



“The voice of SMEs in Europe”

Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUE

Better cross-border payment services should not come at SMEs’ expenses

Brussels, 24 April 2007. UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, welcomed the adoption of the Payments Services Directive (PSD) at the European Parliament’s plenary today (Tuesday). According to UEAPME, the vote finally puts an end to the institutional blockade on simplifying cross-border payments within the EU, and provides at last the legal framework to make the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) possible. On the same occasion, UEAPME put forward a position paper on how to adapt SEPA and its features to the needs and expectations of European small businesses while minimising possible threats (1).

First of all, UEAPME stressed that most of Europe’s SMEs, especially small and micro enterprises, act mainly on local and regional markets and typically process only a few cross-border payments per year. *“These companies are accustomed to their national payment systems, and will not opt for SEPA if the system will concentrate on providing better and cheaper cross-border services but increase the costs of national payments at the same time”*, commented **Gerhard Huemer**, UEAPME Director for Economic and Fiscal Policy. UEAPME therefore insisted on the need to ensure that SEPA will offer some added value to customers operating mainly or exclusively at national level.

Secondly, the starting points for the changeover to SEPA, i.e. the current national payment systems, differ dramatically on features such as transaction times, additional optional services and card payments. Against this background, UEAPME urged Member States to involve national SME representative organisations in migration plans as early as possible to ensure a smooth and State-tailored transition with shared objectives.

Thirdly, UEAPME denounced the risk of SEPA creating new monopolies for elements such as payment card hardware or payment support services. SMEs currently suffer from the lack of competition between operators, terminal providers and technical assistance. SEPA will only be accepted, said UEAPME, if it contributes to increased competition, better offers and lower prices for these services. UEAPME thus called on national and European competition watchdogs to take all the necessary steps to avoid market restrictions and overpricing.

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(1) http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2007/070424_SEPA_final.pdf

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.

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