

Declaration by the General Assembly to the European Council on 13 and 14 December 2018

Ahead of the meeting of the European Council, the General Assembly of SMEUnited – Crafts and SMEs in Europe – asks the Heads of State and Government to respond to the reality of the 24 Million SMEs when discussing Brexit, the future Multiannual Financial Framework, the state of play of the European Single Market, and strengthening digitalisation in Europe. SMEs are the driving force behind Europe's economy and the main contributors to welfare and stability in Europe.

The postponement of the vote in the British Parliament on **Brexit** increases uncertainty further. SMEUnited stresses the need to provide clarity about the regulatory framework for businesses after March 2019 as soon as possible.

“Digital transformation” is the annual theme of SMEUnited. During the year SMEUnited has gathered best practices from member organisations and put forward policy demands at European level. SMEs request fair and transparent rules, skills development, modern infrastructure and SME-friendly standards to allow digitalisation for all SMEs.

Digitalisation increases international competitiveness. However, more and more SMEs question the balance between costs and benefits stemming from the **Single Market**. They ask for a timely, correct and full implementation and enforcement of EU legislation and decisions in all the Member States. Furthermore, Member States should tackle gold plating at national level to avoid additional burdens. SMEUnited asks for a reduction of barriers, which hinder SMEs to grow, like divergences in tax systems, IPR protection and standards.

To tackle the challenges mentioned, the next **Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF) has to aim at making Europe more competitive. European programmes have to provide European added value and should incentivise the implementation of needed reforms. SMEs expect better support for innovation (specifically the take-up of new technologies like digitalisation), to tackle the skills gaps and to provide access to finance. SMEUnited requests progress on the negotiations about the future MFF and a timely adoption of the future programmes.