

UEAPME Newsflash

UEAPME assesses national economic recovery plans

Further to a meeting of its Board of Directors last week, UEAPME released this week a [short summary](#) assessing the national economic recovery plans recently adopted or announced by several Member States to tackle the current downturn. Access to finance tops the list of SME-specific measures, with increased volumes of guarantees and additional subsidised loans and credits being the most common instruments, followed by the extension of deposit guarantees and by an increased use of EIB/EIF means. As far as general measures with positive effects on SMEs are concerned, infrastructure projects and income tax reduction are the most present. Despite these positive news, UEAPME members would have liked to see more tax cuts and more attention to non-wage labour costs and working time flexibility. Moreover, they reported possible significant delays in the implementation of adopted programmes. This may endanger the effects of announced or agreed recovery programmes and reduce employment and economic activity, concluded UEAPME.

➤ Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Impact of crisis on employment discussed at EMCO

Social Affairs Director Liliane Volozinskis spoke alongside representatives of the other European Social Partners at the Employment Committee (EMCO), where Member States coordinate and discuss employment and labour market policies, which took place in Brussels on 16 February. Participants were presented with the first monthly unemployment monitor in the framework of the EU economic recovery plan, which UEAPME welcomed despite the lack of a data breakdown by enterprise size. Ms Volozinskis pointed out that the economic crisis has now reached SMEs, whose immediate concern is access to finance. On employment, SMEs should have equal access to all support measures in national recovery plans in terms of flexible working arrangements, temporary unemployment benefits as well as measures for training and requalification of staff. Flexicurity is the adequate framework in which all measures must be taken, stressed Ms Volozinskis, who anticipated a joint declaration of the European Social Partners for the Tripartite Social Summit.

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Stimulus measures must not hinder the single market

A working breakfast on stimulus measures against the financial and economic crisis took place in Brussels on 17 February. Economic and Fiscal Policy Director Gerhard Huemer spoke alongside Jiri Plecity from Commissioner Verheugen's cabinet at the event, which was organised by the EPP's SME Union in collaboration with UEAPME and its member ACCA, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. Europe must rely on SMEs to find ways out of the crisis, stressed Mr Huemer, who singled out access to credits and loans as the main concern for small firms, which find it increasingly difficult to finance their investments and day-to-day activities. Although much has been done in the last months in this respect, more measures are needed, especially on working capital. Another key concern for SMEs is the practical implementation of national recovery plans, continued Mr Huemer. Member States must make sure that their anti-crisis packages do not go against the internal market rules and do not hamper financial stability in the medium term, he concluded.

➤ Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

SAC tackles state of play of social dossiers at EC and EP

The UEAPME Social Affairs Committee (SAC) met in Brussels on 17 February. The packed agenda included a discussion on the negotiations on the revision of the parental leave agreement as well as on inclusive labour markets. Members also exchanged views on the European Commission's "Post Lisbon Strategy", taking into account the current economic and social situation, the consequences of which were examined in the light of an upcoming joint contribution by the European Social Partners. Moreover, they exchanged information on the implementation of the directive on equal treatment between men and women in employment and occupation in SMEs to finalise our reply to the EC consultation. Members tackled as well some key pieces of legislation under discussion at the European Parliament, such as the proposal for a directive on equal treatment for self-employed men and women and assisting spouses as well as the revision of the directive on pregnant workers. Finally, they exchanged views and concerns on other important dossiers, for instance the working time directive and the employers' contribution to the 15th anniversary of EURES.

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Consumer rights: business organisations write to MEPs

UEAPME, BUSINESSEUROPE and Eurocommerce wrote this week a letter to all members of the European Parliament in view of their discussions on the EC proposal for a directive on consumer rights. The three organisations emphasised their support to the objectives of the directive of improving the functioning of the single market by making cross-border trade easier for companies while ensuring an optimal common level of consumer protection. These objectives will be best achieved through targeted full harmonisation of certain aspects regulating contractual relations between companies and individual consumers, continued the three, which stressed the need to strike the right balance between the competitiveness and interests of companies and an appropriately high common standards of consumer protection. The level of protection can only be decided by a political process that must be based on facts and sound and objective research, concluded the business organisations. This joint letter follows a [position paper](#) released by UEAPME some weeks ago, in which the organisation highlighted a number of areas where it thinks the proposal must be seriously amended not to harm SMEs' image and competitiveness.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Dora Szentpaly](#)

SMEs call for new governance model in cohesion policy

UEAPME published this week its response to the European Commission's Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. In its paper, UEAPME stressed that while the importance of crafts and SMEs in economic and social terms and for the stability of the territories is now recognised and politically promoted, practically speaking it is still largely underestimated or insufficiently implemented. UEAPME therefore insisted on the need to: establish a real dialogue between political actors and the "real economy" assuring multilevel governance based on "horizontal subsidiarity"; train public and private actors on partnerships and on the "enterprise culture"; start from the "Think Small First" principle when elaborating legislation and territorial development measures; simplify and limit to the strictly necessary administrative and financial procedures for participation in regional development programmes; involve intermediary organisations of SMEs, craft and micro enterprises. These 5 measures are the key to success for the future cohesion policy, concluded UEAPME.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Birte Day](#)

Building crafts award first European design masters

A delegation of the EACD, the European Association of Building Crafts, visited Brussels this week. The visit, which included a meeting at UEAPME, aimed at presenting the first European design masters, a high-level vocational training curriculum designed and run by the craftsmen themselves. Based on the tradition of "training trips" that has enriched building craftsmen and their know-how since the middle ages, the EACD established a pan-European master degree. The first six master plasterers received their diplomas in Brussels this week. The EACD visit also included a meeting with Education Commissioner Jan Figel, during which the organisation reinstated the need for building craftsmen to act on a European dimension and take ownership of the training process in order to shape the future of the art.

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KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- [Public hearing on the consumer rights directive at the European Parliament](#) (02/03, Brussels)
- [Conference on "Current policy issues in the governance of the European Patent System"](#) (17/03, Brussels)
- [UEAPME SME Convention](#) (27/04, Brussels)
- [First European SME Week](#) (06-14/05, Brussels)

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