



HEADLINES

EU / Social Affairs: Opt-out scrapped out by Employment Committee

The Employment Committee of the European Parliament debated and voted on the controversial report by Alejandro Cercas (Socialist, PES) earlier this week. Following an intense debate on Tuesday 19th April, MEP agreed on Wednesday to remove the opt-out from the 48-hour week, and supported the idea according to which hours spent on-call should be considered working time. The compromise report as adopted (by 31 votes to 14, with 1 abstention) differs significantly from the original Commission's proposal and is unlikely to be received by member states with enthusiasm.

Regarding the opt-out provision, the Employment Committee decided that the collective agreements allowing for employees to work longer working hours should be abandoned within 36 months after the new directive comes into force. The proposal put forward by the European Commission would in contrary keep the individual opt-out while tightening up the conditions for its application.

Regarding on call time, MEPs followed the EU Court's ruling which stated that time spent on call, even though not actively working should also be considered as proper "working time. They also suggested that hours of "inactive" working time could be calculated differently from normal active working hours. On this point, MEPs strongly disagreed with the Commission's draft.

These requirements made by the Employment Committee would be highly detrimental to small businesses. Indeed, the opt-out provides a crucial flexibility to small business and its removal will cost the EU thousands of jobs.

However these changes are not likely to be approved by some member states. The UK is supported by other Member States (mainly Slovakia and Malta) in its rejection of removing the opt-out, as well as of the idea of abandoning the possibility for individuals to opt out.

The report will now go to the May plenary session of the European Parliament.

See Cercas draft report

http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/PR/555/555686/555686en.pdf

EU / Internal Market : Rapporteur presents first part of report

On Tuesday 19th April Mrs Evelyne Gebhardt commented the first part of her report to the Internal Market and Consumer Affairs Committee. She highlight the need to have this directive in order to tackle the current obstacles in the internal Market for services, while defending her approach, which combines the replacement of the "country of origin principle" by the mutual recognition principle; harmonisation, and a focus on the "country of destination principle" (see also our Bulletin N°7).

Whereas socialist MEPs from France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Belgium welcomed the move in Mrs Gebhardt's approach, conservative and liberal MEPs strongly warned over its negative consequences for Europe's growth and jobs. Notably, Malcom Harbour MEP (EPP-ED, UK) said that

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abandoning the country of origin principle would not help tackling the 90 types of discriminatory barrier in national law that prevented free movement of services; and stressed that a maximum scope for this directive would be need to ensure a maximum of jobs creation. Mrs Harbour's views were echoed by several conservative MEPs (Mr Stubb MEP, Finland; Mr Würmeling MEP; Germany, Mr Lechner MEP, Germany) as well as liberals (Mrs Jäätteenmäki MEP, Sweden; Mrs Malmström MEP, Sweden; Mr Lamsdorff MEP, Germany and Mrs Thyssen MEP, Belgium). Toine Manders MEP (Liberals, NL) stressed that it would hypocritical to accept the enlargement and reject free competition from the new Member States at the same time.

Mrs Gebhardt report should be finalised for June, with a possible vote in plenary in October 2005.

See the 1st Part of the Rapporteur's draft report

http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/PR/562/562261/562261en.pdf

EU/ Competitiveness : CIP to enhance synergy of policies

The Commission launched on 6th April the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), a seven-year instrument that will help the EU achieve the Lisbon's goals, focusing on competitiveness, eco-innovation, energy efficiency and renewables and accelerating the information society, with a special attention to SMEs. More than 4 billion euros should be available for actions during the next budgetary 2007-2013 period.

The CIP consists of three sub-programmes:

- The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme, which includes activities in the areas of entrepreneurship, SMEs, industrial competitiveness and innovation;
- the ICT Policy Support Programme, which will promote the speedy adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs)
- The Intelligent Energy-Europe Programme, designed to accelerate the uptake and promotion of energy efficiency and to increase awareness-raising of renewable energy sources.

More info http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/cip/index_en.htm

EU / Research : 7 scientific leaders urge on creating “competitive research climate”

Seven European intergovernmental scientific research organisations have expressed their views on how to boost European research and get closer to the Lisbon goals. The EIROforum which gathers seven influent scientific intergovernmental scientific research organisations (CERN, EFDA, EMBL, ESA, ESO, ESRF and ILL) presented its view on how to create a climate that would allow for efficient, costin Europe where competitive research can be undertaken in an efficient, cost-effective and successful way.

EIROforum's views, which corroborate the Commission's FP7 proposal, include greater visibility for science in Europe; attracting young people in science through a 'Partnership for science education' initiative; setting up a European research council (ERC) with "significant funds"; improving the use of and access to European research infrastructure, and the development of a new generation of large research infrastructure of common interest.

More info :

<http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/456&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

IN BRIEF

EU / Education : Europe's brainpower key to Lisbon Strategy, says Commission.

The European Commission has adopted a Communication on "Mobilising the brainpower of Europe: enabling universities to make their full contribution to the Lisbon Strategy".

With this text, accompanied by a Commission Staff Working Paper on "European Higher Education in a Worldwide Perspective", the Commission wants to make sure that universities play a key role in the fulfilment of the Lisbon agenda. They also have to actively address current challenges in order to remain competitive and close the gap with non EU universities. "Knowledge and innovation are the engines of sustainable growth in Europe today, said Ján Figel', Commission for Education and Training.

