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Press Release

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Crafts and small businesses from new Member States face integration challenge

- **Support is needed to improve organisational aspects, tackle financial and technical barriers**
- **Existing legislation must be thoroughly implemented**

Brussels, 29 June 2006. Concrete commitments and support instruments are essential in order to maximise the added value of crafts and small businesses from new Member States, according to UEAPME, the European SME employers’ organisation. UEAPME President **Paul Reckinger** spoke today (Thursday) at the Warsaw conference on the integration of crafts and small enterprises from new Member States, paving the way to the 4th Conference on Craft Enterprises that will be held in Germany in Spring 2007.

“Despite some fallbacks, the EU has come a long way in the last twenty years”, said Mr Reckinger. “The completion of the single market, the introduction of the Euro and the enlargement process are key milestones that come to mind. These achievements, however, are both a success and a challenge, especially when it comes to integrating small businesses from new Member States.”

Several ways to improve crafts and small businesses’ performances with particular regard to new Member States are to be discussed in detail at the Warsaw conference, namely:

- Organisational aspects – UEAPME insists on the need to strengthen the legal and political framework for national business associations in new Member States. This would allow them to become a representative actor in civil society and to provide high quality membership services to crafts and small businesses.
- The elimination of financial barriers, which still hamper the full participation of crafts and small enterprises from new Member States in the single market. According to UEAPME, the existing European financial instruments, such as the CIP, the structural funds and the JEREMIE initiative, should be fully exploited and implemented.
- Technical barriers such as standards and regulations should be lifted as much as possible – while the benefits of standards are not questionable, UEAPME stresses that the “think small first” principle is not always applied in this field, with small businesses being faced with a complicated set of burdensome rules. Simplification and training are the key answers in this respect.

Mr Reckinger asked for “real actions” in these policy areas. “There is a good set of measures on paper – unfortunately, their implementation is lagging behind, far from craftsmen and small businessmen who need it the most”, he continued. “We trust that the EU and the new Member States will be able to gather new momentum and successfully incorporate crafts and small businesses in a thriving and effective internal market”, he concluded.

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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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