



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Policymakers urged to "get 2014-2020 programmes right" at 2nd SME Convention

More than 350 participants gather in Brussels; focus on "Horizon 2020", "COSME" and future cohesion policy

Brussels, 1 October 2012 – The 2014-2020 policies and programmes recently unveiled by the European Commission must be further tweaked to finally reach SMEs on the ground. This was the message brought forward by UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, at the second "SME Convention" that took place in Brussels today (Monday). The event, which was organised by UEAPME with the support of the European Commission, gathered more than 350 participants from national SME organisations, EU institutions and Member States to discuss the proposals for the 2014-2020 programming period on cohesion policy, on the European Social Fund, on "Horizon 2020" and on the "COSME" programme. The convention was opened by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, European Commissioner for Research. It also featured high level speakers from the European Commission, the Parliament, the EESC, the EIF and the Cyprus, Irish and Lithuanian Presidencies of the EU.

"When we organised our first SME Convention in 2009, Europe was in the very middle of the economic crisis. It was a moment of urgency, and SMEs were facing a sharp decline in their confidence levels. Today, our confidence levels are slightly higher, but the sense of urgency remains", said President **Gunilla Almgren** at the event. *"This is due mainly to two factors: first of all, the economic situation is still far from being rosy, with Europe on the brink of a new recession. Secondly, these weeks are crucial for the future of research and innovation, cohesion policy and SMEs' competitiveness in the EU. The next programmes will run until the end of this decade, so we must get them right as of now."*

On the "**Horizon 2020**" research and innovation programme, Ms Almgren stressed the importance of a dedicated budget of 15% of the budget for its "SME Instrument". A single management body for the implementation of the "SME instrument" "in all the different areas identified by Horizon 2020 is also needed. Moreover, the current European definition of SME must be kept when identifying possible beneficiaries, stressed Ms Almgren, warning against the attempts recently made to change or widen these criteria. Last but not least, the current thresholds to finance loan guarantees should be abolished.

When it comes to the "**COSME**" programme on SMEs' competitiveness, it must be used to monitor the application of the Small Business Act principles in all policies and programmes, explained President Almgren. The programme should be built upon dialogue and partnership with SME organisations, bring about a revision of the Enterprise Europe Network and, as it is the case for "Horizon 2020", the current limit to loan guarantees of up to EUR 150.000 must be deleted.

On the 2014-2020 **cohesion policy**, Ms Almgren stressed the importance of fully involving economic and social partners in the definition of the priorities, and called for "ring-fenced" budget quotas for SMEs' competitiveness and for innovation-related activities to be kept in place. The enhanced possibility to use structural funds to support the creation of financial instruments is a step forward that deserves further efforts and perhaps even an anticipated use before 2014, she added.

"The message that I take home from today's conference is that there really is a need to act now to ensure that these programmes can actually make a difference on the daily life of our small entrepreneurs. UEAPME will work closely with the EU institutions so that these policies will not only look good on paper, but bring about change on the ground. I will make sure that our message is heard, starting from the 'SME Assembly' in Cyprus next month", concluded Ms Almgren.

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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/>

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