



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

Economic and social progress cannot happen without SMEs

Main responsibility to deliver Social Pillar lies at national and regional level

Brussels, 21st March 2018 – At the Tripartite Social Summit focussing on 'Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights' (EPSR), UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller put forward the fact that we need a strong economy and growth to achieve social progress. However, the SMEs are still facing barriers to growth: incomplete single market, rigid labour markets, and lack of finance for riskier projects. She also emphasised that the main current challenge on the labour market is the skills shortage. On the delivery of the EPSR, the main responsibility remains at national and regional level. UEAPME advocates for a bottom-up approach to deliver results, taking into account the needs of SMEs and with stimulus from the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Indeed, this challenge holds SMEs back regarding growth and employment. UEAPME and the Committee of the Regions signed the 'Cohesion Alliance for a strong EU Cohesion policy post 2020', reflecting the paramount importance of the regional development in this context.

Commenting the importance of the economic situation, and on the barriers SMEs face, **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller** said *“The economic situation is crucial when it comes to growth. However, SMEs are still facing barriers to growth, that it be the incomplete internal market, the rigid labour markets, the skills shortage or the lack of finance for riskier projects. Concerning the delivery of the Pillar of Social Rights, the Commission has come up with major legislative proposals that will create new burdens for SMEs. This is a top-down approach and it is not the right way forward. It does not reflect national and regional differences and creates unnecessary burdens. We advocate for a bottom-up approach that better takes into account the needs of stakeholders, including SMEs on the ground.”*

Shortage of skills has become the main challenge for SMEs on the labour market. *“We call for continuing support for more vocational training and adaptation of skills to labour market needs. Our SMEs need people with technical and digital skills as well as more soft skills,”* highlighted Ms Rabmer-Koller. With the support of the Multiannual Financial Framework, this should better contribute to employability of the workforce and strengthen SMEs' ability to engage in this process at national and regional level. The MFF will determine the financial resources available to support SMEs and implement policy actions for SMEs as well as bring added value to Europe. *“The MFF should grant SMEs with a better access to innovation and skills. The topic of digitalisation is also fundamental in this process.”*

For this to work, it also needs to go hand in hand with the support of a well-designed cohesion policy. *“In the aim of reinforcing our bottom-up approach, I met Committee of the Regions President Karl-Heinz Lambertz to sign the ‘Cohesion Alliance for a strong EU Cohesion policy beyond 2020’. Through this signature, we are sending a strong political signal to the Institutions that SMEs and local and regional authorities have a common interest to a close partnership,”* said Ms Rabmer-Koller. SMEs are the main actors for creating jobs and growth, and ensuring economic, social and regional cohesion all over Europe. The Committee of the Regions supports this partnership approach and a strong involvement of SME experts, the signature of the Alliance underlines this fact.

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing Crafts and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 64 member organisations covering about 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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