

# UEAPME Newsflash

## GDPR: SMEs call on Member States to support implementation

Secretary General Véronique Willems [met](#) Commissioners Ansip, Jourová and Gabriel with other stakeholders to discuss the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). They also talked about the Commission's newly published Guidance to facilitate its application and a new online tool dedicated to SMEs. While thanking the Commission for the new material, UEAPME remains highly concerned about the uncertainty surrounding the implementation at national level. Only two Member States have already adapted relevant national legislation. SMEs fear not having enough time to prepare for all the provisions they have to comply with. UEAPME recognises the European Commission's efforts to reach out to stakeholders and support as much as possible a smooth implementation of the GDPR. In particular, Ms Willems thanked the Commission for the workshop that was jointly organised with UEAPME to inform SMEs about the new rules.

Contact: [Chiara Aprea](#)

## Industry Policy needs strong focus on SMEs

Ahead of the EU Industry Day, UEAPME published its [position paper](#) on "A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy", demonstrating the relevance of SMEs for the industrial sector and argues that the strategy will only succeed if it recognises the specific situation and needs of SMEs. In order to ensure this, UEAPME calls for an adequate role of SMEs during the Industry Day and representation of SMEs in the upcoming High-level Industrial Roundtable. The most relevant SME challenges to be tackled are: shortage of qualified labour, financing investments and innovation, administrative and regulatory burdens, barriers to growth, and unlevelled playing fields within the single market and at global level. UEAPME will [organise a workshop](#) at the EU Industry Day to show how traditional SMEs catch up with digitalisation and greening of the economy and how to facilitate this.

Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

## Quality Framework for Apprenticeships good for SMEs

UEAPME published a [position paper](#) on a Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships calling on the Council to adopt the framework, as proposed by the Commission. This is a good example of European added value based on extensive joint work of social partners in Vocational Education and Training (VET). The criteria should help boost apprenticeship in Europe and in particular in Crafts and SMEs. A crucial part is that SMEs are recognised as genuine learning environments, but they need adequate support for sufficient return on investment, including from their organisations. Direct involvement of SME organisations in the governance of apprenticeship systems, and reinforced cooperation between the world of work and that of education, are preconditions for attractive learning pathways. It is now up to Member States to transform the proposal into concrete policies and measures.

Contact: [Arnold de Boer](#)

## Making EMU more robust against external shocks

At the technical meeting of the Macroeconomic Dialogue, EU Social Partners discussed how to make Europe's economies more resilient against economic shocks with the Commission, European Central Bank and Ministries of Finance. More coherence within the Euro area and risk reduction are seen as an important precondition for deepening the Monetary Union and for making it more resistant to future crises. Economic Policy Director Gerhard Huemer supported the concept of [economic resilience](#), which aims to make Europe's economies less vulnerable, increases the capacity to absorb shocks and the ability to recover. He argued for a broad approach including finance, product and labour markets, and the public sector. It should strengthen the ability of economies to react on changing environments. Finally, Mr Huemer recommended the inclusion of this concept in the European Semester Process to ensure targeted analyses and recommendations.

Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

## Economic Policy Seminar for national SME organisations

DG ECFIN invited national SME representatives to present and discuss main policy initiatives to improve implementation and public perceptions of EU policy initiatives. At the seminar, Secretary General Véronique Willems [discussed](#) how to better use the European Semester Process to put in place the right policies for SMEs and the role national SME associations can play during this process. She welcomed the progress made so far as regards labour market and social policies, but regretted the lack of involvement in economic policy. At another session, Economic Policy Director Gerhard Huemer discussed how SMEs can benefit from the Capital Market Union with DG FISMA. The debate very much focused on improving bank lending due to the fact that still very few SMEs have access to relatively underdeveloped capital markets in Europe.

Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

## Social dialogue needs to be further strengthened

European social partners held their social dialogue mutual learning cluster seminar in Dublin for their members from Ireland, Austria, Hungary and Poland. While recovery is a reality, social partners have a crucial role in tackling multiple new challenges in a changing economy. They have to support adaptability and flexibility for companies and workers but also provide stability. Despite the diversity of national systems, they are confronted with similar issues such as digitalisation, ageing workforce, pension adequacy, skills mismatch, integration of refugees, and lack or inadequate childcare. All social partners agreed on the need for a common understanding at national and / or sectoral level to find innovative solutions in a time of rapid change. In doing so, they will contribute to inclusive growth and jobs and ensure society's stability. This new paradigm and the need for their capacity building will be further discussed as part the EU social dialogue activities later in 2018.

Contact: [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

## SBA follow-up meeting focusses on social files and GDPR

The quarterly SBA follow-up meeting, organised by DG GROW to discuss current files with the European business organisations, mainly dealt with social files. Participants were updated on the state of the upcoming initiative on Access to Social Protection for all, including self-employed, Social Affairs Adviser Arnold de Boer expressed concerns with a one size fits all approach at EU level. Even if self-employed / entrepreneurs sometimes need more awareness of the risks, a mandatory approach is not adequate for this heterogeneous group. Entrepreneurs need a degree of freedom to be able to choose, and in particular need tailored and affordable offer of social protection schemes. A careful approach is essential, and Member States need room to explore policy options. Participants also got an update on the "Goods Package" and the GDPR.

Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## Belt and Road Initiative: what economic & policy implications?

UEAPME associate member ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), the [EU-Asia Centre](#), the [European Movement International](#) and UEAPME jointly organised a multi-stakeholder [conference](#) on "The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Reshaping the Global Value Chain". Two panels, in which UEAPME member Türkonfed participated, looked into the implications and business experiences of China's grand scheme to link Asia and Europe together via new massive infrastructure projects in Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans.

Contact: [Luc Hendrickx](#)

## Perspectives discussed in EU Financial Circular Economy Platform

Speaking at the second meeting of the Informal Expert Group "Support to Circular Economy Financing", Sustainable Development Director Guido Lena commented on the scope of Section I, dealing with recommendations to regulators. Mr Lena pointed out that the group should deal not only with financing but also with incentives for investments. This is not only to stimulate the setting up of start-ups based on circular economy concepts, but also and mainly to propose solutions to help traditional SMEs go from linear to circular.

Contact: [Guido Lena](#)

### EVENTS AHEAD:

- UEAPME Workshop at Industry Day - [Registration](#) (22.02, [Gerhard Huemer](#))

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**UEAPME Newsflash**  
Compiled by: [Jenny Manin](#)  
Press and communications officer  
Phone: +32 2 230 7599  
Mobile: +32 496 520 329