



European Committee
of the Regions



ECON commission conference on
**Regions and cities supporting sustainable and
resilient growth of SMEs**

Luttenbergstraat 2, 8012 EE Zwolle (Netherlands)

23 September 2022

Since early 2020, following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, European SMEs plunged into a deep crisis, marked by severe supply chain and labour market disruptions. The EU has taken unprecedented actions to cushion the blow of the crisis on SMEs, with a combination of emergency measures aimed at short-term (liquidity and employment schemes, temporary state aid framework) and long-term (NextGenerationEU).

While the resilience of European SMEs was severely tested during the pandemic, the measures introduced have helped SMEs to stay afloat during the hard times, although not without an impact on SME financial performance.

Whilst a continuation of the recovery in 2022 has been widely anticipated, the war in Ukraine has casted a significant level of uncertainty on the economic prospects in Europe, resulting in deteriorating global investment and trade climate, rising prices of energy and raw materials and risks of new global supply chain disruptions.

The conference will look into the role of local and regional authorities in fostering the sustainable and resilient growth of SMEs, based on smart place-based policies to provide SMEs a stable framework to operate, invest and expand, taking advantage of the opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

Interpreting arrangements: 6/6 (English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Polish)

Draft Programme

9:00 Registration and coffee

9:15 **Welcome**

Eddy Van Hijum, Regional Minister of Overijssel Province and Member of the ECON Commission

Chair of the ECON Commission

9:30 **Keynote speeches**

[TBC] Ms Hanke Bruins Slot, Minister for Interior and Kingdom relations

[TBC] Mr Constantijn van Oranje-Nassau, honorary doctorate University of Twente, envoy at Techleap.nl (former StartupDelta), co-founder of StartupFestEurope

9:45 **Session 1: European policy action for stronger, more resilient SMEs in an increasingly volatile world**

Moderated by *the Chair of the ECON Commission*

This session aims to look at the key stakes for SMEs in the ongoing EU policy agenda (e.g. EU Industrial Strategy, Fit-for-55 package, Digital legislation and the EU Chips Act etc.), taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine on the recovery of SMEs across EU regions. It will also give focus on how to ensure that EU policy framework prioritises the strengthening of SME confidence and resilience in the Single Market (e.g. Single Market Emergency Instrument), building synergies between policies at European, national and regional level.

Speakers:

Tom Berendsen, Member of the European Parliament

Tadeusz Truskolaski, President of the city of Bialystok (Poland) and member of the ECON Commission

Bonifacio Garcia Porras, European Commission, Head of Unit for SME policy in DG GROW

[TBC] Pieter Waasdorp, Dutch SME Envoy

Lina Konstantopoulou, Eurochambres Policy Director

[TBC] Ingrid Thijssen, Chair VNO-NCW

Q&A session with audience

11:00 **Coffee break / press conference & signing ceremony of regional MoUs**

During the coffee break, a press conference will be held, during which political representatives of the Region of Overijssel, Nordrhein Westphalia (DE), Baden-Wurtemberg (DE) and Flanders (BE) will sign MoUs for cooperation.

11:30 **Session 2: Regional innovations and instruments facilitating SMEs' green and digital transitions**

Moderated by *Eddy Van Hijum, Regional Minister of Overijssel Province and member of the ECON Commission*

This session aims to showcase the most inspiring territorial instruments and initiatives supporting SME green and digital transitions in EU regions, raise awareness of the relevant EU funding and take stock of the latest developments in interregional cooperation for advancing industrial transitions.

Speakers:

[TBC] *European Commission, DG CONNECT*

Chantal Schrijver, European Investment Bank, Head of Office in Amsterdam

[TBC] *Aitor Mintegui Echalecu, Basque Country Delegation to the EU, member of the Vanguard Initiative*

Jan Mahy, Professor of Sustainable & Functional Textiles at Saxion university of Applied Science

Jaap Beernink, CEO Novel-T Innovation centre for companies

[TBC] *Outi Ervasti, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council*

Q&A session with audience

12:45 **Conclusion**

[TBC] *Eddy van Hijum, Regional Minister of Overijssel Province and Member of the ECON Commission*

[TBC] *Chair of the ECON Commission*

13:00 **Buffet lunch**

14:30 **Study visits**

Perron 038 – Innovation centre for manufacturing industry

Van Wijhe – Local family-run paint company

17:00

End of conference and transfer to the railway station

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