

- PRESS RELEASE -

The Single Digital Market should promote access and transparency to unlock SMEs' potential for jobs creation say EU officials and stakeholders

Brussels, 15 September 2015 – Today, HOTREC, the umbrella Association of Hotels, Restaurants and Cafés in Europe and UEAPME, the voice of SMEs, together with EU stakeholders, officials and MEPs agreed on the need to address the digital challenges faced by SMEs in Europe in order to boost growth and jobs creation.

In a joint HOTREC-UEAPME conference co-hosted by MEP Karas, chair of the SME intergroup, and MEP Tapardel, co-chair of the tourism intergroup, EU officials and stakeholders identified the need for a more open digital market. *“The Commission is strongly engaged in developing a more accessible, transparent and therefore effective digital market for all SMEs alike. This is a major goal for the recently launched Digital Network”*, explained Mr. Carlo Corazza, Head of Unit Tourism, Emerging and Creative Industries at DG GROW from the European Commission.

Considered as a key challenge for SMEs, various speakers stressed the dominance of digital giants, making it difficult for SMEs and microenterprises to be visible, when not promoting unfair commercial practices. Calling on the Commission to tackle the issue, which was represented by Ms. Anna Herold from Commissioner Oettinger's cabinet, Mr. Peter Faross, Secretary General of UEAPME said: *“The Think Small First principle should also prevail when it comes to the digital agenda, which should benefit SMEs and microenterprises. We look forward to assessing the impact of the new initiatives launched by the Commission and in particular those addressing unfair competition and practices”*.

The rise of the sharing economy was also discussed in the presence of MEP Monteiro de Aguiar. HOTREC and UEAPME stressed that the Commission and European Parliament should work on a legislative framework when consumer protection is concerned. *“Issues such as Online Travel Agents, search engines and the sharing economy, are to be addressed to level the playing field and unlock SMEs' potential for job creation and growth”* commented Ms. Susanne Kraus-Winkler, President of HOTREC.

Last but not least, all participants agreed that SMEs also need to do their part to embrace digital opportunities. *“SMEs have to get out of their digital comfort zone. We have to better connect SMEs to the digital revolution, as digitalisation represents a huge opportunity for them to expand their markets. It is important for SMEs to strengthen their digital profile in order to unlock the full potential of the digital single market”*, concluded MEP Othmar Karas.

What is HOTREC?

HOTREC represents the hotel, restaurant and café industry at European level. This industry includes around 1,8 million businesses, of which 99% are small and medium sized enterprises (91% of them micro enterprises, i.e. employing fewer than 10 people). These businesses make up some 59% of industry value added. The hospitality industry provides some 10.2 million jobs in the EU alone. Together with the other tourism industries, the sector is one of the largest industries in Europe. HOTREC brings together 42 national associations representing the sector in 28 different European countries.

For further information: www.hotrec.eu

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What is UEAPME?

UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 80 member organisations covering over 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 on Twitter.

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