

# UEAPME Newsflash

## University/Business Forum: Toifl outlines SME needs

President Georg Toifl spoke on 28 February at the first [European University/Business Forum](#) in Brussels. Faced with globalisation, rapid changes in technology and the lack of qualified staff, SMEs needed to benefit from closer ties with academia and vice versa, said Mr Toifl, who singled out management and innovation as the most promising areas for collaboration. On management, Mr Toifl stressed the need for a “reality check”: the offer of SME-specific management curricula by European universities was still very limited and the number of graduates working in SMEs needed to be increased, not to mention the necessity to build bridges between the two realities for instance through stages and internships. On innovation, Mr Toifl touched upon several aspects, such as the need to fully exploit SMEs’ innovative potential, a point that was echoed by University representatives; the success of SME-gearred, small-scale projects; the need to widen the concept of R&D to include non-codified innovation used by crafts and SMEs; the importance of regional clusters for technology transfers and cooperation.

➤ Contact: [Helen Hoffmann](#)

## Small Business Act: UEAPME writes to COMP Ministers

The Competitiveness Council met in Brussels on 25 February. The Small Business Act for Europe was among the items on the agenda. The [provisional conclusions](#) of the meeting were welcomed by UEAPME, which wrote a letter to the participating Ministers welcoming the Council’s support for a Small Business Act “setting out an integrated policy approach across the SME life cycle, underpinned by a strong evidence base and in line with better regulation and the Think Small First principle”. The Council conclusions also stressed that “in order to enable them to operate effectively in the internal market and internationally, SMEs need rules that are clear, simple and consistent”, which is in line with the requests made by UEAPME in the past months. In the [letter](#) sent by UEAPME, Secretary General Andrea Benassi urged the EU27 to give SMEs all the support they “need and deserve” in the run-up to the EC proposals on the SBA due for adoption in June.

➤ Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## Company law, accounting, auditing: positive vote at EP

The EP’s Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, meeting in Brussels on 26 February, adopted almost unanimously an amended opinion initially drafted by Ieke van den Burg MEP (PES, NL) on simplification in the areas of company law, accounting and auditing. UEAPME welcomed the vote, which redresses some key shortcomings in the initial EC proposal and brings it more in line with the [position](#) taken by the organisation and its members in the last months. First of all, the Committee backed the application of the “once only” principle in the field of accounting, so that enterprises will not have to provide the same information more than once or to more than one recipient. Secondly, MEPs backed “detailed, neutral and in-depth” impact assessments, especially targeting medium, small and micro enterprises. Finally, the EP stressed that simplification must be balanced against the needs of all stakeholders in order not to erode their legal rights.

➤ Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## EC expert group on e-invoicing holds kick-off meeting

The European Commission’s newly set up “Expert group on e-invoicing” met in Brussels for the first time on 26 February. The group aims at establishing the legal and technical requirements for an EU-wide framework for the electronic transfer of billing and payment information between business partners, which should be established by 2009 and become one of the cornerstones of a successful Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). It is made up of representatives from the Commission, the public sector, payment service providers, standardisation organisations and business organisations. UEAPME is represented by Mr Risto Suominen, Chairman of the Working Group on SME Finance, who stressed at the meeting the importance of e-invoicing as a cost-cutting measure capable of reducing invoicing-related charges by up to 90% according to recent surveys.

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

## HLG on admin burdens discusses “fast track” actions

The European Commission’s “High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens” met in Brussels on 26 February. Ms Annika Fritsch, a specialist in taxes and corporate law and coordinator of Better Regulation at UEAPME’s Swedish member Företagarna, is one of the appointed members of this new body, which during its second meeting discussed a number of possible “fast track” actions to quickly reduce administrative burdens. The HLG could not submit a final assessment of these actions due to the lack of quantitative data, but called on all parties involved in the legislative process to start using the already existing procedures and tools to reduce administrative burdens.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## SMEs respond to EC consultation on active inclusion

UEAPME recently replied to the European Commission’s second-stage consultation on the promotion of the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market. UEAPME underlined that employment remains the main safeguard against social exclusion, but job creation requires a business friendly environment as a precondition. However,

while the first role of a company is to act economically, SMEs are also well recognised social actors deeply rooted in the local community. UEAPME therefore regretted that the role of crafts and micro enterprises in integrating disadvantaged people was overlooked by the EC in its communication. On the positive side, UEAPME backed the three pillars of the EC's "holistic" approach (better access to quality services, minimum income schemes and link to the labour market) and the reinforcement of the Open Method of Coordination at EU level. It also concurred with the EC on the urgent necessity to review the incentives and disincentives from tax and benefit systems.

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

## Environment news: French Presidency, Waste Directive

Senior Advisor Cristina Marongiu recently met representatives of the French Presidency to discuss priorities in the sector, which will include biodiversity, environmental risks prevention, pollution and climate change, a topic that will remain hot in the months to come. This week, UEAPME also supported the calls by its members in the construction sector against the inclusion of arbitrary targets for recycling in the run-up to the EP discussions on the Waste Framework Directive. More information on this important topic will follow in the next issues.

➤ Contact: [Cristina Marongiu](#)

## From Andrea Benassi's agenda: SME Intergroup, Figel

Secretary General Andrea Benassi met this week with two leading MEPs as well as with Mr Jan Figel, EU Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth.

**27-28/02:** Mr Benassi met MEPs **Marianne Thyssen** and **Dominique Vlasto**, members of the Parliament's SME Intergroup. In both meetings, the forthcoming Small Business Act took centre stage, with MEPs' expectations on the topic matching those of UEAPME. Following a recent meeting with **Othmar Karas** MEP, President of the Intergroup, UEAPME and the SME Intergroup are exploring concrete ways to collaborate on this crucial issue for European crafts and small businesses.

**27/02:** the meeting with Commissioner **Jan Figel** also touched upon the Small Business Act, before moving on to other topics such as the European Institute of Technology (EIT), which according to UEAPME must include a representative of crafts and SMEs in its Governing Board. Mr Figel and Mr Benassi also discussed the need for further actions to foster apprentices' mobility and to promote a culture of entrepreneurship in Europe, starting from secondary school books and in collaboration with representative organisations such as UEAPME and Academy Avignon.

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

## FORWARD PLANNING

### KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- [Workshop: "Is Europe supporting its companies to export?"](#) (Brussels, 04/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- [High Level Meeting of the European Alliance for CSR](#) (Brussels, 04/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- [Conference on Migrant Entrepreneurship – Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship](#) (Brussels, 05/03, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- [PIN-SME Experts Forum at CeBIT](#) (Hannover, 05/03, contact [Sebastiano Toffaletti](#))
- [European Commission conference on the European Private Company](#) (Brussels, 10/03, contact [Maria Cimaglia](#))
- [European Social Partners seminar on restructuring](#) (Vienna, 10-11/03, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- [Tripartite Summit for Growth and Jobs](#) (Brussels, 13/03, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- [Conference on "The reduction of administrative burdens on SMEs"](#) (Bled, 17/04, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))

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