

UEAPME Newsflash

Troika tackles adult learning, creativity and innovation

Secretary General Andrea Benassi spoke on 21 May at the "Education Troika" organised by the Slovenian Presidency, which focused on the Council conclusions on promoting creativity and innovation through education and training as well as on adult learning. On the first point, Mr Benassi stressed that innovation is a key driver of change for SMEs, for which it is an ongoing process rather than a series of linear, high-tech, research-driven inventions. Therefore, innovation must be meant in a broader sense, said Mr Benassi, who welcomed the idea of a European Year of Creativity and Innovation in Education and Training. Innovation and creativity, he said, should be promoted all along the life of a company. On adult learning, Mr Benassi called for actions to tackle the skills mismatch on the labour market and the lack of qualified workforce. However, adult learning cannot solve all problems, and all measures must be consistent with the EU lifelong learning action programme and Education and Training 2010 action plan, he concluded.

➤ Contact: [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

State aid: guarantees must be included in the GBER

The European Commission adopted on 20 May an updated "Notice on State aid in form of guarantees". The new text sets out a realistic and practical method to calculate the aid component of guarantees, said UEAPME, which welcomed the introduction of a "safe harbour grid" to this end. The organisation was also pleased by the inclusion of provisions for start-ups and of simplified, "single premium" rules for low-amount guarantees typically used by SMEs. UEAPME warned, however, that none of the measures introduced will bring about concrete improvements for SMEs unless guarantees are included in the scope of the "General Block Exemption Regulation" due to be adopted in the coming months in the framework of the Small Business Act. Member States might otherwise decide to use other, less efficient instruments to avoid notifications to the EC, which would make guarantees unattractive and ultimately useless for SMEs.

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

EP sends worrying message on accounts simplification

The European Parliament's plenary adopted on 21 May an [own-initiative report](#) by Klaus Lehne MEP on a simplified business environment for companies in the areas of company law, accounting and auditing. MEPs voted in favour of exempting micro-companies from the 4th Company Law Directive that serves as the harmonised basis for establishing and publishing business accounts. UEAPME had repeatedly called against such an exclusion, which will not, as MEPs claimed, reduce red tape and costs. On the contrary, micro-enterprises will still need financial information for other important purposes, for instance in their relations with banks and suppliers, company transfers, business partnerships and so on. Exempting micro-enterprises from publishing accounts will therefore increase rather than reduce administrative burdens. The vote took place despite the negative views of a sizeable part of the House, including EPP-ED Vice President Marianne Thyssen MEP, who abstained from voting and later made a strong declaration supporting SMEs' views.

➤ Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

Accountants, auditors discuss future of their profession

UEAPME's associate member EFAA, the European Federation of Accountants and Auditors for SMEs, organised its annual conference on "SMEs and SMPs: is the traditional role of the profession challenged?" in Copenhagen on 22 May. Enterprise Policy Director Luc Hendrickx spoke on the expectations of SME clients towards small and medium-sized practitioners (SMPs). Four out of five SMEs rely on different forms of external advice, he stressed, mostly on fiscal issues, legal matters and finance-related topics. Good reputation, trustworthiness and competence play a key role in the choice of accountants and bookkeepers, which generally score well on client satisfaction. SME owners expect from external service providers not only advice on their accounts, but also on commercial and strategic decisions. Accountants and auditors should hence broaden their offer of services, concluded Mr Hendrickx, in order to better suit SMEs' needs.

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

VET and continuous training: EESC considers SME needs

Social Affairs Adviser Helen Hoffmann participated on 19 May in a workshop organised by the SME, Crafts and Professions Group of the EESC. Chaired by Claudio Cappellini, spokesperson of the Group, the event discussed SME needs in terms of VET and continuous training. Speakers included EESC member and Scottish businessman Brendan Burns, who called for qualifications and skills in Europe to be more driven by business needs and to be easily recognisable. Ms Hoffmann recalled the activities of the European Social Partners targeted at identifying and anticipating competences and qualification needs, notably through the Joint Labour Market Analysis in 2007. She also stressed the need for public support to finance lifelong learning and continuous training. Based on the workshop a report is to be published later this year by the EESC group to feed proposals to CEDEFOP, the European Centre for Vocational Training.

