



HEADLINES

EU / TAXATION Malmo 21/04/2001: Member States remain divided on future EU strategy

The EU Finance Ministers had an initial discussion on the future cooperation on taxes during their informal meeting last weekend. The conclusions of this debate confirmed earlier indications that progress in this field is unlikely in the near future (see ESBA WEEKLY - Vol 3 - N 10) as the Member States remain divided over the way in which to achieve greater coordination (via competition and/or harmonisation). To make the work of the Council in this field more efficient, the Member States seem to agree that better coordination could be achieved via a different sub-group than the Coreper. The Swedish Presidency proposal to create a permanent high level group on taxes was welcomed by most Member States but they are still far from an agreement. Among several other issues, the meeting also discussed energy taxation, a question blocked since the end of the German Presidency. The Swedish Presidency would like to speed up the drafting of an energy tax directive, which should lead to a common structure for energy taxation, but little progress was made as several countries. The Ministers agreed to define the structure of taxation before debating the setting of rates.

ESBA URGES MEMBER STATES TO ACHIEVE RAPID PROGRESS IN THIS FIELD AS THE WHOLE CURRENT TAXATION SYSTEM IS TOO COMPLEX RESULTING IN UNFAIR TREATMENT OF SMALL BUSINESSES. ESBA REQUESTS MEMBER STATES TO FIND THE RIGHT POLICY MIX BETWEEN TAX COMPETITION AND HARMONISATION AND CALLS FOR A POLICY OF FAIR TAX COMPETITION BETWEEN MEMBER STATES AS A MEANS TO REDUCE AND SIMPLIFY TAXATION.

EU / TRANSPARENCY Brussels 25/04/2001: EU reaches agreement on public access of documents

Via the co-decision procedure, the Council and the European Parliament agreed on a compromise on the issue of public access to the documents of the EU institutions. The European Parliament and the Council still have to vote formally on its adoption. By Community law citizens will now have in principle the right to access all categories of documents, including internal working material and defence documents. However, the relevant EU institutions may refuse access based on defined provisions on secrecy. If a request is refused, the applicant will have the right to appeal to the European ombudsman or to the Court of Justice. Whereas the EU institutions argue that the new rules will significantly improve citizens' access to EU documents, many NGOs were very critical on what has been achieved and how this has been achieved.

For more information:

<http://www.statewatch.org/secreteurope.html>

http://www.eu2001.se/eu2001/news/news_read.asp?iInformationID=14361

EU / HEALTH AND SAFETY Bilbao 25/04/2001: Launch of SME Accident Prevention Funding Scheme

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is organising a €5 million initiative to reduce work-related accidents in SMEs. The Agency issued a call for project proposals providing grants for the provision and dissemination of effective good practice examples, training and education schemes and information and communication projects. The budget for the new scheme was allocated to the Agency by a decision of the European Parliament at the end of last year. Accident statistics show that

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yearly about 4.5 million accidents occur in the workplace and over 5,500 people are killed in workplace accidents, with small enterprises facing double incidence rates for fatal accidents compared to larger companies. Accident prevention is also the theme of this year's European Week for Safety and Health at Work (an information campaign designed to raise awareness and promote activities to make Europe a safe and health place to work), which is being coordinated by the European Agency and will run in Member States in October 2001.

More information:

<http://osha.eu.int/ew2001/>

EU / TELEWORK Brussels 26/04/2001: Commerce sector signs EU-wide agreement

The social partners (Eurocommerce for the employers and Uni-Europa commerce as trade union) in the commerce sector (EU's largest sector, employing 16% of the total workforce) agreed on concrete guidelines for regulating telework through collective agreements and other arrangements, giving home-based workers the same statute as any other employee. It is the first agreement on teleworking after the European Commission submitted a set of proposed guidelines to form the practical framework for possible formal negotiations between social partners on the matter. Horizontal negotiations on teleworking have so far not been launched (see ESBA WEEKLY - Vol 3 - N 16).

Details of the agreement:

http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/01/616|0|RAPID&lg=EN

UPCOMING EVENTS Noordwijk aan Zee (NL) 10&11/05/2001: Concerted action seminar on Business Failure; Theme: Business failure, Entrepreneurship, Good practices. Info: <http://www.ez.nl/businessfailure/index.htm> Brussels (B) 29/05/2001: Make it simple!; Theme: Enterprise Policy, SMEs, regulations. Info: <http://www.unice.org> Lisbon (P) 18&19/06/2001: New strategies for improved health in SME, role of social partners, policy developments and creating supportive environments: Info: http://www.bkk.de/gesundheit/health_at_work