could trigger considerable innovation and productivity gains. “Smaller enterprises are not taking advantage of ICT solutions nearly as much as they could”, continued Mr Müller. “Training and support could radically improve this state of affairs. More orders, invoices and contracts should be dealt with via ICT solutions, in order to cut down administration costs and to process payments and orders in real time.”

SME delegates from the EU Member States met in Brussels recently to discuss ways in which ICT can be used to gain new sales and operate more profitably. A “Pan-European ICT and eBusiness Network” was formed under the auspices of UEAPME to identify and spread successful eBusiness techniques in all European countries. The new network will be open to all European SMEs and their representatives active in the field.

“Our eBusiness Network aims at enhancing the use of ICT tools in a better-integrated European ICT market. We trust that both the eBusiness Network and the ICT Task Force will make a useful contribution by showing the way ahead, identifying obstacles to the completion of a real internal market and maximising the positive impact that ICT tools can have on the EU economy”, concluded Mr Müller.

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EDITORS’ NOTE: UEAPME is the employer’s organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 78 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

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