



HEADLINES

EU/ Social Affairs : Working Time Proposal discussed in Parliament

On Wednesday 6th October the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs held the first debate on the proposed revision of the Working Time Directive (see the ESBA Bulletin n° 17 for more information). Mrs Quintin, Director of the Commission DG Employment and Social Affairs, presented the proposal as being a balanced text improving both flexibility and the security of workers.

Liz Lynne (ALDE, UK) expressed strong reservations on aspects of probationary periods, the issue of inactive on-call time and the definition of autonomous workers. M. Bushill Matthews (EPP-ED, UK) was concerned that the proposal could worsen existing directive. Several MEPs, including A. Cercas (PES, Spain, Rapporteur), S. Hughes (PES, UK) and Ilda Figueredo (GUE/NGL, Portugal) expressed their disappointment about a new proposal that would increase competitiveness at the expense of worker's protection.

The Council also held a first exchange of views on the working time proposal. Whereas some delegations welcomed the proposal as it would improve legal certainty in this area, some others expressed fears that it will damage flexibility. Discussions will focus on the length of the reference period, the definition of working time, and the conditions of applications of the "opt-out clause". The Presidency's objective is to reach a political agreement on a draft Directive at the 6/7th December Council.

[More info](#)

EU / Competitiveness: Dutch Presidency pushes forward better regulation

On October 8th the Dutch Presidency organised a conference "Simple is Better – Effective Regulation for a competitive Europe", where the issues of better regulation and concrete cases for simplification were debated. Dutch Minister Zalm enhanced the Dutch Presidency's commitment to reduce administrative burden, an approach based on the three following elements: Developing, together with the Commission, a method to measure the administrative burden at EU level; coordinating the inputs provided by Member States for the simplification program; and pushing for more efficient procedures when it comes to simplification proposals.

The Netherlands already has implemented measures to reduce the administrative burden by 25% by 2007. According to a study by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Analysis, coordinated measures to address administrative burden at EU level could lead to a structural increase of 1.7% GDP.

At the next ECOFIN Council on the 21st October, Ministers are expected to agree on building blocks for a common assessment method of the potential burden for businesses complying with legislation. They are also expected to ask the Commission to organise pilot projects to start applying the common method by the first half of 2005. This scheme is part of a joint initiative on regulatory reform launched in January by the four presidencies holding office in 2004 and 2005 (Ireland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the UK).

[More](#)

[info](#)

EU / Institutions : New Commissioner for Enterprise put competitiveness first

Günther Verheugen was audited by the European Parliament on 30th September. He confirmed that the new Commission will make the Lisbon strategy and European competitiveness one of its core projects. However, he believes that the main responsibility for boosting competitiveness remains with the Member States, and therefore called for a reinvigorated open co-ordination to facilitate the exchange of information on successful national policies.

Mr. Verheugen also claimed that SMEs were a “major priority” for him. Representing one third of Europe’s jobs, he believes they are key due to their adaptable and flexible nature and he plans to work to enhance their innovation capacity. He also confirmed that the Commission backed the Basel II banking reforms but would ensure that their implementation would not hinder SMEs.

[Verheugen’s written answers to Parliament questionnaire](#)

EU / SMEs : Corporate Social Responsibility Campaign launched in Brussels

On 12th October the Enterprise DG of the European Commission officially launched the Pan-European awareness campaign on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for SMEs. The campaign will run from October until June next year, with 65 events taking place in the local languages of all member states, candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and Norway. A toolkit is available, including case studies, an awareness-raising questionnaire, and a guide to communicating about CSR.

The campaign will focus on SMEs that have undertaken CSR practices, in order to illustrate how other small businesses can integrate CSR in a more systematic way, communicate better on CSR and draw more benefits on it. Indeed, already many SMEs are involved in CSR activity but are not always aware of its business benefits. According to Pedro Ortún from the Commission’s DG Enterprise, we need to differentiate better between small and big firms when addressing the CSR challenge. The CSR approach, says Ortún, should remain a voluntary one.

[More information](#) on the Awareness Campaign on CSR for SMEs

IN BRIEF

EU / SMEs: Consultation on National Charter reports 2004

European and national business organisations are invited to comment on the content of the 2004 national reports on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises. The Commission will use the inputs when drafting its next annual Charter Implementation Report. The deadline for Consultation is Friday 29th October.

The comments will also be published on the Internet. The European Charter for Small Enterprises, adopted by the Council in 2000, calls upon Member States and the Commission to take action to support small enterprises in ten key areas, including education for entrepreneurship, better regulation and availability of skills which are the priority areas for 2004.