For further information see:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/lisbon_en.html

EU / Regions: Mutual Learning Platform to boost knowledge & training in regions

The European Commission has launched a Mutual Learning Platform (MLP) for research and innovation in EU regions. This platform, a joint initiative of the Commission's Enterprise and Industry, Research, Regional Policy and Information Society DGs, with an active involvement of the CoR, is designed to encourage regional policy makers to share their experiences and enable regions to participate fully in the knowledge-based society. It pulls together a number of existing initiatives such as regional foresight activities, the European Innovation TrendChart and Scoreboard, and the Regions of Knowledge pilot actions.

More information : http://www.innovating-regions.org/network/presentation/mlp_details.cfm

EU / Call for tender: Helping SMEs manage innovation

European Commission DG for Enterprise and Industry has published a call for tender aimed at helping enterprises' needs to manage innovation and transfer entrepreneurial ideas into commercial success. This call for tender aims to enhance business consultancy in the field of innovation management and, through provision of new and better tools and further dissemination of best practice solutions, develop support for national and regional institutions (IRC's, development agencies, chambers of commerce, etc) in their efforts to improve the innovation management capabilities of European SMEs

The call will be open until 31st May 2005 and the total available budget is euro 5m.

To access more information : http://dbs.cordis.lu/cordis-cgi/srchidadb?CALLER=open_tender

EU / SMEs : How to find the right business partner?

A new website offers European SMEs in-depth information on how the Pan European Business Co-operation Schemes (PES) can help them find the right business partner. Supported by the European Commission, the PES are implemented by the EIC Network and Eurada and encompass 6 projects involving more than 100 partners from 30 European countries.

Read more about PES on <http://eic.cec.eu.int/PES>

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CONSULTATIONS

- **EU regulation on origin marking (“made in”)**

The Commission is examining the possibility of developing an EC regulation on origin marking (“made in...”) with regard to some imported industrial products. This regulation would impose a compulsory mark indicating the name of the country of origin (“made in Country X”) for certain products when imported in the EC. You are invited – as an organisation or as an individual - to give your opinion on an EC regulation on origin marking.

Closes 30 April 2005

Further information: <http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/forms/dispatch?form=401>

- **Aviation and climate change**

The European Commission has launched an internet consultation on reducing the climate change impact of aviations. There are questionnaires for both individual citizens & organisations.

Closes 6 May 2005

Further information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/climat/aviation_en.htm

- **EU / Consultation on cross border mergers and acquisitions**

A new survey has been launched by the Commission to find out why there is little cross-border consolidation in the financial sector and what the obstacles are to EU cross-border mergers and acquisitions. The consultation is open to all interested stakeholders in the financial sector. The results will serve as an input for a report expected from the Commission in September.

Closes 15 June 2005

One line questionnaire : <http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/forms/dispatch?form=405>

Q&A :

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/05/131&format=HTML&aged=0&language=en&guiLanguage=en>

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important Dates

25-26 April	General Affairs & External Relations Council
27-24 April	European Parliament Mini-Plenary Session, Brussels
9-12 May	European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg
23 May	General Affairs & External Relations Council
23-24 May	Education, Youth & Culture Council
25-26 May	European Parliament Mini-Plenary Session, Brussels
2-3 June	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council

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2-3 June	Justice & Home Affairs Council
6-7 June	Competitiveness Council
6-9 June	European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg
7 June	Economic & Financial Affairs Council

Other SME related Events

27 April	SME Software Patents Discussion, European Parliament, Brussels Organised by SME Union.- Further information: http://www.sme-union.org/
28 April	Working breakfast with Commissioner Verheugen Brussels, Belgium - Organised by SME Union Further information: http://www.sme-union.org/
11-13 May	International Training Program on Intellectual Property and Management of Innovation in SMEs - Geneva, Switzerland - Organised by WIPO & INSME Further information: http://www.wipo.int/sme/en/activities/meetings/forthcoming_events/index.htm
12-13 May	6 th International Conference on Corporate Governance Nuffield Hall, Regents Park, London Further information: http://www.wcfcg.net/iccg/iccg.htm
19-20 May	e-Learning Conference “Towards a Learning Society?” - Brussels, Belgium Organised by DG Enterprise - Pre-registration open until 14 March - Further information & to register: http://www.elearningconference.org
26-27 May	European Conference on Innovation and e-Business - Brussels, Belgium Organised by DG Enterprise - Further information: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/innovation/e-business_en.htm#practical_information
29-31 May	12th Annual Conference on the role of Banks, Financial and Economics Institutions in the promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises Amman, Jordan – Organised by the Arab Academy for Banking and Financial Sciences (AABFS) - For further information email: conferences@aabfs.org
31 May – 3 June	Green Week Conference 2005 – “Get to Grips with Climate Change” Brussels, Belgium - Organised by DG Environment For further information & to register to participate: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/greenweek/index_en.htm
15-16 June	Annual Conference on the European Charter for Small Enterprises Luxembourg - Organised by the European Commission & Luxembourg Presidency http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/events/charter/conf_2005.htm
23-24 June	ESBA Annual Event – Brussels, Belgium – More information to come soon

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