



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

## **SMEs need more supportive conditions for jobs and growth**

*SMEs are growing again and plan investments; access to finance and skills shortage are barriers*

Brussels, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016 – Today, the European Social Partners met with the European Council and Commission, as well as with the Troika of Head of States at the Tripartite Social Summit, to discuss the refugee crisis, digitalisation and an improved involvement of Social Partners in European Governance. Ulrike Rabmer-Koller, President of UEAPME<sup>(1)</sup>, focused her intervention at the meeting on how the EU policy can help strengthen the economic recovery and support SMEs. So much depends on the business environment, the ability to finance SMEs' investment plans and the availability of skilled workforce. The refugee crisis needs a European solution, one that can also keep Schengen alive. Refugees can contribute to the upswing if they are integrated in the labour market and can start companies. Finally, a stronger involvement of Social Partners in the European Semester process, especially at national level, can contribute to better implement necessary reforms, that is if they have the capacity and resources to actively participate. Therefore, capacity building, especially for SME associations in some Member States, is a precondition to strengthening the social dialogue at national level.

After the Tripartite Social Dialogue meeting, **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller** stated:

*“Our latest EU SME Barometer<sup>(2)</sup> shows that SMEs are overcoming the difficulties of the crisis and for the first time we now see positive figures for employment as well as for investment. Europe should not miss this opportunity and should ensure that the SMEs willing to invest have access to finance. We appreciate the efforts and the flexibility the European Fund for Strategic Investment shows in supporting finance for SMEs, but this may not be enough and UEAPME would like to see better use of Structural Funds or national means to provide SMEs with the needed financial instruments.”*

*“The overarching topic of today’s meeting was the refugee crisis and their integration into the labour market. I said that we need a joint European solution, have to secure our external borders to keep Schengen alive and make all possible efforts to rapidly integrate refugees into the labour market or help them to start a company. Many of our national organisations are already providing support services and many SMEs are willing to offer jobs to refugees.”*

*“Finally, we discussed better involvement of social partners at all levels in economic governance and in the European Semester Process. The involvement of social partners in the design and the implementation of country specific recommendations and the national reform programmes would especially improve the commitment to and the ownership of needed reforms. However, we see that not in all Member States’ social partners’ organisations have the resources and capacity to engage in such processes. Therefore, I am advocating for capacity building programmes to allow those organisations to represent their members in such processes.”*

(1) the European SME Employer Association

(2) The full survey results can be downloaded at [http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/160314\\_Barometer16H1.pdf](http://www.ueapme.com/IMG/pdf/160314_Barometer16H1.pdf)

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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 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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