



*“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”*

## **EU SME policy has to move from words to actions**

***New UEAPME President Rabmer-Koller presents SME policy priorities and asks for concrete actions***

Brussels, 27<sup>th</sup> January – Ulrike Rabmer-Koller, used her first official visit to Brussels as the new President of the European Crafts and SME Association UEAPME, to discuss future priorities of Europe’s SME policy with EC Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, Commissioner Avramopoulos, Members of Parliament, representatives from Commission services and other stakeholders. Today, at a meeting with international journalists, Rabmer-Koller expressed her satisfaction regarding the inclusion of UEAPME’s demands in the different policy packages presented by the European Commission. However, most of these policies are still at announcement stage and only consist of headlines. It is now time for concrete actions to improve SMEs’ situation in Europe. Rabmer-Koller will intensify the cooperation and improve the dialogue with European decision makers and relevant stakeholders like consumers and trade unions to highlight the importance of SMEs for jobs, growth and investments in Europe. Rabmer-Koller’s priority for her two-year mandate is to improve the conditions for SMEs in Europe by ensuring better regulation and less administrative burden, facilitating access to finance, closing the skills gap and unlocking the potential of digitalisation.

Discussing the future of EU SME policy with EC Vice-President Katainen, Rabmer-Koller showed support for the general policy lines taken by the European Commission with the European Investment Plan, Single Market Strategy, Capital Market Union and other policy packages. However, she asked to speed-up implementation, because *“our SMEs all over Europe do not yet see improvements; on the contrary they complain about further increase of regulatory and administrative burdens”*. She also raised that, by integrating the policies for SMEs in different policy packages, *“Europe may lose coherency in its approach towards SMEs. The 20 Million SMEs need to feel concrete improvements at European and national level. More visibility of SME policies and a concrete Action Plan targeted towards SMEs are needed.”* She also underlined the importance of bank lending for SME finance. Especially small local banks suffer from overregulation. *“It makes no sense for Europe to also apply Basel III to the smaller local banks as it was designed for large multinational ones”*, she argued regarding the need for regulatory changes for those banks most important for SME finance.

The future of EU SME policy was also broached at the SME Intergroup meeting, chaired by MEP Othmar Karas. There, Rabmer-Koller announced that she will initiate dialogues on priority topics for SMEs with other stakeholders. She said *“SMEs need forward looking and pragmatic solutions and I am convinced that open dialogues with all relevant players will lead to better solutions”*.

On better regulation, she emphasised that *“SMEs want to see results now!”* and UEAPME will push for progress in the review of existing regulations, the REFIT exercise. However, she insisted on the respect of the Think Small First principles by all legislators at European and national level. For the latter, she will intensify the cooperation with the SME Envoy network.

As regards the skills-gap, she promoted vocational education and training as effective instrument for the transition from schools to the labour market. *“Experience shows that countries with well-designed apprenticeship programmes have much lower levels of youth unemployment”*. Therefore, she expects more qualification efforts and work-based training for young persons with a lower qualification potential and for support to the companies making those efforts.

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**EDITORS’ NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers’ organisation representing Crafts and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 64 member organisations covering about 12 million enterprises with 45 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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