

UEAPME Newsflash

SMEs praise EU 2020 strategy and call for Council support

The European Commission has launched this week its “[EU 2020 strategy](#)”, which aims to lead Europe out of the current economic crisis and prepare the EU economy for the next decade. According to UEAPME, the Commission’s document can really make a difference and bring Europe back on its pre-crisis growth path. UEAPME praised the document’s clear structure and its emphasis on identifying bottlenecks and delivering results. It was also 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. 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, which nevertheless invited Member States to fully support the strategy. [Read more](#) or contact [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Training Committee launches mobility project in Paris

The UEAPME Training Committee met in Paris this week. On the agenda was a short discussion session among members on pending topics such as EQF and EQARF, followed by the launch of Euroapprenticeship, a new project aiming to increase the mobility of apprentices in Europe, as foreseen in the “Youth on the Move” flagship initiative of the new EU 2020 strategy. The project will aim at creating a “network of mobility networks”, notably by the development of a web-based platform, to make placement abroad a realistic and feasible option for apprentices in all EU Member States (see *issue 82*). Project partners and the Commission decided on the visual identity of Euroapprenticeship and discussed various issues including the official launch to the public, which will take place in November in Brussels at a conference organised by the EC on the Leonardo programme. Contact: [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

Consumer information must be accompanied by education

Enterprise Policy Director Luc Hendrickx spoke this week in Brussels at a public hearing on consumer information organised by the European Economic and Social Committee. He stressed that SMEs fully support the right to information as one of the basic consumer rights and generally perform very well in this respect. However, obligations linked to consumer information are very cost-intensive for SMEs and should be proportionate to the goal they want to achieve, i.e. to provide a level of information sufficient to assess the basic features of products and services, according to the EU definition. Legislation in this field should take into account the business reality in which information is often provided informally, for instance orally, and should also target the average consumer needs, said Mr Hendrickx. Finally, consumers must be not only informed but also educated, as information obligations alone will burden SMEs without making consumers better off, he concluded. Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

Seminar discusses flexibility and social dialogue in SMEs

Social Affairs Adviser Helen Hoffmann spoke this week at a [seminar organised by Eurofound and Alejandro Cercas MEP](#) for the launch of the Eurofound [European Company Survey](#) report. Ms Hoffmann welcomed the timely report, which shows the extent to which flexibility and social dialogue are crucial for SMEs, especially when dealing with the anticipation of change. She also underlined some characteristics of social dialogue in smaller firms, which cannot be compared to the more formalised structures in larger enterprises. Commenting on information and consultation of the workforce, she stressed that the legal framework is in place but needs now to be fully implemented by Member States. Social dialogue must be further strengthened as a permanent feature of the European social model and as a key component to a good implementation of the flexicurity principles, she concluded. Contact: [Helen Hoffmann](#)

UEAPME comments on new EU tourism policy framework

UEAPME published this week its response to a consultation document on tourism policy in the EU that was released by the European Commission to prepare a new communication on the issue. According to the Commission, the new EU tourism policy should aim to stimulate the competitiveness of the tourism industry, to strengthen the development of sustainable tourism and to promote Europe in third countries. UEAPME agreed with these main goals and put forward a series of remarks and suggestions. On competitiveness, UEAPME stressed the role of tourism as a driver of wealth in rural areas and the importance of innovation, while regretting the absence of any reference to the need for professionalisation of the sector. UEAPME also backed the goal of a more sustainable tourism sector, which is both a challenge and an opportunity, and called for a study on the perception and attractiveness of European countries in third countries to be undertaken. [Read more](#) or contact [Luc Hendrickx](#)

Social partners’ report on ESF seminar now available

The European Social Partners have recently published a [report](#) on a seminar on the European Social Fund (ESF) that took place in Brussels in December last year (see *issue 81*). The aim of the seminar was to discuss ways to improve the participation of social partners in the European Social Fund and to use the ESF more effectively to tackle the consequences of the crisis on employment. On the first aspect, one of the main conclusions was that many obstacles can be overcome by strengthening the capacities of social partners. In particular, participants insisted that the partnership principle between authorities and social partners needs to be reinforced at all levels. On the second aspect, participants recognised the need to reconcile the financing of flexibility needed to respond to the crisis with long-term challenges. The agreement was that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution as, for example, the differences in unemployment rates in Member States show. Contact: [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

Uptake of ICT in European SMEs discussed at CeBIT event

Secretary General Andrea Benassi spoke this week at the “[European Forum for Competitiveness and Growth in SMEs](#)” taking place at CeBIT, the world’s largest ICT trade fair in Hannover. The event was co-organised by UEAPME, PIN-SME, the European Commission and CeBIT. Mr Benassi praised the role of the European e-Business Support Network for SMEs (eBSN) set up by the Commission, which led to the creation of PIN-SME and provides an excellent platform for decision-makers and ICT policy experts to share information and ideas. He also stressed the importance of promoting professionalism in ICT, a goal that cannot be achieved only with large vendors’ certifications and training schemes and that must include independent ICT companies. Moreover, Mr Benassi called for improved interoperability of ICT systems to avoid market monopolisation and for easier rules and increased awareness on the EU funding possibilities for SMEs in the area of ICT. Contact: [Sebastiano Toffaletti](#)

UEAPME appoints representatives at VAT working group

UEAPME appointed this week five experts who will represent the organisation in an informal working group with business representatives on VAT administration set up by the European Commission’s DG Taxation and Customs (see *issue 88*). Chas Roy-Chowdhury from ACCA (UK), Chairman of UEAPME’s Taxation Working Group, and Matthias Lefarth, Head of the Taxation and Finance Policy unit at ZDH (DE), will act as permanent representatives in the working group, with Cindy Laureis from UNIZO (BE), Anna Lunden and Satu Grekin from the Federation of Finnish Enterprises providing further expertise. Economic and Fiscal Policy Director Gerhard Huemer will coordinate our input to the group, which will discuss how the relationship between taxpayers and tax administration in terms of VAT obligations, audit and general communication can be improved to their mutual benefit. Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

From Andrea Benassi’s agenda: Brussels, Hannover

02/03: In Brussels, Secretary General Andrea Benassi met members of the Cabinet of President Barroso for an update on the main SME policy dossiers under discussion.

02/03: On the same day, the Secretary General chaired the monthly meeting of the Brussels-based permanent delegates of our member organisations.

04/03: In Hannover, Mr Benassi spoke at an event co-organised by UEAPME, PIN-SME, the European Commission and CeBIT on ICT and SMEs (see *above*).

05/03: Today in Brussels, the Secretary General welcomes a delegation from the Emilia Romagna region of our Italian member organisation CNA.

➤ For questions on Mr Benassi’s agenda, please contact the [UEAPME Secretariat](#)

KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- [Seminar on the European Ombudsman’s new mandate](#) (12/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- [European conference on CSR](#) (12/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))

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