

UEAPME Newsflash

UEAPME puts focus on SMEs at Industry Day

At the first meeting of the High-level Industrial Roundtable with Commission Vice-President Katainen and Commissioner Bienkowska, President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller [put forward](#) the need to have a specific focus on SMEs within a renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy. SMEs are crucial to the industry sector and therefore need to be taken into account in industrial policy. In a [position paper](#) published earlier, UEAPME had asked for an adequate role for SMEs during the “Industry Day” annual event and for representation in this Roundtable, for which Ms Rabmer-Koller was selected. Ms Rabmer-Koller used the first meeting to highlight the essential recognition of the specific situation and needs of SMEs in implementation of all actions of the renewed policy. Discussions focussed on what will shape the EU industry of 2030 and beyond, and what policy response is needed to make Europe competitive and create jobs.

Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

SMEs are crucial to achieving circular economy

Secretary General Véronique Willems and Sustainable Development Director Guido Lena participated in different panels of the Commission’s two-day Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference on how to better involve SMEs in this systemic change for our society. They both highlighted that circular economy will not be achieved without the full involvement of SMEs and pleaded for transition not to happen overnight in order to allow SMEs to adapt and stay on the market. They also highlighted the need for a favourable political and legislative framework facilitating the transition from linear to circular for SMEs, composed of awareness-raising, technical assistance at local level, improved access to finance for the upfront investments, upskilling of entrepreneurs and their employees, as well as capacity building for SME organisations, particularly at local level.

Contact: [Guido Lena](#)

Sales of goods: a missed opportunity

After two years of debate, the EU Parliament Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee voted its report on the proposal concerning contracts for the sales of goods. UEAPME [acknowledges](#) the Committee’s efforts to find a reasonable compromise for all parties and appreciates that the lifespan guarantee has not been introduced, minimum length of legal guarantee has not been raised, and that the burden of proof of one year has been proposed. However, SMEs regret that the proposal does not live up to the expected potential initially foreseen, notably establishing full harmonisation of guarantees and remedies at European level. UEAPME remains concerned by specific burdensome provisions that it will address in the next steps of the legislative process, such as the deadline for completing the repair or replacement. Ahead of the vote, UEAPME co-signed a [statement](#) with BUSINESSEUROPE and EuroCommerce highlighting the main concerns.

Contact: [Chiara Aprea](#)

Increasing the resilience of Europe’s economy

At the [political meeting](#) of the Macroeconomic Dialogue, European Social Partners discussed the current economic situation and how to make Europe’s economies, and especially the Euro Area, more [resilient against economic shocks](#) with EC Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis, Eurogroup President Mário Centeno, the Troika of Finance Ministers and the European Central Bank. Secretary General Véronique Willems underlined the importance of sound public households and flexible product and labour markets to react on future crises, and asked for more involvement of social partners at national and European level in the discussion on resilience. Moreover, she presented the first results from UEAPME’s upcoming SME Barometer, which show an increase of confidence in the SME sector. However, she emphasised the first signs of labour shortage and skills gaps that are making it difficult to fill vacancies and hamper the creation of new jobs.

Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Social fairness package discussed by EU social partners

The Social Fairness Package and the autonomous European Social Dialogue were the main topics of the Social Dialogue Committee (SDC) meeting. In the debate with the Commission on “Access to Social Protection for all workers”, Social Affairs Director Liliane Volozinskis recalled the importance to respect the subsidiarity principle and Member States competences. UEAPME could accept a Council recommendation supporting social protection of self-employed as long as it remains voluntary and an adequate offer is available. On the European Labour Authority, Ms Volozinskis asked the Commission for clarification of the future role of social partners. Ahead of the SDC, the UEAPME Social Affairs Committee had an in-depth discussion on “A proposal for transparent and predictable working conditions”, a burdensome Commission proposal for SMEs.

Contact: [Liliane Volozinskis](#)

Work-life balance directive not to harm small businesses

At the [hearing](#) of the Employment Committee on work-life balance, Social Affairs Adviser Arnold de Boer [called](#) on MEPs to limit the impact of the Commission's proposal for micro and small companies. UEAPME shares the objective of increasing the participation of women on the labour market, but has well-founded concerns with the current changes. Due to the proposed payment levels for parental leave and other provisions, the cost implications would be significant with potentially high financial, administrative, and wider economic damage to the functioning of businesses. Adequate minimum standards are needed at European level, but the levels of payment and the interaction between different forms of leaves should be adapted in a smart way at national level with social partners. At the workplace, flexible and jointly agreed arrangements are needed in a non-formalised way. This is the best approach to realistically match the needs of employers and workers. Contact: [Arnold de Boer](#)

Public Procurement strategy should focus on implementation

UEAPME was invited to a [workshop](#), organised by the Internal Market Committee, to discuss the latest [Public Procurement Strategy](#) published by the Commission last October. Even if the last review of the Public Procurement Directives should have been implemented since the beginning of 2017, SMEs do not see much impact so far on [better access for SMEs](#) to public contracts. Therefore, Economic Policy Director Gerhard Huemer welcomed that facilitation of SME participation is a priority area in the new strategy. In order to achieve better implementation, he asked for more efforts to professionalise public buyers. Furthermore, the Commission should provide guidance to make better use of public procurement for strategic objectives like innovation, SME participation and greening the economy. Finally, Mr Huemer complained about different national standards for e-procurement, which creates new barriers for public contracts within the single market. Contact: [Gerhard Huemer](#)

----- News from UEAPME Projects -----

UEAPME signs up as subcontractor to set up EREK

UEAPME officially signed the three year contract with Technopolis Group Belgium to become subcontractor for the setting up of the [European Resource Efficiency Excellence Centre](#) (EREK). UEAPME's task will mainly consist of implementing communication and promotion strategies, contributing to the catalogue of good practices, attending project meetings, as well as providing feedback on the discussion topics. EREK, foreseen by the Green Action Plan for SMEs as one of the main instruments to help traditional SMEs become more resource-efficient, was officially launched by the European Commission during the Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference (see above). Contact: [Guido Lena](#)

Early Warning Europe presented at the SME Intergroup

At the European Parliament SME Intergroup meeting, the Early Warning Europe project was presented, linked to the Insolvency Directive currently being discussed in the Parliament. Secretary General Véronique Willems focussed on the setting up of a European wide network of experts and organisations with a keen interest in helping companies in difficulties – through bankruptcy if necessary – towards a second start. UEAPME member ATA, as one of the target countries, explained their experiences in implementing an early warning mechanism for companies in distress in Madrid (SP). The network will gather best practices and lessons learned from the first wave of target countries (Italy, Greece, Poland and Spain), develop policy recommendations and also incentivise setting up early warning mechanisms in other countries in cooperation with ESBA and EUROCHAMBRES.

Contact: [Véronique Willems](#)

----- News from UEAPME Sector Fora -----

Transport: UEAPME publishes position on Mobility Package

The UEAPME Transport Forum issued a [position paper](#) on 'Europe on the Move' Package welcoming the Commission's aim to promote clean, competitive and connected mobility and to achieve a more harmonised framework for road transport operators. Some proposals are already a step in the right direction, but there is still need for improvement, as some proposed changes do not correspond to SMEs' needs of daily practice. As much as the also so-called 'Mobility Package' touches and regulates on various aspects of mobility like Eurovignette, driving and resting time, cabotage, as well as tachograph, the Forum members aimed to reach a well-balanced position for clear, precise, transparent and comprehensible European rules to ensure fair competition while minimising costs and avoiding further administrative burdens for businesses.

Contact: [Dieter Grohmann](#)

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