



“The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe”

UEAPME elects its representatives for Europe’s SMEs

President’s SME priorities for the EU agenda: better regulation, access to finance, skills shortage, and digitalisation

Brussels, 7th December –Ulrike Rabmer-Koller was unanimously re-elected for a second two-year mandate as President of UEAPME, the European Craft and SME Association. In her acceptance speech, Ms Rabmer-Koller stated that she would continue her efforts to strengthen the organisation as the “Voice of SMEs in Europe” and put forward her policy priorities (better regulation, access to finance, skills shortage, and digitalisation). UEAPME’s General Assembly elected representatives for its Board of Directors and Administrative Council from the member organisations⁽¹⁾. Ahead of the election, Ms Rabmer-Koller welcomed Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans at the UEAPME General Assembly to discuss the progress made so far with better regulation and reducing administrative burdens for SMEs.

UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller thanked all member organisations for the support given over the last two years, which strengthened the organisation and first improvements were achieved as regards her policy priorities for SMEs. This was backed by a stronger role as social partner in an up-scaled EU social dialogue. During the discussion with Vice-President Timmermans, she underlined UEAPME’s support for his Better Regulation agenda and acknowledged the first positive results from the REFIT exercise. UEAPME agrees with the more pragmatic approach, however, more has to be done to reduce bureaucracy to allow SMEs to grow, employ and invest.

The newly (re)elected members of the Board of Directors and Administrative Council discussed priority issues for their mandate.

On access to finance, Ms Rabmer-Koller said that *“UEAPME succeeded to increase and prolong the support for SMEs by the European Fund for Strategic Investments and improve the capacity of banks to lend to SMEs by an extended SME Supporting Factor in the banking regulation.”* For the future, she wants *“that the next generation of European Funds give priority to financial instruments, and hence allowing SMEs to invest and innovate.”*

Furthermore, Ms Rabmer-Koller raised concerns about the increasing number of SMEs reporting problems to find employees with the needed skills, especially when they want to apply new technologies. *“There is a certain recognition of the problem from the political level, but SMEs need concrete actions including reforms in vocational training and work-based learning to modernise their business and stay competitive”,* she warned and she wants to see *“a stronger focus on skills in the next generation of European Programmes and Funds.”*

Finally, Ms Rabmer-Koller used the need for SMEs to catch-up with digitalisation as an example of all these challenges for SMEs accumulating and said, *“given the current regulatory environment as regards platform economies, e-commerce and IPR, many SMEs rather see digitalisation as a treat than an opportunity and the latest decision on geo-blocking has not improved the situation.”* UEAPME will therefore continue to ask level playing field for all SMEs, traditional and those applying new business models, and for a legal environment which also respects the reality of small businesses. In addition, SME need access to finance and the right skill to master the challenge of digitalisation. *“This is why unlocking the potential of digitalisation and helping SMEs tackle these challenges will remain one of my priorities for the next mandate”,* concluded Ms Rabmer-Koller.

(1) list available on demand

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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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