



PRESS RELEASE

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Trade unions and SMEs cooperate on common economic and social concerns

The current economic and employment crisis calls for an increased partnership between SMEs and trade unions by exploring various forms of social dialogue not only at company level, but also at local, regional, sectoral, national and European level. A joint project initiated by ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation, and UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation aimed at identifying common economic and social concerns between trade unions and SMEs. At the closing conference in Brussels today, ETUC and UEAPME presented an expert report (1) containing a detailed analysis of the four topics that were singled out for discussion during the project:

- Regional and local development and its impact on SMEs;
- Management of demographic challenges and the role of training in SMEs;
- Innovation in SMEs and the role of social partners;
- Undeclared work as a factor of unfair competition and the role of the social partners.

"Social dialogue is a fundamental instrument in the fight against the current crisis and in finding solutions to protect both jobs and workers. The involvement of workers and trade unions in the daily life of enterprises – no matter the size – must be an integral part of the European industrial relations system. The situation is very heterogeneous across the EU. We expect, with this project, to contribute to the creation of a climate of trust, dialogue and cooperation in SMEs", said **Maria Helena André**, ETUC Deputy General Secretary.

"A strong support from workers and workers' representatives is crucial for European crafts and small businesses to succeed, all the more so in the present economic situation. The question is therefore not 'if', but 'how' to involve trade unions. This requires first of all a better understanding of the small business reality, since SMEs are very diverse and cannot be treated in the same way and with the same tools as larger companies. Smaller businesses are closer to their workers and conduct a daily informal social dialogue that does not require highly formalised and institutionalised structures. The practice of social dialogue at other levels is therefore becoming essential, be it at local, regional or sectoral level in addition to the national and European dimension. Our joint project has demonstrated that trade unions are increasingly aware of these specificities and that many examples of good practices exist. At the same time, much remains to be done to ensure a better understanding and tangible results in all Member States", said UEAPME Secretary General **Andrea Benassi**.

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(1) Available online at http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/ETUC_UEAPME_SME_Expert_Report_2009.pdf

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