



HEADLINES

EU/Administrative Burden: EU to publish report on progress on cutting red tape

On 7 December, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso is expected to meet Edmund Stoiber, Chairman of the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burden (HLG) to discuss the progress on cutting the red tape in the European Union. Only a small minority of all proposals based on recommendations by the HLG have made it through the decision making procedure. The vast majority however is stuck in Parliament or Council, keeping good proposals from reaching their intended beneficiaries: SMEs. The meeting between Barroso and Stoiber is expected to result in a progress report, to be published in the near future.

ESBA Opinion

There are 23 million SMEs in the EU; the total cost of regulation on these businesses is estimated at 123.8 billion Euros or 3.5 per cent of EU GDP. It takes each SME on average seven hours a week to comply with this administrative burden. Partly as a result of this 1,700,000 SMEs fail every year in the EU, that's nearly 5,000 every day. These figures are truly staggering. For this reason, ESBA has initiated a Written Declaration in the European Parliament, which has been tabled for adoption last month, reminding the institutions of their commitment towards reducing red tape, and facilitating the execution of these commitments. ESBA strongly urges MEPs to sign the declaration as a sign of good will and a step in the right direction.

To learn more about the High Level Group on Administrative Burden, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the Written Declaration, please visit: www.actionnotwords.org

EU/Maternity Leave: Council refuses Parliament's demand for 20-week maternity leave

On 6 December, the Council met for its first policy debate on the issue of maternity leave. The majority of the EU ministers do not view the version as amended by the European Parliament as a realistic basis for a compromise. The increase of maternity leave to 20 weeks on mandatory full pay was particularly difficult to digest by the Member States. The Council is much more inclined to take the European Commission's original proposal as a vantage point for further discussion. By the end of this year, the Belgian Presidency will have prepared a document which will serve as the basis for discussion together with the upcoming Hungarian and Polish Presidencies. Furthermore, the Council has expressed its desire to include the EU Social Partners in the discussion. The aim is to have political agreement by the end of 2011.

ESBA Opinion

The European Small Business Alliance welcomes the Council's conclusions, as ESBA has been an unambiguous opponent to the European Parliament's report. ESBA President Tina Sommer said: "We all want adequate, flexible maternity leave but it should be for governments in dialogue with parents and their employers to decide how much their economy can afford to give and how it is to be delivered. These proposals should be about setting minimum EU standards for the health and safety of pregnant workers - not adding new payroll costs for overburdened companies and national social security systems".

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To read more about the Conclusion of the Employment and Social Affairs Council of 6 December, please click [here](#)

IN BRIEF

EU/Invoicing: E-invoicing to become the most common method of payment by 2020

On 2 December, the European Commission in its Communication on e-invoicing outlined its intention to foster e-invoicing among businesses in the European Union and make it the principal method of billing by 2020. As the current penetration of e-billing is rather low especially among small businesses, the document lists several actions to improve the situation. Among its key priorities, the Commission intends to improve the legal environment to enable simple cross-boarder e-invoicing and highlights the importance of an EU standard for this. In order to facilitate the mass uptake of e-invoicing, the Commission foresees the establishment of national forums by mid-2011 to be complemented by a multi-stakeholder forum at European level by 2013.

To read the Communication ‘Reaping the benefits of electronic invoicing for Europe’, please click [here](#)

EU/Digital Agenda: Statistics show increase in broadband speeds and subscriptions

On 25 November, the European Commission disclosed the results of its annual statistics on broadband connections in the European Union. The findings show that the level of broadband take up continued to grow annually by 8% on average with mobile broadband connection increasing swiftly. The data shows that a subscription of almost one third of European households to broadband speeds of at least 10 Mbps has been achieved. Although all growth is positive, the ambitious targets of 100% broadband penetration in the EU by 2013 and increased subscription to fast and ultra fast internet by 2020, as set out in the Digital Agenda for Europe, are far from being achieved. The Commission confirmed that more action on the EU and national level is required.

To read the Communications Committee Working Document, please click [here](#)

EU/Public Procurement: Study unveils obstacles for SMEs in public procurement

On 25 November, the European Commission published a report examining the participation of European SMEs in public procurement. A comparison of their overall weight in the economy to the value of public contracts they secure unveils considerable discrepancies. The study also reveals that it remains difficult for micro-enterprises to obtain a public procurement contract. It highlights a number of hurdles to be tackled in order to improve the access of small enterprises to public tenders. So as to increase their participation, the analysis stresses the prerequisite of procedural simplification and improvement of the tools used to deliver the necessary information.

