



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

SMEs' jobs potential is the key to solve the employment crisis

UEAPME regrets lack of consideration on the central role of SMEs as job creators as Employment Policy Conference starts

Brussels, 6 September 2012 – With unemployment hovering around double digits and Europe on the brink of a new recession, it is absolutely crucial to better take into account the needs of SMEs as the main source of jobs in the EU. This is the message brought forward by UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation, on the occasion of the "Employment Policy Conference" opening today in Brussels. The so-called "employment package", which was presented by the European Commission in April and is being discussed today and tomorrow, is a step in the right direction as it prioritises the demand side of the labour market and encourages structural reforms. However, UEAPME deplores the lack of attention for the specificities of SMEs and especially of small and micro companies on issues such as labour market regulations, labour costs, flexicurity, initial and continuous vocational training. It also regrets that little attention is given to work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes, which have proved their worth where applied in bridging the gap between education and employment.

Secretary General **Andrea Benassi** commented as follows:

"Our society and our economy cannot work with unemployment rates being over double digits. Faced with the urgency of a social and economic crisis and with its negative repercussions on labour markets, notably high youth unemployment, Europe will not be put back on track without the key contribution of SMEs as the main job creators."

"The new EU employment policy currently under discussion rightly focuses on labour market reforms, which are long overdue in many Member States, as well as on the need to urgently act on the demand side of job creation. However, it is a too general approach and does not take into account the reality of SMEs and the specificities of small and micro companies. A closer look on issues such as labour market regulations, labour costs, flexicurity, initial and continuous vocational training is needed. All these must be better adapted to the reality of small and micro companies with fewer workers, for a truly dynamic and well functioning labour market."

"Another aspect which has been overlooked so far is the importance of work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes to bridge the gap between education and employment and tackle skills mismatches. Small companies need workers, but not just any worker. They need well qualified staff, and in particular well qualified young people able to quickly adapt to the world of work when coming out of the education system. The most successful way of tackling this challenge is to strengthen and introduce where they do not exist vocational education and training systems, notably work-based learning and apprenticeships schemes. With their capacity to boost employability and to develop a sense of entrepreneurship in young people, these tools proved to be an important part of the success of the best performing countries in terms of youth employment in Europe, such as Austria, Denmark or Germany."

"Once improved and made more SME-friendly, the main challenge for the new EU employment policy will be to deliver and implement the recommendations at national level. If a strong emphasis on SMEs' needs and specificities is missing at EU level, small companies will hardly get a good follow-up at national, regional and local level. Europe cannot miss such an important chance to tap into SMEs' full potential as job creators."

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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/>

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