

Declaration of Bucharest

on the occasion of the European Entrepreneurship Forum

by the Employers' Group of the EESC, SMEUnited and CNIPMMR

We call for a fair, competitive and sustainable business environment that encourages enterprises to grow, innovate, invest and trade. We need more effective framework conditions for European SMEs through a long-term EU SME policy strategy with a clear vision for 2030, accompanied by a specific action plan including concrete measures and a timetable for implementation and monitoring mechanisms. This should become a top priority for the strategic agenda of the next Commission and be put in place at the beginning of the new EU institutional cycle. This requires a new and decisive stage in the political recognition of SMEs - shifting from "Think Small First" to "Act Small First".

We call for enabling and encouraging policies that stimulate SMEs, creativity, innovation, ongoing learning, agility and entrepreneurial spirit throughout society. We need to create a more entrepreneurial European Union, encouraging in particular young people and women to start their own business. Therefore, we recommend to:

- **Enhance recognition of entrepreneurs' and recognise their contribution** to both the economy and the society. We need to teach an entrepreneurial mind-set starting at an early age, to have a new generation of entrepreneurs to create and takeover enterprises. To flourish, the companies also need employees with a spirit of initiative and civil servants understanding the nature of entrepreneurship,
- **Ensure that education policies** are focused more on workplace learning, supporting Vocational Education and Training (VET), Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) areas, digital skills and apprenticeships to **make skills more fit to the labour markets' needs**. SMEs have to have access to the skilled and competent workforce,
- **take a bolder approach to supporting SME development;** to ensure an effective and more efficient European SME policy covering the different types of enterprises and an inclusive, cross-cutting policy approach in this area,
- **provide programs to coach, train and advise entrepreneurs** in close cooperation with business organisations and encourages an exchange of best practices.

Doing business requires financing for innovation and investments in the future. SMEs are looking into alternative forms of finance while craving for better access to bank loans. Therefore, we propose:

- **supporting banking environment that incentivise lending to SMEs** without unnecessary red tape as well as **promoting alternative forms of finance**, like lending platforms and crowd-investment,



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- **new financial instruments within the next MFF**, which focus on innovation and investments allowing SMEs to go for more risky projects. The cohesion and regional development policies have a role to play in boosting competitiveness,
- **fostering public investments** at the European level.

The ongoing megatrends (such as digitisation, artificial intelligence and circular economy) fundamentally transform our society. Seizing the opportunities offered by **digitalisation** requires a change of mind-set within SMEs and room for them to develop new products, services and business models. **To ensure a successful transition, SMEs specifically require:**

- a facilitating environment ensuring the right level of skills development, financial support, capacity building, future-proof infrastructure and standardisation,
- an equal access to data for SMEs, investments in cyber security and involvement in steering Artificial Intelligence.

Due to the unequal implementation and enforcement of EU legislation in Member States, SMEs still have to take differences in legislation into account. Hence, **we urge the European institutions and Member States to:**

- **implement and enforce** EU legislation in all the Member States in a timely and correct manner, **to tackle gold plating** and to reduce and to avoid additional burdens and barriers,
- **ensure a fair balance between SMEs and other stakeholder's interests** and particularly respecting the freedom to conduct business, and tackle unfair trading practices in B2B relationships,
- boost internationalisation of SMEs and **create a better balance between access to markets and fair competition.**
- Take measures to **improve liquidity** of SMEs sector including improvement in the term of payments of public authorities.

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