

## Help SMEs digitalise, and help the European economy grow

Speaking at a joint Metro and EuroCommerce conference, Digitalisation of SMEs: How to make it possible, in Brussels today EuroCommerce, speaking on behalf of its Vice-President Patricia Hoogstraaten, called for a proactive European SME policy reflecting the major challenges arising from digitalisation and changes in consumer behaviour and their impact on small retailers and wholesalers, and said:

*“Small retailers and wholesalers are often leaders in innovation and in adapting to fast-changing customer demand. But they struggle with gaining access to expertise and resources needed to take full advantage of the new technology. We very much support the call of the Network of the SME Envoys for a forward-looking EU SME policy and are pleased that Ursula von der Leyen announced a dedicated SME strategy as a priority for her Presidency of the European Commission. SMEs are vital to the EU economy as a whole, but vulnerable; they need regulatory action and financial support, tailored to their ways of operating, and targeted at enabling them to benefit fully from a vibrant European Digital Single Market.”*

EU action to support SMEs will have a direct positive impact on the wider economy. SMEs in retail and wholesale account for 5.4 million businesses, or 1 in 4 of all businesses in the EU. 99 % of retail and wholesale businesses are SMEs and 90% micro-businesses, employing less than 10 people. The retail and wholesale sector currently employs 29 million Europeans, almost two-thirds of which work in SMEs. Shops and wholesalers provide important employment for local people, and act as an anchor for communities, keeping both villages and town centres good places to live, visit and do business.

Christian Verschueren, Director-General of EuroCommerce added:

*“Small and medium-sized retailers and wholesalers are particularly affected by the many remaining barriers to a properly functioning Single Market. These barriers, in both digital and non-digital markets, are holding Europe back from using the Single Market as a springboard to compete with operators in Asia and the US. Our sector - and Europe as a whole - needs a strong commitment to the Single Market for services and goods, and regulation which promotes, rather than hinders growth. This in turn needs a recognition at the highest level of the key role SMEs play in the EU economy.”*

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