



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

## **EP vote on self employment and equal opportunities leaves SMEs with mixed feelings**

Brussels, 1 April 2009 – UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, was left with mixed feelings by the report on equal treatment between men and women for self-employed and assisting spouses adopted at the European Parliament's Gender Equality Committee yesterday (Tuesday). While fully supporting equal treatment as a paramount principle, UEAPME was disappointed by the Parliament's choice to make affiliation to social security schemes obligatory for assisting spouses. The organisation also expressed doubts on the provisions on maternity leave approved by the Parliament's committee, which may not cater to the specificities of the self-employed, denounced UEAPME.

Social Affairs Director **Liliane Volozinskis** offered the following comments:

*"Increasing equality between self-employed men and women is crucial to stimulate entrepreneurship, particularly female entrepreneurship and all the more so in this time of economic crisis. Adequate social protection including maternity leave can contribute to achieving this aim. However, yesterday's vote left us with mixed feelings on both issues."*

*"On social protection, the European Commission originally suggested to allow assisting spouses to request the same level of protection enjoyed by self-employed workers. This flexible and reasonable approach is in line with the subsidiarity principle and would give more leeway to national specificities and systems. However, it has been rejected by the Parliament, which is calling for obligatory affiliation to social security schemes instead. This rigid, one-size-fits-all decision could be particularly burdensome for micro enterprises, which will face increasing costs and legal obligations."*

*"On maternity leave, MEPs did not fully consider the consequences of their vote. On the one hand, they rightly stressed the need to come up with rules adapted to the self-employed and based on their needs, especially as far as flexibility and different work requirements are concerned. On the other hand, they decided to retain the link between rules for the self-employed and rules for employed female workers, deleting de facto the very same flexibility that they wanted to achieve. Moreover, the main maternity leave directive is currently under revision and the EC is proposing 6 weeks of compulsory maternity leave after childbirth, which is clearly not adapted at all to the activities of self-employed and assisting spouses. The Parliament's plenary must recognise that keeping the link between the two directives is not the best option on the table and should decide to deal with the two issues separately."*

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

**EDITORS' NOTES:** UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 83 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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