



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Enterprise Experience: improving mutual understanding between EU and SMEs

Brussels, 17 July 2006. UEAPME, the European SME employers’ association, welcomed today the launch of the “Enterprise Experience” programme by the European Commission, by which civil servants of DG Enterprise will have the possibility to spend a week in an SME as training visitors¹. According to UEAPME, which was involved in the programme since a pilot project took place in 2005, “Enterprise Experience” will be an excellent opportunity for EU officials to get a better understanding of the business realities they work on.

“A direct, hands-on experience within an SME is the best way for EU officials to get to grips with the way we work and the issues we face every day”, said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General. “Civil servants need a better awareness of our needs and conditions in order to properly and effectively address them.”

The programme will be an opportunity for EC staff to see the practical consequences of European and national legislation on the everyday operations of a small business. It will also increase their knowledge on the structure of SMEs, with a particular reference to micro-businesses that represent the vast majority of businesses in Europe.

“EU officials spending a week in a micro-business will probably find out that the everyday life there is quite different from their expectations”, continued Mr Müller. “They will not find any ‘departments’, for instance, and they will quickly learn that the owner-manager has to deal with all aspects of the enterprise. As far as their role in the EC is concerned, civil servants will see for themselves how the small size of micro-businesses makes them more vulnerable to excessive, unnecessary or over-complex legislation – and we hope they take this message back to Brussels.”

UEAPME suggested a number of ways by which the programme could be fine-tuned to the needs of SMEs. For example, pilot projects have shown that it is crucial for visitors to be fluent in the work language of the host company. Regional and national SME federations should be included in the visits programme. A follow-up procedure should be foreseen, in order to maximise the lessons learned and their influence on future policy initiatives.

“The ‘Enterprise Experience’ programme is a recognition of the specificity of SMEs and a step in the right direction to improve mutual understanding between the European Commission and small businesses in Europe. We trust that it will have a direct impact on the future EU SME policy and contribute to a better awareness of the issues at stake”, 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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¹ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/exp_prog/index.htm