



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

## **SME Assembly: progress made is not enough, warns UEAPME**

Brussels, 15 November 2012 – The best way to help Europe's SMEs grow is to remove all the remaining obstacles in their path, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation. Speaking today at the "SME Assembly" organised in Nicosia by the Cyprus EU Presidency and the European Commission, President Gunilla Almgren stressed the need for an "enabling environment" for small companies to thrive and create jobs. Some of the most pressing issues are labour market reforms, better access to finance for SMEs including a full and correct implementation of the late payments directive, support measures for innovation, "green" investments and the use of standards as well as a cut in red tape, she said. As far as the EU is concerned, Ms Almgren warned about the importance of the 2014-2020 programmes and reinstated our call 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 (1). Recalling the results of our last "Think Small Test" and "SBA Implementation Scoreboard", which recorded some progress across all the ten surveyed policy areas related to the Small Business Act, Ms Almgren urged Member States to continue working to ensure that all the commitments made in 2008 become a reality (2).

President Almgren offered the following comments to the audience of the SME Assembly:

*"The European Charter for Small Enterprises, which dates back to 2000, clearly states that the best possible environment must be created for SMEs. After more than ten years, progress has been sketchy to say the least, and the very need for such an environment seems to be put into question again. As far as we are concerned, there are no doubts: politicians do not create jobs, enterprises do. The role of policymakers is to ensure that we can create jobs in the best possible way. What enterprises need the most is respect and support from public authorities for the work they do, even and especially in this time of crisis. We have seen substantial efforts from EU and national policymakers, but more must be done."*

*"At EU level, the 2014-2020 policies and programmes currently under discussion lay the foundation for all the possible support measures for our enterprises and organisations. They will largely determine the future of research and innovation, cohesion policy and SMEs' competitiveness in the EU. These programmes will run until the end of this decade, so we must get them right as of now and further tweak them to reach all SMEs on the ground. Also at EU level, we need a platform to discuss at the highest level all SME-related policies and dossiers on the table. We hope that our call for an 'SME Economic Dialogue' will not fall on deaf ears. This group would guarantee the application of the 'Think Small First' principle from the outset. It would also greatly facilitate better consultation of SME stakeholders and better regulation in the EU."*

*"At national level, we need labour market reforms, and we need to find people with the right skills and qualification. Work-based learning and apprenticeships are crucial in this respect, have proven their worth and should be promoted more. We need access to finance. This means the full and correct implementation of the late payments directive, and the availability of financial instruments answering to the needs of all SMEs. We need support services: on innovation, on 'green' investments, on the use of standards and for our intermediary organisations. We need less red tape. And we need all this now."*

*"Thankfully, we are witnessing some first signs of progress. For instance, according to our latest survey on the implementation of the Small Business Act, policymakers are now acting on the commitments they made in 2008. Respect for the 'Think Small First' principle seems to be more widespread, and we have recorded improvements in all the ten policy areas linked to the Small Business Act that we review. However, progress is not yet even across countries and across policies. While we are on the right path, we are far from the end of the journey."*

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

(1) For a full list of SME priorities for the EU and for Member States, see [http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/121001\\_SME\\_to\\_do\\_list.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/121001_SME_to_do_list.pdf)

(2) The full survey results and individual country sheets can be found at <http://www.ueapme.com/spjp.php?rubrique121>

**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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