On 26 February, Ms Maria-Luisa Cabral, Advisor in the President Cabinet, received Ms Véronique Willems Secretary General, and Ms Liliane Volozinskis, Director for Social Affairs and Vocational Education and Training of SMEunited.

The objective of the meeting was to discuss the role of SMEUnited in the Tripartite Social Summit and the Commission's work programme.

**Tripartite Social Summit**: SMEUnited voiced concerns that they are not placed at the same level with BusinessEurope and ETUC despite that SMEUnited is a recognised European social partner, has members from all EU Member States, (except from Czech Republic), and represents two third of employment in Europe. Their "second line" role is due to purely historic reasons: in 1998 the European Court of Justice rejected their case regarding their exclusion from the negotiating process for the agreement on the parental leave Directive. As a result they are kept in the second line ever since, and thus neither invited to speak in the beginning of the Tripartite Social Summit (TSS) nor to the TSS preparatory meetings. The TSS is the flagship of the European social dialogue therefore allowing SMEUnited intervening in the introductory session would send a strong signal to their members about the role they play in social dialogue at European level. However, SMEUnited recognised that the Commission consults them properly.

Ms Cabral recalled the President's views on the important role that small and medium sized enterprises play in the EU. Regarding the TSS, she showed openness to talk to SMEUnited again after the TSS on 16 March.

**Commission Work Programme**: SMEUnited raised three issues:

1. **Minimum wage**: SMEUnited is against having a directive in this area. Social partners will likely not enter into negotiations on this as the positions of employers and trade unions are too far from each other. Ms Cabral confirmed that the 2nd stage consultation would be launched later than planned, at the end of April, as requested by the social partners. All options for a legal instrument are on the table. The proposal would come after summer.

2. **Platform workers**: SMEUnited does not agree to dedicate so much attention at EU level to such a small group of people. The real issue is not if somebody is self-employed or worker but the fair business to business arrangement. They agree, however, that bogus self-employment is a concern. The social protection of self-employed is national competence and the EU should not intervene. Ms Cabral recalled that there are no predefined solutions and that the Platform work Summit in September should help shape the reflection on this issue.

3. **Pay transparency**: SMEUnited pleaded to exempt micro-enterprises from the initiative. Ms Cabral confirmed that the Gender Equality Strategy would be adopted by the College next week and an initiative would follow later in 2020. The dedicated hearing with social partners and the public
consultation will run in parallel in the summer. The Commission is aiming at a balanced proposal and ready to listen to stakeholders.

SMEUnited raised the importance of the capacity building of social partners and reminded that not all Member States consult social partners in the framework of the European Semester and that governments could use better the European Social Fund to improve the capacity of social partners.

SMEUnited recalled the request of new President of SMEUnited to meet President von der Leyen. The request will be considered.