



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

Cohesion policy for 2014-2020 must keep a clear focus on SMEs

UEAPME calls for “partnership principle” to be applied at all levels, SME-dedicated budget to be kept; insists on role of intermediary organisations

Brussels, 15 March 2012 – The new cohesion policy for 2014-2020 must closely associate economic and social partners in programming at all levels, including in the identification of priorities, and secure “ring-fenced” budget quotas for SMEs’ competitiveness and innovation-related activities, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation. The association published today a comprehensive position paper with specific, article by article comments on all the various cohesion funds as well as a set of overarching priorities for SMEs (1). UEAPME highlighted the key role played by intermediary organisations, calling for specific guidance and support measures for SMEs and stressing the need for a real “multilevel governance” of cohesion policy. This exercise should also be extended to the choice of priorities at regional level, warned the organisation.

Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** offered the following comments:

“European crafts and SMEs are deeply rooted in their regions. The vast majority operates at local level, providing a vast array of products and services to the community. SMEs operating cross-border still retain a local dimension when they choose their staff and service providers. When larger industries are present, SMEs are often irreplaceable partners and dependable subcontractors. In least favoured areas and declining industrial regions, SMEs are frequently the only local source of private employment and a key player in ensuring social cohesion. All crafts and SMEs concur to their region’s economic dynamism and innovation. They create growth and employment, even in this time of crisis. Thankfully, the new cohesion policy for 2014-2020 rightly starts from this assumption. If the suggestions we are presenting today are taken on board, we may soon witness a modern cohesion policy in line the needs, expectations and potential of European SMEs.”

“The concept of ‘multilevel governance’ must become a reality at all levels and must include economic and social partners. Local and regional authorities are increasingly responsible for the creation of a regulatory environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship. The most successful so far have been those capable of acting in partnership with intermediary business organisations and willing to accompany all enterprises, including the smallest, in their efforts to keep and increase competitiveness. All regions should play this card. Those that do already fare better in economic terms and implement better EU rules and programmes. On the contrary, those that do not engage in dialogue and choose a top-down approach end up with a framework that is not receptive to the needs of local small businesses. Multilevel governance should also be applied when choosing how to put in place the 11 priorities identified by the European Commission at regional level. Local authorities and economic and social partners are the best placed to make this selection.”

“Last but not least, we believe that ‘ring-fenced’ budget quotas for SMEs’ competitiveness and for innovation-related activities must be kept in place. The original proposal by the Commission to devote 30% of available funds to the development of SMEs, micro, and craft enterprises made perfect sense and must not be watered down. We hear more and more political declarations on the critical role of SMEs for Europe’s recovery and growth. The new cohesion policy is a perfect chance to transform this political will into practice.”

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(1) The position paper is available at http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/Structural_Funds_2014-2020_pp_1502_2012_v2.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 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/>

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