

SMES ARE VITAL ACTORS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE RURAL AREAS

Brussels, 15/06/2022 – SMEunited welcomes the Long Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas and supports the Rural Action Plan and the Rural Pact, which cover a wide range of challenges in rural areas and take into account all actors, in particular SMEs. Almost half of European SMEs and microenterprises work in rural areas, where they ensure the economic and social cohesion of the territories through their services as well as a certain social balance by maintaining and creating jobs and providing vocational training.

During the Rural Pact Conference of the European Commission, President Petri Salminen stated: "SMEs play a key role in creating economic activity, stabilising social structures and transformation towards sustainability and more generally in combatting the desertification of rural areas. For these reasons, they are highly interested in most of the actions under the flagships of the Rural Action Plan and the measures of the Rural Pact, in particular, the Rural Proofing and the Rural Observatory."

The Long Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas shows that rural development is not only and not purely based on agriculture and forestry. SMEs, whether or not linked to an agricultural activity, are the driving force of the European economy and the witnesses of culture in rural areas: their know-how, human capital and expertise are part of Europe's cultural heritage. Europe must recognise that rural crafts and SMEs are active in all economic fields, including high-tech industrial production, where they are often innovative. However, entrepreneurs in rural areas face difficulties, when accessing mobility, housing, and financial services.

President Salminen concluded: "We need a strong political commitment in favour of rural areas. I invite the European Institutions to adopt a European Rural Agenda. To define the framework of this Agenda, we suggest the creation of a High-Level Group of Experts involving all the actors in rural areas."

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EDITORS' NOTES: SMEunited is the association of Crafts and SMEs in Europe with 67 member organisations from over 30 European countries. SMEunited represents national cross-sectoral Craft and SME federations, European SME branch organisations and associate members. We speak on behalf of the 22,5 million enterprises with around 82 million employees across Europe. SMEunited is a recognised employers' organisation and European Social Partner. SMEunited was formerly known as UEAPME.
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