

UEAPME Newsflash

UEAPME present at “Social Ministers Troika” in Brdo

Secretary General Andrea Benassi spoke at the “Social Ministers Troika” with the European Social Partners, the Commission and the Parliament in Brdo on 31 January. Participants discussed how flexicurity principles can contribute to a higher participation rate in the labour market of young people, women and elderly workers. He highlighted that the segmentation of labour markets is due to several structural factors: rigidity of labour laws, lack of flexible working patterns, lack of skills required, and social protection systems discouraging the uptake of a formal job and pushing people towards undeclared work. Besides the necessary reforms for a better fluidity of EU labour markets, specific measures for each of these groups are needed, said Mr Benassi, who stressed that SMEs strongly suffer from the EU “employment dilemma”. On one hand they constantly face the lack of workforce and of qualified young people, women and older workers; on the other hand, the employment rate of these specific groups remains very low.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

SEPA officially launched but not yet suitable for SMEs

The official launch of SEPA, the Single Euro Payments Area in which individuals and businesses will make credit transfers, debt transfers and use payment card services across the EU area under the same basic conditions, rights and obligations, was celebrated in Brussels on 28 January. UEAPME welcomed SEPA as a positive step forward, but warned that it is not yet suitable for everyday use by crafts and SMEs. It stressed the absence of rules concerning remittance information, which is crucial for tools such as e-invoicing and e-accounting, as well as on the practicalities surrounding debit transfers. Moreover, UEAPME criticised the lack of adequate information to end users, and insisted on the need to ensure competition both on SEPA-related services and on hardware/software infrastructures. Unless these shortcomings are redressed, a quick migration to the new system cannot be recommended, UEAPME concluded.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Macroeconomic Dialogue: experts say “wait and see”

Economic and Fiscal Policy Director Gerhard Huemer participated to a technical meeting of the “Macroeconomic Dialogue” between the European Central Bank, the Council, the Commission and the European Social Partners in Brussels on 31 January. The meeting discussed the economic situation in Europe in relation to the recent economic crisis in the United States as well as the unexpectedly high inflation rates recently measured in the EU. Despite some disagreement between employers and trade union representatives on specific aspects such as wage policy, all participants concurred that the current economic uncertainty requires constant monitoring and swift reactions, but only if strictly necessary and after careful consideration of all the possible aspects and consequences of every action.

➤ Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

“CSR for SMEs” project partners meet in Prague

The partners of the EU-funded “Mainstreaming CSR among SMEs” project, led by UEAPME, met in Prague on 31 January and 1 February. The project aims at supporting small business organisations in implementing the recommendation guidelines made by the Multi-Stakeholder-Forum on CSR. The meeting was hosted by [ECCR](#), the Economic Chamber of the Czech Republic, and attended by representatives from 13 organisations in 7 different European countries, who discussed progress on the project’s milestones and expected results, which include a handbook to be used in 10 countries and distributed across Europe through the partners’ networks and a toolkit comprising 5 seminar concepts, a 25-hour VET curriculum and an interactive business game.

➤ [Visit the project website](#) or contact [Luc Hendrickx](#)

Conference highlights importance of VET systems

President Georg Toifl spoke at a conference co-organised by UEAPME’s member ZDH on “Dual vocational education and training – the key to a competitive Europe” in Berlin on 28-29 January. He focused on the advantages of VET. He emphasised the importance of diversity of VET systems in the EU27 and stressed that the very concept of practice-oriented alternating systems is more important than the actual forms it takes. Moreover, he insisted on the need to increase the attractiveness and quality of VET and create a parity of esteem with higher education. The recognition and validation of alternating training systems are crucial factors, said Mr Toifl, who also highlighted the role of education, lifelong learning and VET as drivers of the Lisbon strategy. Finally, Mr Toifl called for more action to reduce school drop out as a fundamental base for successful VET, and for more investments in human resources and continuous education. This needs a joint effort by employers, employees and the public sector, he concluded.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Helen Hoffmann](#)

Gender stereotypes: UEAPME gives employers’ view

The Slovenian Presidency organised a conference on “Elimination of Gender Stereotypes: Mission (Im)possible?” in Brdo on 30 January. The event addressed possible ways to eradicate traditional gender roles and stereotypes, especially in areas such as education, training and labour markets. Social Policy Adviser Helen Hoffmann spoke on the employers’ point of view on gender inequality during adulthood. She recalled the work of the European Social Partners on

the issue, notably the Framework of Action on Gender Equality in 2005 and the two follow-up reports since. She stressed that from a company perspective several factors must be considered, such as demographic change, the lack of skilled workers, and the need to increase women's participation in the labour market. A gender mix must be ensured in male or female dominated sectors, said Ms Hoffmann, who concluded by showcasing some initiatives taken by crafts and SMEs to counteract different forms of segregation of women in the labour market.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Helen Hoffmann](#)

UEAPME replies to EC on protecting healthcare workers

UEAPME recently replied to an EC consultation of the European Social Partners on protecting healthcare workers from blood-borne infections due to needlestick injuries. UEAPME said that it clearly considers the health and safety of all workers as crucial, including healthcare workers, for whom the protection from biological agents is essential. However, UEAPME believes that the current legislative instruments are sufficient and need not be amended, although Member States must make more efforts to effectively apply national legislation transposing EU law in this field. A more widespread use of syringes and needles with safety devices should also be aimed for, as well as increased training on the safe use and disposal of the instruments. Finally, UEAPME strongly supported initiatives such as the exchange of best practice within the sectoral social dialogue.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

FORWARD PLANNING

KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- EC hearing on the "Small Business Act" (Brussels, 06/02, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- Launch of the new Enterprise Europe Network (Brussels, 06-07/02, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- European conference on fashion and innovation (Milan, 15/02, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- Conference on Migrant Entrepreneurship – Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship (Brussels, 05/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- European Commission conference on the European Private Company (Brussels, 10/03, contact [Maria Cimaglia](#))

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