



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

## **Brexit negotiations must minimise harm for SMEs**

***President Rabmer-Koller urges negotiators to apply a 'Think Small First' approach and minimise the negative impact on SMEs***

Brussels, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2017 – Commenting on today's notification by the British government to leave the EU, UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller states: *"Of course we accept this decision taken by the people and politicians in the United Kingdom. In order to minimise the negative impact on Europe's economy, growth, job creation and welfare, UEAPME requests a responsible approach towards SMEs."* The negotiators have to bear in mind the Think Small First principle, when clarifying the future relationship between the EU27 and the United Kingdom as early as possible. Furthermore, UEAPME calls for a strong commitment to build a bright future for all EU-citizens through more ambitious and efficient SME-policy. No matter which future scenario is chosen for the EU, SMEs will always remain the backbone of European economy and the source of new jobs, growth and innovation.

UEAPME foresees that in a worst-case scenario where the UK leaves the Internal Market and the Customs Union without a new trade agreement, Europe -may be confronted with a new economic crisis and the possibility of a recession in some Member States. **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller** said that *"already over the course of last year, confidence of SMEs in the UK and its neighbouring countries went down and companies stopped investing as shown in the biannual UEAPME SME Barometer<sup>(1)</sup>. These concerns will definitely increase after today's event for both, the SMEs in the United Kingdom and in EU27."*

Therefore, UEAPME expects that both sides at the negotiation table show awareness and responsibility, and avoid any unnecessary burden for SMEs and their employees. Neither the EU27, nor the UK should wait to discuss their future relationship and they should start preparatory talks about a Free Trade Agreement as soon as possible. *"The time has come to move from political talks and tactics to practical solutions for real problems in order to reduce legal and technical uncertainty for businesses as soon as possible"*, insists Ms Rabmer-Koller. The UEAPME President demands *"efforts to avoid burdens resulting from new border arrangements as far as possible"*. Politicians have to be aware that Crafts and SMEs will be the ones to most suffer from such burdens. Thus, the negotiations have to be guided by the Think Small First approach. *"Customs inspections on company sites or pre-certification for customs compliance may work for large businesses, but will not help SMEs"*, Ms Rabmer-Koller put forward as concrete concern. Instead, SMEs expect e-governance applications with easy accessible multilingual internet portals and support structures, which could be provided by SME organisations. In addition, it is also of utmost importance for SMEs that trade in the services sector remains open and available at fair conditions to all parties.

Furthermore, the British notification also recalls the need to speed-up reforms needed in Europe to create a less bureaucratic and more business friendly environment for our SMEs. In order to achieve practical solutions, the President asks that *"throughout the negotiation process, SME business organisations as relevant stakeholders are regularly consulted at national and EU-level."*

<sup>1)</sup> <http://www.ueapme.com/spip.php?rubrique120>

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

**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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