



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

## Economic crisis, future programmes: SMEs hand over 'to do list' to VP Tajani

Brussels, 2 October 2012 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, has unveiled today at the European Parliament a "to do list" of actions for the European Union and for Member States to support the real economy and avoid a dangerous downturn in the next months (1). The list was presented by Secretary General Andrea Benassi at a press conference with Antonio Tajani, Vice President of the European Commission responsible for industry and entrepreneurship, and Jürgen Creutzmann MEP, rapporteur at the European Parliament for the "COSME" programme. As far as the EU is concerned, UEAPME asks for the creation of an "SME Economic Dialogue", a policy platform at the highest level to discuss all SME-related policies and dossiers on the table. Mr Benassi also presented our priorities for the 2014-2020 programmes currently under discussion. For Member States, our "to do list" includes labour market reforms, better access to finance for SMEs, support measures for innovation, "green" investments and the use of standards and, last but not least, a cut in red tape.

*"The European Union and its SMEs are at a crossroads. Faced with a long downturn and uncertainty about the future, SMEs' confidence and performance in the last months have been suffering. Nobody can deny that the EU and Member States have put together a substantial policy response, but it is not enough. The efforts must now be channelled to meet the needs and expectations of SMEs. Our 'to do list' spells exactly what we want and from whom",* said Mr Benassi.

At EU level, the first item on the list is the creation of an "**SME Economic Dialogue**", a platform for exchange at the highest level on all SME-related policies and dossiers on the table. This body should meet regularly in order to ensure consistency between its own outcomes and those of the Competitiveness Council and of the European Parliament's procedures. *"This group would guarantee the application of the 'Think Small First' principle from the outset to all policy initiatives taken at EU level and concerning SMEs. It would also greatly facilitate the quest for better regulation in the EU",* explained Mr Benassi, who requested and earned the support of Vice President Tajani on this point. Our list also contains a series of specific requests on the **2014-2020 programmes** on cohesion policy, innovation and SMEs' competitiveness.

At Member State level, governments must implement at home the policies they have agreed in "Brussels", if necessary against the resistance of vested interests. Moreover, they must come up with tailored solutions for the specific situation and needs of their economies, of their labour markets and of their SMEs, stressed Mr Benassi. In particular:

- SMEs must be enabled to create jobs. Member States should put in place **labour market reforms** to set growth and job creation in motion. Work-based learning and apprenticeships should also be further promoted.
- SMEs need **access to finance**. This means a full implementation of the late payments directive, and the availability of financial instruments capable of answering to the needs of all small and medium-sized enterprises.
- SMEs need adequate **support services** to maximise their innovation potential, to meet the challenge of a resource-efficient economy and more sustainable production methods, and to use the existing standards.
- Member States should cut **red tape** further. When transposing EU directives, they must avoid "gold plating". When legislating on their own, they must act only if necessary and always with the smaller entities in mind.

*"Our list of measures must be given absolute priority in the weeks and months ahead, as they have the potential to really make a difference to the daily business of SMEs. We urge policymakers at all levels to start acting as of today. This is really a 'make or break' moment to support the real economy and avoid a new, perilous downturn",* concluded Mr Benassi.

\*\*\*\* END \*\*\*\*

(1) Available at [http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/121001\\_SME\\_to\\_do\\_list.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/121001_SME_to_do_list.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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