



*“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”*

## **SMEs broadly welcome new “Erasmus for all” programme**

Brussels, 23 November 2011 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, welcomed today’s “Erasmus for all” proposal by the European Commission, which suggests allocating 19 billion EUR towards promoting skills and learning mobility of young people in what will become the successor of the current Lifelong Learning Programme. UEAPME endorsed the proposal’s simplified and streamlined architecture, stressing that it is based on the right key actions: learning mobility, cooperation for innovation and good practices, support for policy reform. Using the successful “Erasmus” mobility brand beyond higher education to include vocational education and training (VET) and focusing on the quality of mobility should contribute to strengthening VET mobility and attractiveness, said UEAPME. While acknowledging the higher budget allocated for the mobility of VET students, however, the organisation regretted that funding is still lagging behind compared to higher education. Moreover, apprentices are still not identified as a separate target group. This is not consistent with Europe’s recent commitments to tackle youth unemployment and skills mismatches on the labour market, warned UEAPME.

Social Affairs and Employment Director **Liliane Volozinskis** commented as follows:

*“The ‘Erasmus for all’ programme presented today will be crucial to foster the skills and learning mobility of young people. This is especially important at a time of economic crisis and negative repercussions on labour markets, with notably high youth unemployment. It is also key to meet companies’ need for more and better qualified workers and to overcome skills mismatches. The proposal’s new simplified and streamlined architecture is based on the right actions: learning mobility, cooperation for innovation and good practices, as well as support for policy reform.”*

*“Leveraging the successful ‘Erasmus’ mobility brand beyond higher education to all forms of education and training including VET and focusing on the quality of mobility as rightly proposed by the Commission today should also contribute to reaching the new proposed benchmark of around 6% of EU initial VET graduates to have a study or training period abroad, which is ambitious but politically necessary. However, more work is needed to remove practical, technical and legal obstacles to learning mobility and to set up a good infrastructure to support sending and hosting SMEs and better valorise their engagement in quality mobility of apprentices.”*

*“Although we appreciate the substantial increase in the budget allocated for the mobility of VET students, which was more than doubled, we are concerned that VET is still not on a par with higher education, which will take the lion’s share. Moreover, apprentices are still not identified as a separate target group, which would have been helpful to implement the new political commitments on promoting apprenticeships and work-based learning to tackle high youth unemployment. The Commission could have been more consistent on this aspect. The ball is now in the court of the European Parliament and Council. We strongly hope that they will understand that spending on education and training is the best investment that can be made for Europe’s future, and that they will act accordingly.”*

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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 84 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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