

SME Intergroup

2004 - 2009

Abstract of the SME Intergroup 2004-2009 Meeting

***“SMEs – a sleeping giant?
Challenges of the Spring Summit 2006”***

Chaired by President Othmar Karas (EPP:ED)

Speakers:

- **Werner DAJANI**, Austrian Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour
- **Gerhard HUEMER**, UEAPME, director of Economic and Fiscal Policy

Strasbourg, Thursday, 16th March 2006
11.00 – 12.00 h

List of MEPs participating the Meeting

Philip	Bushill-Matthews	EPP/ED
Othmar	Karas	EPP/ED
Wolf	Klinz	ALDE
Marie	Panayotopoulos	EPP/ED
Paul	Rübig	EPP/ED
Peter	Stastny	EPP/ED
Jacques	Toubon	EPP/ED
Lambert	van Nistelrooij	EPP/ED

Assistants of MEPs

Agnieska	Budny	Ass: Kaczmarek
Corinne	Müller	Ass: Hennicot-Schoepges
Geraldine	Nee	Ass: Dollay
Agnieska	Rakowska	Ass: Busek
Eva Maria	Tscherner	Ass: Karas
Sarah	Wolpert	Ass: Rübig

Observers

Claus	Giesing	EC DG ENTR
Tobias	Linnemann	SME Circle
Barbara	Schweighofer	SME UNION

Members of the SME Intergroup

Karas	Othmar	EPP/ED	Langendries	Raymond	EPP/ED
Herczog	Edit	PSE	Lehideux	Bernard	ALDE
Klinz	Wolf	ALDE	Leinen	Jo	PSE
Andrikiene	Laima	EPP/ED	Liese	Peter	EPP/ED
Ashworth	Richard J.	EPP/ED	Locatelli	Pia-Elda	PSE
Barsi-Pataky	Etelka	EPP/ED	López-Istúriz White	Antonio	EPP/ED
Bauer	Edit	EPP/ED	Lulling	Astrid	EPP/ED
Brejč	Mihael	EPP/ED	Lynne	Elizabeth	ALDE
Brepöls	Frederika	EPP/ED	Matsis	Yannakis	EPP/ED
Brezina	Jan	EPP/ED	Mayer	Hans-P.	EPP/ED
Brunetta	Renato	EPP/ED	McCarthy	Arlene	PSE
Bushill-Matthews	Philip	EPP/ED	McDonald	Mary Lou	GUE/NGL
Buzek	Jerzy	EPP/ED	Mikolasik	Miroslav	EPP/ED
Calabuig Rull	Joan	PSE	Mitchell	Gay	EPP/ED
Caspary	Daniel	EPP/ED	Muscat	Joseph	PSE
Chichester	Giles	EPP/ED	Paleckis	Justas V.	PSE
Corbey	Dorette	PSE	Pálfi	István	EPP/ED
del Castillo Vera	Pilcy	EPP/ED	Panayotopoulos	Marie	EPP/ED
Didziokas	Gintaras	UEN	Peterle	Alojz	EPP/ED
Dombrovskis	Valdis	EPP/ED	Pittella	Giovanni	PSE
Doorn	Bert	EPP/ED	Podkanski	Zdzislav	EPP/ED
Douay	Brigitte	PSE	Purvis	John	EPP/ED
Doyle	Avril	EPP/ED	Radwan	Alexander	EPP/ED
Ebner	Michl	EPP/ED	Reul	Herbert	EPP/ED
Ehler	Christian	EPP/ED	Rübig	Paul	EPP/ED
Ek	Lena	ALDE	Sartori	Amalia	EPP/ED
Evans	Jonathan	EPP/ED	Seeber	Richard	EPP/ED
Fourtou	Janelly	ALDE	Silva Peneda	José A.	EPP/ED
Geringer de			Spautz	Jean	EPP/ED
Ödenberg	Lidia J.	PSE	Stastný	Peter	EPP/ED
Gierek	Adam	PSE	Sturdy	Robert	EPP/ED
Gill	Neena	PSE	Thomsen	Britta	PSE
Griesbeck	Nathalie	ALDE	Titely	Gary	PSE
Guy-Quint	Catherine	PSE	Toubon	Jacques	EPP/ED
Harbour	Malcolm	EPP/ED	Ulmer	Thomas	EPP/ED
Hennicot-Schöppges	Erna	EPP/ED	Vakalis	Nikolaos	EPP/ED
Hökmark	Gunnar	EPP/ED	van den Burg	Ileke	PSE
Honeyball	Mary	PSE	van Nistelrooij	Lambert	EPP/ED
Hudacky	Jan	EPP/ED	Weiler	Barbara	PSE
Itälä	Ville	EPP/ED	Weisgerber	Anja	EPP/ED
Jäättteenmäki	Anneli	ALDE	Wortmann-Kool	Corien	EPP/ED
Jeggle	Elisabeth	EPP/ED	Wuermeling	Joachim	EPP/ED
Jordan-Cizelj	Romana	EPP/ED			
Kaczmarek	Filip A.	EPP/ED			
Kauppi	Piia-N.	EPP/ED			