[See the consultation](#)

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EU / Entrepreneurs: Self-employment more accessible ?

A recent report released by the European Commission's Enterprise Directorate-General underlines that the positive action taken by Member States to improve the legal environment for employees willing to become self-employed, can have a clear impact on their decision.

The report summarises the findings from a series of expert meetings held in 2003 and 2004 and analyses the obstacles that might make the change from dependent employee to self-employed business owner particularly difficult. It also provides an individual assessment of the situation for each of the countries that participated in the project (Denmark, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Norway and Turkey).

The report is available [here](#)

EU / SMEs: Report on how to avoid business failure

A new report released by the European Federation of Accountants outlines the major causes for business collapse and provides some guidance on how to reduce the risk of collapsing. The report stresses key factors for business failure, which include overdependence on a single customer, lack of planning and budgeting systems, or fraudulent collusion between employers and suppliers. The report encourages small firms to implement forecasting and budgeting systems and performance indicators. Also, small firms should not hesitate to commission a voluntary audit of financial statements even when statutory audits are not legally required.

[Read more](#)

EU / Enterprise: New report on the impact of e-business on the economy

The third edition of the report “e-Business W@tch” has been published. The 230-page report offers an analysis of how European firms use information and communication technologies (ICT) to transform their business processes in 10 sectors. It is available in paper and electronic (CD-Rom) versions.

[More info](#)

EU / Standardisation : Workshop on promoting use of standardisation as a policy instrument

On 14th October the European Commission General organised an educational workshop for national administrations, agencies and interested in standardisation as a tool to support policies and legislation. Held on the World Standards Day, an event annually organised at the request of the international standards bodies ISO (International Standards Organisation) and the IEC (International Electro-technical Committee) the workshop focused on how to increase awareness and understanding of European standardisation among Member States' governments, public authorities and the European Commission itself.

[Read More](#)

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CONSULTATIONS

DG Enterprise National Charter Reports Closing Date 29 October

The Commission has invited European and national business organisations, as well as other interested stakeholders, to comment on the content of the 2004 national reports on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/charter/charter2005.htm

DG Environment Action on Climate Change Post 2012 Closing Date : 31 October 2004

The Commission has launched a consultation to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to submit their views on how the future global climate change regime should be shaped and what the EU's contribution to this should be. The aim of this consultation is to assist the Commission in identifying important issues for consideration in preparing its report for the spring 2005 European Council.

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

General Secretariat Review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy Closing Date : 31 October 2004

The aim of this consultation is to gather your views on the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS), its past achievements, and where the EU should take it from here. The consultation describes the EU SDS as adopted in 2001 and asks a number of questions on its scope, content and achievements.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/sustainable/pages/consult_en.htm

DG Internal Market Copyright and Related Rights Closing Date 31 October 2004

The review is aimed at updating the legislative framework in the field of copyright and related rights, increasing its consistency and also simplifying the provisions. In addition, there is a need to analyse whether this framework still contains shortcomings which have a negative impact on the functioning of the Internal Market. In this case, additional harmonisation measures may have to be envisaged.

Within the framework of the review, the Commission is now launching a consultation of all interested parties along the basis of a working paper. The consultation aims to complete the legal analysis and allow further assessment of the impact of possible changes.

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/copyright/docs/review/sec-2004-995_en.pdf

COMING UP

EU Institutions : Important Dates

- 21 October ECOFIN Council (Luxembourg)
- 21 October Meeting of Parliaments Conference of President's - Commission President-

designate José Manuel Barroso will respond to the EP's assessments of

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nominee Commissioners

- 25-28 October European Parliament Plenary Session (Strasbourg)
- 27 October Election of the European Commission (Strasbourg)
 - 29 October Heads of state and government meet for the signing of the EU constitution, Rome
 - 1 November New Commission begins five-year term
 - 5-6 November European Council – Heads of State and Government meet in Brussels
- 12 November Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumers Council (Brussels)
- 15-18 November European Parliament Plenary in Strasbourg
- 16 November ECOFIN Council (Brussels)
- 25-26 November Competitiveness Council: Single Market, Industry & Research

Other Events

- 12 November High-level European workshop to present good national and regional policies
for stimulating the competitiveness of the ICT sector (More info & registration:
<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/news/index.htm>)
- 16 November workshop on "Environmental Aspects and European Standardisation" (DGs Enterprise and Environment), Slovenia – (More info: <http://www.albatros-bled.com/sist-seminar/en-index.html>)
- 5-7 December 4th European Forum for Innovative Enterprises, Stuttgart (More info: www.fourthforum.org)