



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

UEAPME General Assembly urges policymakers to invest in “Europe’s main asset”

Access to finance, 2014-2020 programmes, SBA governance key issues; Almgren first woman at helm of European SME association

Brussels, 29 November 2011 – Policymakers at EU and national level must invest in craft and SMEs as the main asset that will allow Europe to weather the current economic and financial crisis. This was the message brought forward by the General Assembly of UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation, which took place in Brussels yesterday (Monday). Delegates from all over Europe singled out access to finance as a concern, stressing the need to secure tailored financial instruments for the different kinds of SMEs operating in the EU. Moreover, they called for stricter relations between the recently established Network of national SME Envoys and business organisations, both at EU and national level. The General Assembly also elected Gunilla Almgren as UEAPME President until the end of 2012, bringing for the first time a woman at the helm of the organisation.

An entrepreneur in the sanitary fittings industry, Gunilla Almgren served as First Vice-President of the Board at Företagarna, the Swedish Federation of Private Enterprises. She sits in the Board of several Swedish business-related organisations and companies. At UEAPME, she served until today as Policy Vice President for Sustainable Development and as Board Spokesperson. Her election marks the first appointment of a woman as President of a European SME association.

“The message from our General Assembly was very clear: SMEs across Europe are very heterogeneous, ranging from traditional, family-run businesses to high-tech and fast growing enterprises and start-ups. These companies are the asset that will allow Europe to leave the current economic and financial crisis behind. Therefore, a broad range of tailored financial programmes and instruments for these companies is needed. The various programmes and financial instruments for 2014-2020 to be presented by the Commission later this week will be crucial in this respect. They should provide support for classic SME loans, for ‘mezzanine finance’ tools, for innovation and for high tech companies”, said Ms Almgren.

Members also raised the question of the impact of the new “Basel III” rules on SMEs. While supporting the need to increase the resilience of the financial system, they stressed that enterprise financing did not cause or worsen the crisis. Therefore, a more stringent regulation cannot be made at the expense of SME finance, warned participants.

A closer dialogue with the recently created network of national SME Envoys is also needed, pointed out our members. At EU level, this could take the form of a renewed “economic dialogue” involving the rotating EU Presidencies, the European Commission, the network of national SME Envoys and the main business organisations. *“This body should meet regularly and at the highest political level. Moreover, stronger ties between national SME associations and national SME Envoys must be created to secure the SBA implementation on the ground”,* said Secretary General Andrea Benassi.

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EDITORS’ NOTES: UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 80 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer, Tel. +32 (0)496 520 329, Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com