



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

EU 2020 strategy must now earn Member States' full support, say SMEs

Brussels, 3 March 2010 – The "Europe 2020" strategy unveiled by the European Commission today is an impressive policy agenda that can really make a difference and bring Europe back on its pre-crisis growth path, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation. UEAPME welcomed the document's clear structure and its emphasis on identifying bottlenecks and delivering results, while sharing the Commission's blueprint for a credible and coordinated exit strategy from the current crisis. The SME organisation was particularly pleased by the strategy's focus on the quality of regulatory systems and on their ability to enforce European law, a point that was stressed by UEAPME in the consultation preceding today's document and that was clearly taken on board by the Commission. Moreover, UEAPME welcomed the strategy's attention towards SMEs, which are repeatedly mentioned in the text. On the negative side, the Commission overlooked the importance of efficient and effective public administrations, a point that should have received more attention, warned UEAPME.

Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** offered the following comments:

"The EU 2020 strategy as unveiled today is heads and shoulders above all previous attempts to give Europe a long-term strategy for sustainable growth. It is a coherent, comprehensive and impressive piece of work, which goes well beyond a mere target-setting exercise to elaborate not only on where Europe must go, but also on how to get there. Never before was the Commission so clear on where bottlenecks are, on how to remove them and on who must do what. This is a radical change of perspective that could really make a difference if all stakeholders take full ownership of the process."

"The headline targets proposed today on employment, innovation, climate and energy, education and poverty will not be easy to reach and are perhaps overoptimistic. However, they are fewer and clearer compared to the Lisbon Strategy and they clearly cater to the overarching priority of achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Moreover, these targets are not one-size-fits all indicators, since the Commission clearly suggests that they should be adapted to the different national situations. We fully share this more realistic approach."

"Today's document reserves a great deal of attention to SMEs and to their needs. The Small Business Act may not be mentioned explicitly, but its spirit and main principles are clearly present in the text. This is particularly true when it comes to improving the environment in which SMEs operate through a better application of the 'Think Small First' principles."

"The Commission has visibly made treasure of the comments received during the consultation phase, including those coming from SMEs. The result is a clearer focus on previously neglected aspects, such as the quality of regulatory systems and the importance of properly implementing and enforcing regulations. However, we would have liked more attention to the quality of public administration. The strategy's targets will be hard to achieve unless the costs linked to public administrations are reduced and their efficiency is increased. This is crucial for enterprises in general and for SMEs in particular. The fact that this issue was overlooked is perhaps the only black spot in an otherwise impressive document, which Member States must now fully support."

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 82 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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