



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

Commissioners’ hearings: SMEs welcome Tajani’s performance

UEAPME pleased with references to SME finance, late payments and SBA, but calls for a broader policy vision for the EC as a whole

Brussels, 19 January 2010 – Commissioner-designate for Entrepreneurship Antonio Tajani delivered an overall solid and convincing performance during his hearing at the European Parliament yesterday (Monday), according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers’ organisation. UEAPME was particularly pleased with Mr Tajani’s commitment to secure access to finance for SMEs as a matter of urgency and with his pledge to improve the “SME Test” and to apply it to all future pieces of legislation. The organisation also applauded Mr Tajani’s call to the European Parliament and to the Council to speed up the implementation of the Small Business Act, as well as by his references to crucial issues such as better regulation, late payments, public procurement and standardisation for SMEs. However, Mr Tajani could have been clearer on how he intends to ensure that small businesses’ needs are fully reflected in all EU policies, including those outside his portfolio. Generally speaking, the hearings coming to a close today have shown some very vague replies and a certain lack of vision that must be corrected by President Barroso in the coming months, starting from the EU 2020 strategy, said UEAPME.

“Commissioner-designate Tajani’s replies ticked all the right boxes when it comes to the policy priorities of his term, starting from access to finance for SMEs”, said Secretary General **Andrea Benassi**. *“He also rightly stressed the importance of the Small Business Act, both in relation to its principles and to the pieces of legislation it contains, and he was in general very knowledgeable about the subjects in his portfolio. However, Mr Tajani did not spell out a clear vision on how he intends to work with his colleagues to ensure that SMEs’ needs are properly taken into account in policy areas outside his portfolio. This was the only slight hiccup in an otherwise encouraging performance”,* he continued.

Mr Tajani singled out **access to finance** for SMEs as his top short-term priority. This is to be welcomed, said Mr Benassi, especially as the Commissioner-designate seemed to be very knowledgeable about all the different financing opportunities and as he stressed the need to ensure that funding reaches SMEs rather than being blocked by intermediaries. The Commissioner-designate’s call on MEPs to swiftly adopt the **late payments** directive was another encouraging signal. Mr Tajani was also very clear on the **Small Business Act**, pledging to “Think Small First” and to assess the impact of all new legislative proposals on SMEs. Positive answers also came on **better regulation**, including a vow to assess all existing programmes to make them more understandable, on **standardisation** for SMEs and on **public procurement**.

On the other side, Mr Tajani was vaguer on how he intends to collaborate with his colleagues on policy dossiers outside his direct remit. European enterprises, and small businesses in particular, are not only affected by enterprise policy, but by a much wider range of decisions on issues such as social policy, taxation, environmental rules, consumer protection and trade policy, stressed Mr Benassi. Perhaps due to the questions asked or to lack of time, Mr Tajani did not elaborate on how to ensure a coherent SME policy across the spectrum of all community legislation, regretted Mr Benassi.

Finally, commenting on the candidates’ hearings so far, Mr Benassi stressed that *“most candidates seemed to lack a broader vision, providing sometimes vague and unconvincing answers, possibly because of the format of the hearings and due to the questions asked by MEPs. President Barroso must now work to put flesh on the bones of the next Commission. He must ensure coherence and define clear political goals for the months and years to come, especially when it comes to SME policy. The EU 2020 strategy currently under discussion is an excellent chance to do so, and we trust that President Barroso will not miss it”,* he concluded.

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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 84 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND FOR COMMENTS ON THE OTHER HEARINGS PLEASE CONTACT:

Francesco Longu, Press and Communications Officer, UEAPME, Tel. +32 (0)496 520 329, Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com