



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Social Dialogue needs new approach to tackle new challenges

Better involvement in economic governance, broadening the scope and capacity building are the keys for a new start

Brussels, 5 March 2015 – Today, European Institutions and Social Partners used the European Social Dialogue's 30th anniversary to call for "A new start for Social Dialogue". At the opening session of the High-Level Conference, UEAPME President Gunilla Almgren welcomed the new Commission's initiative as the role Social Dialogue can or should play today differs significantly from 30 years ago. Indeed, now it is about the full involvement of Social Partners in governing the European Monetary Union and the European Semester. Furthermore, joint policy approaches tackling the current crisis and aiming to create growth and jobs have to be broader than just labour markets and macroeconomic aspects. Social Dialogue is a core element of our EU social model and of Social Market Economies, and Social Partners have the joint responsibility to ensure both economic growth and fair distribution of welfare. Finally, Ms Almgren highlighted the problem SMEs have to ensure representativeness and get the needed resources to actively participate in Social Dialogue at national and EU level, and called for support through capacity building activities at both levels.

In her opening statement at the High-Level Conference "A new start for social dialogue", UEAPME President **Gunilla Almgren** agreed that, 30 years after the creation of a European Social Dialogue, it is time to rethink method and content of cooperation between Social Partners and with European Institutions and to adapt it to the new economic and social challenges. Indeed, the European Social Dialogue started in the run-up to the Single Market project and aimed to avoid problems by fixing minimum standards mainly for working conditions considering Social Partners' competences are defined in the EU Treaty. With the crisis, Europe has to tackle new challenges and create jobs and employment. Therefore, Social Partners have to be better involved in the new economic governance structures. *"Governments and European Institutions can only expect support for their reform agendas if they involve social partners in the design and implementation of such policies"*, argued Ms Almgren on UEAPME's request for new approach towards social dialogue.

As regards future content of Social Dialogue, Ms Almgren proposes *"to widen to scope of dialogue at European but also at national level to overcome the difficulties created by focusing mainly on wages and labour market reforms. Social Partners should work together to increase competitiveness with the aim to create additional jobs and growth in the private sector."* This means all aspects of competitiveness such as skills needs, efficient administration and public services, innovation systems and better business environment for SMEs have to become part of the European Semester. It should also be part of Social Partners' agenda to allow the creation of win-win situations for both sides. In this context, Ms Almgren sees the need for a new Small Business Act, which should become the yard stick for an effective SME policy included in country specific recommendations.

Furthermore, Ms Almgren reminded participants that a well-functioning Social Dialogue needs strong and representative partners and explained why it is especially difficult for small enterprises to run representative organisations with sufficient resources and expertise allowing an active participation in Social Dialogue at national and European level. In this regard organisational support and capacity building measures are justified to involve SME employers, who represent 2/3 of private employment in Europe.

Finally, Ms Almgren argued that *"Social Dialogue is a constitutional element of Social Market Economies, but it will only be successful if employers and workers' organisations aim to foster growth, jobs and a fair distribution of welfare."*

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing 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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