



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Self-employed must have better access to social protection

Labour Authority only adds value if it truly contributes to the enforcement of rules on cross-border mobility

Brussels, 13th March 2018 – Representing entrepreneurs and self-employed in Europe, and in response to the new Commission initiative as part of the Social Fairness Package, UEAPME advocates that all workers and self-employed have access to basic levels of social protection at an affordable cost. The focus should be on facilitating tailored access to social protection schemes at national level. UEAPME expresses its concern with a compulsory approach to almost all branches, as proposed by the European Commission, since it could jeopardise entrepreneurs' free choice. It is important that Member States remain free to organise their social protection systems and that differences between Member States be taken into account. The establishment of a European Labour Authority (the other pillar of the Social Fairness Package) should serve to further promote cross-border mobility and at the same time tackle fraud and abuse linked to it.

"Social protection systems in Europe need to be modernised", UEAPME Secretary General Véronique Willems said, "in view of the labour market developments. UEAPME supports the principle that all people should have access to social protection, regardless of their employment status. In particular for self-employed, Member States should remain free to decide which branches of social protection should be compulsory or voluntary, and should facilitate real access with tailored offers and at a reasonable cost."

The Commission's proposal differentiates between workers and self-employed, but makes most branches of social protection mandatory for all, except unemployment insurance. Ms Willems explained: *"The social protection of self-employed in Europe needs to be improved. However, a mandatory approach entails the risk of increasing social protection contributions to a level where self-employed can no longer afford it. The implementation should be done carefully, in order not to harm innovation and job creation in a proportionate way, in close cooperation with SME organisations"*.

Ms Willems continued: *"Member States need to explore policy options, and start serious discussions in order to tackle imbalances and the rigidity of labour markets in Europe. The 'gig economy' raises many questions on the future of work and rightfully so. However, we should avoid premature solutions that jeopardise entrepreneurship. We need to focus on facilitating transitions between employment statuses. Entrepreneurship is and should remain a valuable career option, and ensuring social protection can take away fear of becoming self-employed, especially in increasingly dynamic labour markets"*, Ms Willems added.

On the European Labour Authority (ELA), Ms Willems explained: *"We very much hope that it will entail real progress regarding the full enforcement of European rules in cross-border mobility. Better tackling fraud in the field of social security is a major step forward for small businesses. Ensuring a level playing field is highly needed since SMEs currently suffer from the lack of cooperation between national authorities to ensure effective implementation of EU rules in the field. Providing updated information to workers and businesses and facilitate systematic cooperation and information exchange between national authorities is equally relevant"*.

Ms Willems concluded: *"UEAPME regrets that the ELA will not become a genuine tripartite Agency. Given their specific role and expertise in cross-border labour mobility, social partners should be given a proper role in the management of the Authority"*.

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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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