Challenges of the Spring Summit 2006

In his opening remarks **Othmar Karas** welcomed the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy at the Spring Summit 2005 that had introduced a new partnership for growth and jobs and National Reform Programmes, which were monitored by the Commission. He highlighted that nevertheless European projects were needed. As many officials and politicians had mentioned and stressed many times, SMEs were the generator of growth and more and better jobs. The Spring Council under the Austrian Presidency should come up with further ideas for European programmes.

Werner Dajani from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour explained that he was in charge of Enterprise policy. He stated that the discussion in the Council working group on competitiveness earlier that week had had its basis on the 2 communications by the Commission dealing with SME policy and Entrepreneurial mindset.

In his opinion the program of the Commission concerning "think small first" should lead to the insight of rethinking the actual policy. The initiatives on cutting Red Tape would have to focus on starting a business with the realisation of the one-stop-shop concept in all member states. Secondly it was also crucial to focus on businesses already in running.

Concerning the SME Charta Werner Dajani stressed the importance of a consistent and coherent reporting system to keep data comparable.

He welcomed the initiatives of the Commission concerning state aids mentioning the increase of the amount for the de minimis rule and a wider range of block exemptions. This was a first step in the right direction but further allowances for SMEs should be invented in both areas.

Gerhard Huemer, political director in UEAPME, the SME and craftsmen association - one of the Commissions partners in the social dialogue - handed out a position paper to which he referred in his speech. He clearly indicated that the benchmark for the Commission and the Austrian Presidency should be to make a concrete decision. In order to make the European economy more competitive they had to make promises a reality.

He insisted that SME papers were not integrated enough into the other policy papers of the Commission. Too many different policy areas were not linked together for SMEs.

He agreed with Werner Dajani that think small first was an important programme warmly welcomed by the UEAPME and other stakeholders. Within the process of reporting on this programme Gerhard Huemer missed cooperation with the stakeholder to have their input. He would also like to see more visibility of reporting itself and a discussion of the results.

For state aids he could see some progress for SMEs as state aids were now also accessible for innovation and no longer not only for research. As the majority of SMEs was innovation without research that was the first time SMEs had access to these sorts of state aid.

According to Mr. Huemer there was some progress in the Basel II concept which opened access to finance via guarantees in the framework of the CIP funded by the EIB. As there was no money from the market available for start-ups and innovative SMEs urgently needed support like guarantees on national and European level.

He further stated that Flexicurity offered a wide range of subjects to discuss and to improve. There was a need for a new working time directive keeping in mind that opt-out was not the solution for everything. Security could not cover any more the job security but employment security. People would have to realise that and politicians would have to offer solutions.

Although UEAPME was happy with the latest development and the Parliaments voting on i.e. REACH, optical radiation and, generally speaking also the services directive, he would like to see more progress regarding the financial perspective. He was aware that the financial perspective would be the result of an inter-institutional bargain but he asked for respecting the fact that money that was to be spent first had to be raised.

Discussion:

Philip Bushill-Matthews, rapporteur for the SME Charta, asked for the implementation of the political ideas. The parliament would like to see the Council take concrete measures and initiatives. Werner Dajani replied that the intention of the Austrian Presidency was to have soft quantitative targets and self obligations by the Member States.

Wolf Klinz – Vice President of the Intergroup – drew the attention also to the fact that citizens lost confidence and feared overregulation. As there was already high unemployment in Europe the Union should focus on access to R&D networks for SMEs and on transition of businesses.

Lambert van Nistelrooij – member of the ITRE committee focused on the Frameworkprogramme and that it was still hard for SMEs to get into networks of open innovation. In the Netherlands the voucher-system was introduced as a successful mean to bring SMEs on board. Clustering would to create a knowledge oriented society.

Conclusion:

In his conclusion **Othmar Karas** – President of the Intergroup – said that one knows that the strategy of a Council had to be a political compromise. To find that compromise was not that difficult, the challenge was to deliver solutions, what Europe needed in the actual economic situation.

Contact for the SME Intergroup

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