



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

Rural development: Parliament’s vote on EARDF ignores non-farming SMEs

Brussels, 15 March 2013 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, was left disappointed by the vote at the European Parliament’s plenary this week on the European Agricultural Rural Development Fund (EARDF). Despite our repeated calls, MEPs voted in favour of refocusing some measures of the EARDF exclusively on farming or activities related to farming and forestry businesses. Support for training, consulting and business creation will only be available for companies active in this field. According to UEAPME, this aid should also be available for non farming SMEs in rural areas, which should also be involved in the planned “short supply chains”. UEAPME therefore called on the upcoming Agriculture Council to scrap the amendments inserted by the European Parliament and to revert to the original and far more balanced proposal by the European Commission.

Enterprise Policy Director **Luc Hendrickx** commented as follows:

“More than 7 million SMEs, the majority of which are micro and craft enterprises, are located in rural areas where they are the most important or often the only employer. These companies contribute in an essential way to economic and social cohesion as well as to the development of rural areas. That is why UEAPME has supported the very balanced approach taken by the European Commission on rural development, which can only be achieved by addressing all economic activities, including of course non-farming SMEs. Unfortunately, this week’s vote at the Parliament goes in the opposite direction. By shifting support only to farming and forestry, MEPs are ignoring the key role of other SMEs in rural development.”

“This week’s vote introduces the possibility to give priority to companies active in farming and forestry for training, consulting and business creation. These are vital support measures for all small companies operating in a rural area, and there are no reasons why farmers should be given a preferential treatment. The same goes for the aid reserved to farmers in the processing as well as marketing of products or in tourism. Non farming companies engaged in the same activity cannot be put at a competitive disadvantage: all companies in the same sector must operate in the same manner and under the same rules in order to avoid distortions of competition. In other words, companies working in the same sector have the same rights and duties and should be granted the same treatment. SMEs should also be involved in the planned ‘short supply chains’, and cooperation among all actors is key to follow the spirit of the EARDF and promote rural development.”

“The proposal by the European Commission is heads and shoulders above the text as modified this week by the European Parliament. We hope that the upcoming Agriculture Council will favour the Commission’s approach. Rural development is a territorial policy that cannot and should not be reduced to a sectoral policy to the exclusive benefit of farmers.”

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A recent letter from UEAPME to the European Commission on this topic is available here:

http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/UEAPME_comments_EAFRD_letter_20130228_Commissaires.pdf

EDITORS’ NOTES: UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 80 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information please visit <http://www.ueapme.com/> or follow [@UEAPME](https://twitter.com/UEAPME) on Twitter.

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