



## **“The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

### **Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

#### **European craft and small enterprises take centre stage at Stuttgart conference**

**Brussels, 12 April 2007.** More than 1000 representatives from UEAPME members, national, regional and local business organisations and governments will attend the 4<sup>th</sup> European conference on Craft and Small Enterprises, which is organised at the initiative of the European Commission’s Vice President Günter Verheugen and will take place in Stuttgart, Germany, on 16-17 April. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, worked in cooperation with the Commission on the event and expects it to produce a fruitful and lively debate on how to take the EU SME policy to the next level.

*“Considerable changes have taken place in the business environment since the last European Conference on Craft and Small Enterprises in Milan in 1997”, said **Hans-Werner Müller**, UEAPME Secretary General. “The enlargement process and globalisation have brought about a whole new series of challenges and opportunities, both in ‘new’ and ‘old’ Member States. Crafts and SMEs have always been at the forefront of the EU’s economic performance, but their vital role must be further promoted and reinforced to react to these new issues. The Stuttgart conference is an excellent opportunity in this respect”, he continued.*

The agenda of the two-day conference will focus on three key strands:

- Skills for the future: both small entrepreneurs and their staff need to be properly trained to maximise their input in a business environment that is getting increasingly competitive and knowledge-intensive. Actions on lifelong learning, qualifications and mobility will be discussed.
- Developing new markets: crafts and SMEs must be enabled to reap the benefits of new business opportunities in the enlarged European Single market and beyond, as well as in new markets for their innovative products and services.
- Improving the business environment: adequate support structures and networks must be encouraged. Moreover, a real “think small first” principle should be applied across all policies, including standardisation policies, when reviewing legislation or putting forward new rules.

Globalisation, demographic change and technological developments are equally important factors in the changing business atmosphere crafts and SMEs have to deal with, and will be examined in detail during the event. Particular attention will also be given to the local and regional dimension of SME policy.

*“We trust that the Stuttgart conference will boost the EU SME policy in the same way as the previous events did, and enable SMEs to maintain their role of driving force of the European economy for the years to come”, concluded Mr Müller.*

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**EDITORS’ NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 81 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 11 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner.

The Stuttgart conference will address the specific challenges for craft and small enterprises as an integral part of the EU SME policy. It is an opportunity to take stock of the wide spectrum of the economic, social and cultural strengths of the craft sector, and to present successful best practices. Among the conference speakers are German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President of the EU Council, Commission Vice President Günter Verheugen, Michael Glos, German Minister for Economics and Technology and Günther H. Oettinger, Prime Minister of the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg. The working languages will be German, English, French, Italian and Polish. More information is available on the website [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/craft4th\\_conference.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/craft4th_conference.htm).

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