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

EPC workshop fosters progress on direct debit features

Economic and Fiscal Policy Director Gerhard Huemer participated on 19 May to a workshop on direct debit organised by the European Payments Council, a decision-making and coordination body of the European banking industry. Some progress was made on the issue: according to a new proposal put on the table on Monday, in the B2B scheme no refunds will be possible after the transaction, but a pre-notification period will allow clients to stop transfers in advance.

This is in line with SME requests, said Mr Huemer. Other issues discussed included remittance information, on which questions remain regarding the role of various actors in the implementation phase, and the difficulties in finding common ground among significantly diverse national starting points as regards simplicity versus security.

➤ Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Delegation of Japanese SME owners visits UEAPME

A delegation of the Association of Japanese Small Business Entrepreneurs (ASBE), which covers more than 40.000 SME owners-managers, visited UEAPME on 19 May. The aim of the visit was to exchange views on the latest developments in public policy for SMEs and to discuss in detail the European Charter for Small Enterprises, which ASBE would like to use as a model for a similar Japanese text. Enterprise Policy Director Luc Hendrickx explained to the delegates the various aspects of the Charter and its main policy messages, also in the light of the upcoming "Small Business Act". The challenges for SMEs operating in city centres were also among the other issues discussed, with representatives from both sides agreeing that despite the different regulatory frameworks, SMEs from both sides are facing similar pressures in resisting their larger, multinational counterparts.

➤ Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

SME FIT: successful events in Romania and Bulgaria

CNIPMMR, the National Council of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises for Romania and a beneficiary partner of the EU-funded SME FIT II project, hosted its [first successful event](#) in Bucharest on 12 May 2008. About 50 entrepreneurs came to learn more about European gender equality issues presented by FEM as well as the advantages and challenges for female entrepreneurs in Europe, presented by project partner APID. On 15-16 May 2008, NCSC, the National Chamber of Skilled Crafts of Bulgaria, invited members to [Varna](#). On the first day, access to EU funds was presented by ZRP and WKÖ. On the second day, UNIZO shared its experience in international project management. In both cases, UEAPME beneficiary partners received positive feedback from participants.

➤ [Visit the project website](#) or contact [Iris Marlovits](#)

From Andrea Benassi's agenda: Plassmann, Le Bail

Secretary General Andrea Benassi participated this week to the Education Troika (*see above*). He also met his counterpart at CEEP and the EC's SME Envoy.

19/05: Mr Benassi met **Rainer Plassmann**, Secretary General of fellow European Social Partner CEEP, to discuss the structure of the European Social Dialogue.

22/05: Mr Benassi met **Françoise Le Bail**, SME Envoy and Deputy Director General at the EC's DG Enterprise, to exchange views on the features of the upcoming Small Business Act for Europe. Mr Benassi insisted once again, after the Education Troika, on the need to broaden the EU institutions' understanding of innovation to include non-codified, learning-by-doing processes typical of SMEs. He also called on the EC to foresee longer consultation periods (12 weeks) before its proposals are published.

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

FORWARD PLANNING

KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- [EC DG COMP Round Table on Environmental Protection and Climate Change](#) (27/05, contact [Gerhard Huemer](#))
- [Conference on the European Charter for Small Enterprises](#) (Bled, Slovenia, 03-04/06, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- "Super Market Access Committee" (Brussels, 04/06, contact [Rosa Solanes](#))
- Diversity - Non discrimination conference (Belfast, 05-06/06, contact [Helen Hoffmann](#))
- [European Parliament's Citizens' Agora on climate change](#) (Brussels, 12-13/06, contact [Cristina Marongiu](#))
- EESC workshop "Implementing energy efficiency policies in the European Union: new opportunities and challenges for SMEs" (Brussels, 16/06)
- EU Social Partners closing conference on restructuring (Brussels, 19-20/06, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- "Cutting red tape for Europe" conference (Brussels, 20/06, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- [CGPME conference on the Small Business Act for Europe: Which SME policy for the French Presidency of the EU?](#) (Brussels, 23/06)

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