



**“The voice of SMEs in Europe”**

**Press Release**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Tripartite Social Summit: SMEs call for labour markets overhaul**

**Brussels, 13 March 2008.** Urgent reforms at national level are needed to improve the functioning of Europe’s labour markets and make the most out of small businesses’ growth and employment potential, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation. Speaking at the Tripartite Social Summit ahead of the Spring Council today (Thursday), President **Georg Toifl** urged Member States to act swiftly through the “flexicurity” approach with the aim of broadening the skill set of workers and jobseekers, increasing the availability of qualified staff and fighting undeclared work.

*“With the 2010 deadline looming, Europe does not stand a chance to achieve the Lisbon goals unless it quickly improves the fluidity and reactivity of its labour markets”,* said Mr Toifl. *“Crafts and SMEs are particularly hard-hit by the present shortcomings, which are stifling their capacity to foster growth and create quality jobs”*, he continued. Mr Toifl then went on to elaborate on the main SME points.

UEAPME and the other European Social Partners **BUSINESSEUROPE**, **CEEP** and **ETUC** announced at the Tripartite Social Summit their decision to negotiate an autonomous framework agreement to determine how they can best contribute to maximise the potential of Europe’s labour markets and workforce. This will include provisions to facilitate access to and progression in the labour market for disadvantaged groups, through measures such as active labour market policies and lifelong learning. Mr Toifl reinstated UEAPME’s full commitment to all current and future joint Social Partners’ initiatives.

Speaking on the new “Lisbon strategy cycle” for 2008-2011, Mr Toifl singled out the upcoming Small Business Act as an obvious top priority for UEAPME. He called once again on EU policymakers to deliver a set of binding measures and common obligations to support SMEs, which *“must not be disappointed again with half-hearted Sunday speeches”*. He also stressed the need to include labour market policies in the Small Business Act, which does not seem to be the case at the moment. Small enterprises must be able to offer to their staff a sufficient level of security, which is a precondition to remain an attractive employer. In addition, they must be sheltered from the unfair competition of undeclared work, which is particularly felt in labour intensive service sectors. Both issues must be addressed in the SBA and become a subject for social dialogue both at European and national level.

Finally, Mr Toifl commented on climate change and energy policy, a key topic for this year’s Spring Summit. He reinstated UEAPME’s calls for a shake-up of the internal market in the energy sector, backed the EC’s proposals in this respect and agreed in principle with the strategic goal of diversifying the energy mix to include a fair share of renewables, if this is done in the most economically sound way. On energy savings and energy efficiency, efforts must start first of all with the refurbishment of buildings to improve energy performance, said Mr Toifl, since experts agree that this sector has the highest potential to promote energy savings while creating employment at the same time.

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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 84 member organisations, which represent crafts and SMEs across Europe, covering over 12 million enterprises with 50 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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