



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Competitiveness Policy needs stronger focus on SMEs

President Rabmer-Koller at COMPET Council: Innovation and digitalisation are decisive for Europe's competitiveness

Brussels/Vienna, 17th July 2018 – UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller was invited to the informal Competitiveness Council of the Austrian Presidency in Vienna to discuss "Boosting European Competitiveness" with EU Commission Vice-President Ansip, Commissioner Bieńkowska, the responsible Ministers and other stakeholders. SMEs play an important role for Europe's industrial sector. A future oriented approach towards industrial policy will only succeed if it targets all companies and makes them able to activate their full potential of innovation and to deploy the possibilities of digitalisation. Both dimensions are a precondition for Europe to become a leader in Artificial Intelligence. SMEs, especially, need an appropriate regulatory environment that respects their specific situation, as well as tailor-made and easily accessible support services.

"UEAPME fully supports the European Commission's efforts to modernise the industrial sector in Europe" said **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller** *"but it will only succeed, if the important role of SMEs in this sector is also taken into account."* Indeed, 99.4% of the 2.1 million companies in the sector are SMEs and start-ups playing a crucial role for innovation and competitiveness.

"Europe's competitiveness depends on high value added products and services and we have to do more to convert research and knowledge into products and services" explained Ms Rabmer-Koller about the need for a stronger focus on innovation and commercialisation in Europe's industrial policy. SMEs, especially, need a broad definition of innovation, which also includes intangible assets and social innovation. SMEs are able to react faster and be more flexible, but they need support to deploy their potential.

Digitalisation has become a key dimension for innovation and industrial competitiveness and, even if some SMEs are front-runners in developing new technologies and applications, many SMEs struggle to adapt due to a lack of resources and internal capacities. *"This is why UEAPME welcomes the new Digital Europe Programme with its focus on digital skills, infrastructure and digital hubs to provide knowledge centres for SMEs"*, underlined Ms Rabmer-Koller. Finally, she stated that *"both a new approach toward innovation and more efforts on digitalisation are also decisive in making Europe a leader in Artificial Intelligence."*

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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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