



*"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"*

## **New EU term must deliver on better regulation, demand SMEs**

***General Assembly adopts policy paper for 2010-2014, calls for more efforts on access to finance, late payments, re-qualification***

Brussels, 3 December 2009 – The recently elected European Parliament and the upcoming European Commission must step up dramatically their efforts to improve the regulatory environment in which SMEs operate. This was the message brought forward by the General Assembly of UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, which came to a close yesterday (Wednesday) in Brussels. More than 70 delegates from 20 countries, representing over 12 million SMEs in Europe, gathered to discuss the present economic crisis and the policy agenda for the 2010-2014 term. Participants adopted a comprehensive position paper (1) outlining the main challenges that crafts and SMEs will face in the coming years, putting forward concrete policy proposals and presenting ideas on how to improve the involvement of crafts and SMEs in the EU policymaking process. Better regulation is a clear concern for the next years, stressed delegates, who also called on policymakers to prioritise SMEs' access to finance, tackle late payments and support workers' re-qualification to lift Europe out of the crisis.

*"Despite the trumpeting announcements and the endless discussions on better regulation in Brussels, small entrepreneurs on the ground have not felt any significant improvements in the last years and are still held back by poorly conceived and ill-considered rules. Europe cannot continue to hamper SMEs' potential to foster growth and create quality jobs, especially not at this stage",* said President **Georg Toifl**. *"We expect a change of pace from the new Parliament and from the incoming Commission in this respect, and we shall take them to task if they fail to change the status quo."*

A first positive sign came last week when President Barroso announced the portfolios of the incoming Commission, continued Mr Toifl. In fact, the better regulation agenda will be under the direct remit of the Commission's Secretariat General from next year on. *"President Barroso has taken first-hand responsibility for the better regulation portfolio. This is a very positive development for crafts and SMEs and a clear signal of his political intention to raise the level of the debate. The President's choice is also a wake-up call to all the Commission's directorates, some of which seem completely oblivious of the potential burden of their proposals on businesses in general and SMEs in particular",* commented President Toifl.

In the short term, leading Europe out of the current economic crisis remains the main concern for craft and SME representatives. The consensus at the General Assembly was that it is too early to withdraw the public support measures put in place in the last months, given the frail status of Europe's economy and the likely rise of unemployment levels in the near future. However, recovery programmes must support structural reforms and strengthen future growth rather than protect uncompetitive structures and overcapacities, stressed participants, who called for more focus in recovery programmes on workers' requalification to ensure their employability in the economic sectors likely to thrive in the future.

Access to finance and late payments were singled out once more as particularly worrying dossiers. *"An increasing number of SMEs are experiencing difficulties in getting access to finance and report plans to reduce investments and employment due to financial restrictions. This is compounded by longer payment terms that are not adequately tackled, neither by the existing legislation nor by the proposed new rules. Much remains to be done on both counts",* continued Mr Toifl.

*"These are not easy times for European small businesses. Access to finance is difficult, private demand is likely to decrease due to the high unemployment levels, red tape is still an obstacle and business confidence is well below the levels registered only two years ago. Against this background, the last thing SMEs need at this stage is more half-hearted promises and endless speeches from politicians. It is now time for action",* concluded Mr Toifl.

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(1) [http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/091203\\_UEAPME-2014\\_final.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/091203_UEAPME-2014_final.pdf)

**EDITORS' NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 84 member organisation covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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