



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Digitalisation is a key challenge for SMEs

Legal framework and facilitating environment discussed with VP Ansip and Commissioner Jourová

Brussels, 28th September 2018 – UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller met with European Commission Vice-President Andrus Ansip to discuss the SMEs' challenges to digitalise. UEAPME wants to make sure that all SMEs are on the digital train. Fair and transparent rules, skills development, modern infrastructure and SME-friendly standards are crucial to achieve this objective. Furthermore, the New Deal for Consumers, highlighting the need for simplification and awareness raising among SMEs, was the topic of an exchange of views with Commissioner Vera Jourová. Moreover, both Vice-President Ansip and Commissioner Jourová showed interest in the possible negative impact of the interaction between the Geo-blocking Regulation and Consumer Rules on online trade.

At the meeting with Vice-President Ansip, **UEAPME President Ulrike Rabmer-Koller** put forward proposals enabling SMEs to grasp the opportunities of digitalisation and underline that Europe's economy can only stay competitive if all companies master the transfer to new technologies. *"A coherent approach to tackle digitalisation should be built on two pillars: an enabling legal framework and a facilitating environment"*, stated Ms Rabmer-Koller. This has to include technology neutral and future-proof regulations for frontrunners, as well as fair and transparent rules for traditional SMEs, which are dependent from large services providers and B2B platforms. Regarding B2B Platforms, UEAPME fully supports the Commission proposal, but asks to improve some aspects as regards fairness, like non-discrimination and restriction on the use of alternative selling channels.

Ms Rabmer-Koller also used the opportunity to promote the idea for setting up a Digital Knowledge Centre, where SME organisations and SMEs can access up-to-date knowhow, exchange best practices, information on support programmes, and get information from neutral experts.

This and the New Deal for Consumers were the subjects of a following meeting with Commissioner Vera Jourová. On the New Deal for Consumers, Ms Rabmer-Koller reiterated that UEAPME has continuously pleaded to reduce formalities and simplify the acquis. However, the New Deal fails to achieve simplification of the existing legal framework. She emphasised that *"SMEs with no legal department are at risk of committing unintentional infringements because too much emphasis is put on enforcement and penalties."*

Referring to the current discussion of the New Deal in the European Parliament, Ms Rabmer-Koller assured UEAPME's support to *"convince MEPs on the need to remove the obligations to accept the right for withdrawal if the product has already been used and to reimburse before having received the returned good."*

Furthermore, Ms Rabmer-Koller raised the possible negative impact of the interaction between the Geo-blocking Regulation and the Consumer Rules on online trade with Vice-President Ansip and Commissioner Jourová. They agreed further analysis should clarify the application of those rules and the impact these can have on running a business.

Finally, she discussed ongoing problems when applying the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and offered Commissioner Jourová continuous input on the implementation of the legislation.

**** END ****

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.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Luc Hendrickx, Enterprise Policy Director, Tel. +32 2 230 75 99, Email: l.hendrickx@ueapme.com

Jenny Manin, Press and Communications Officer, Tel. +32 496 52 03 29, Email: pressoffice@ueapme.com