



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

SMEs profited from EU Integration, but more is needed and possible

Strengthening entrepreneurship and competitiveness is the key for growth, jobs creation and sustainable social systems

Brussels, 24th March 2017 – President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller and Secretary General Véronique Willems participate in the extraordinary meeting between EU Social Partners and the EU Institutions at the 60th Anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. Recalling how SMEs have profited from 60 years of European integration, President Rabmer-Koller referred to the longest period of peace, the largest internal market as driver for growth and the Euro as the second largest global currency. However, *“Europe is on a crossroad and has to do better,”* underlined Ms Rabmer-Koller, *“and for our 23 million SMEs, this means that Europe has to improve its competitiveness and business environment”*. This is why UEAPME supports the debate about the future of Europe – launched with the White Paper – at which we will focus on deepening the Monetary Union, fostering the social dimension by creating jobs and ensuring the future of trade policy. *“It is not only up to the governments to decide the future of the European Union”, the President stated when explaining that “Social Partners also have to tackle this challenge and take responsibility for the way forward.”* Therefore, UEAPME has started reflections with member organisations and will come forward with an SME vision for the future of Europe.

Speaking at the European Social Partners’ meeting with the Heads of the European Institutions in Rome, **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller** raised the concerns of SMEs regarding the current juncture of the European Union. *“Even if there is no doubt that SMEs have profited from more Europe over the last 60 years, today our companies face severe challenges”,* she stated. International political uncertainties, pressure from migration, security issues and social tensions lead to a raise in populism which puts past achievements into questions.

The 60th anniversary, but also the decision of one of the Member States to leave the European Union, forces all of us to develop a new vision for our joint future, for which UEAPME welcomes the White Paper of the European Commission as a good guidance. *“From an SME point of view, Europe has to do better at supporting entrepreneurship and private investment within the Union and needs better instruments to reduce imbalances and to ensure fair competition”,* said Ms Rabmer-Koller summarising the expectations of SMEs, and she added that *“UEAPME will focus on strengthening competitiveness as precondition for growth and job creation, and as basis for sustainable social systems and reducing inequalities and poverty.”*

“However, the discussion about the future of the European Union can and should not be left to the Head of States and Governments alone. The European civil society and the European Social Partners have to take their responsibilities and have to develop their own ideas and visions for our future”, requested **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller**. For this, she announced that *“UEAPME will start a process to put forward the expectations and needs of Crafts and SMEs in Europe and develop joint ideas and visions for a future SME policy and for fair competition related to internal and external markets.”*

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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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