



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

UEAPME welcomes prioritisation of SMEs in future regional development policy

EU Regulations strengthen SME participation and involvement in structural funds, now Member States have to deliver

Brussels 11th July 2013. UEAPME welcomed the outcome of the main part of the Trilogue negotiation on the Structural Funds regulations, which was approved by the European Parliament yesterday. Support for SMEs of all sizes has been put at the centre of all programmes and it is now up to the Member States and regions to use these opportunities in the interest of micro enterprises, crafts and SMEs. This needs the involvement of SME organisations in the design of the operational programmes, which should focus on SME support services, innovation and first of all on SME finance, reminds UEAPME President Almgren in her first reaction.

The vote by the Regional Policy on Structural Funds paves the way for the support of SMEs, including micro and craft enterprises, SME are at the focus of the economic and social development of all regions. Still open are the negotiations on simplification measures and payment as well as about macro-economic conditionality and the performance reserve, proposed by the Commission, supported by the Council, but denied by the Parliament.

UEAPME especially welcomes that many Member States have already involved SME organisations in the development operational programmes. At the same time old habits still persist in other Member States. That is why **Gunilla Almgren**, UEAPME President, reminds national and local authorities in the countries concerned to cooperate better with the organisations representing SMEs. *"Don't make the mistake to limit your SME support to purely rhetoric statements. Regions will only succeed in strengthening their economic base, if they use the funds available to support innovation, competitiveness and access to finance for SMEs in their regions"* insisted Ms. Almgren. Therefore, Member States and regional authorities should base their policy and programmes on four basic criteria: 1.) implementation of the Small business Act and the Think Small First principles, 2) involvement of organisations representing SMEs and Crafts in the decision making process at all levels. 3) using intermediary organisation as advisers and support services provider and 4) simplified administrative, financial and audit procedures, including a system of dispute resolution.

Finally, UEAPME will promote to all regions to use the new possibilities of all Structural Funds to support financial instruments for SMEs, especially loan guarantees and the securitisation of SME loan portfolios of banks to improve their capacity to lend additional money to SMEs. In this context, UEAPME President Almgren supported at the meeting of the European Council the new initiative of the European Commission on the European Investment Bank to blend money from the Regional Development Fund with money the Commission Programmes COSME and Horizon 2020 to create an impactful instrument for the securitisation of SME loan portfolios. Addressing the Head of States at the European Council, Almgren warned that *"It will depend on the national governments and the regional authorities to use this new possibility to support growth and jobs by improving access to finance. What is for sure, such instruments have higher leverage effects and multipliers than building another bridges or golf courses."*

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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 please visit <http://www.ueapme.com/> or follow [@UEAPME](https://twitter.com/UEAPME) on Twitter.

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