To read the final report on ‘Evaluation of SMEs’ access to public procurement markets in the EU’, please click [here](#)

EU/Patents: Enhanced co-operation to put pressure on Italy

On 25 November, during the Competitiveness Council, it was concluded that Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Estonia will ask the Commission for assistance on creating an enhanced cooperation agreement regarding the patent. Other Member States will be welcome to join in. This development is the result of a series of unsuccessful negotiations, led by the Belgian presidency of the EU, during which unanimity regarding a single EU Patent could not be achieved. Although a considerable number of amendments had been tabled, Italy refused to change its position on the ongoing language issue. Spain, on the other hand, has changed its position and no longer insists on Spanish as an official language for the patent. The

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proposal for enhanced co-operation, requiring the involvement of at least nine Member States, will be debated further during the next Competitiveness Council on 10 December.

To read the European Commission's proposal on the Translation Arrangement for the European Union patent, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the conclusions of the Competitiveness Council of 25th November, please click [here](#)

EC/Hazardous substances: MEPs approves Revised Directive on Hazardous Substances

On 24 November, the European Parliament voted in favour of the revised Directive on the Restriction of Hazardous Substances in Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) which updates the existing legislative. The amended Directive broadens the scope to include *all* electronic and electrical appliances with an eight-year transitional period applicable to new items. The draft legislation introduces a listing of new restricted substances which will be subjected to review three years after publication of the new legislation. The Council will now have to formally adopt the revised Directive which is expected to become effective by mid-2012.

To read the position adopted by the Parliament at first reading, please click [here](#)

EU/Europe 2020: EU unveils plans to reform future EU labour market

On 23 November, the European Commission presented its flagship initiative 'An Agenda for new skills and job' which targets a 75% employment rate to be achieved over the next decade. It addresses plans focused on ensuring better working conditions, balancing skills supply with labour demand, facilitating job creation and improving job markets. The Commission foresees a revision of the health and safety at work legislation as well as the Working Time Directive to guarantee enhanced quality of working conditions. The plan includes an incentive to initiate an online database to increase job prospects of young people by forecasting future job demand. The 13 points identified in this flagship initiative are expected to be put into action by 2014.

To learn more about 'An Agenda for new skills and jobs', please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: 'Employment in Europe 2010'

The European Commission issued an annual publication which analyses changes in the EU labour market, especially with regards to the crisis. It evaluates employment policies at national and European level and outlines future challenges and opportunities.

To download this publication, please click [here](#)

OECD: 'Transition to a low-carbon economy'

This publication issued by OECD analyses regulations and policies which address the necessity of a transition to a low-carbon economy. It also examines the responses of the business community to these measures and suggests tools to be exploited in order to achieve the best EU-wide results.

To download this publication, please click [here](#)

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CONSULTATIONS

NEW

Public consultation on disclosure of non-financial information by companies

Closes: 24 January 2011

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the disclosure of corporate social and environmental information by enterprises with the aim of improving reliability and transparency.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

Consultation on the Review of Rescue and Restructuring aid Guidelines

Closes: 2 February

The European Commission issued a consultation which is targeted at collecting views from businesses and financial institutions regarding their experiences with rescue and restructuring aid, especially during the financial crisis.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

Consultation on the future harmonisation of numbering resources for the provision of business services

Closes: 28 February 2011

The European Commission has launched a public consultation which aims to gather opinions from businesses, customers, telecoms operators and public authorities on possibility of using a single business telephone number within the European Union.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

Consultation on the 'Green Paper on the future of VAT– Towards a simpler, more robust and efficient VAT system'

Closes: 31 May 2011

The European Commission has launched a consultation which aims to assess the current VAT system at the European and national level. The intention is to transform it into a more efficient and transparent system that would respond to the needs of the European single market.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

ONGOING

Consultation on the Green Paper on expanding the use of e-Procurement in the EU

Closes: 31 January 2011

The Commission has launched a consultation on how e-procurement could be used more extensively in order to simplify the process of public procurement and enable parties from different Member States to take part in the procedure. The aim is to find possible ways which would facilitate faster introduction of e-procurement enhancing transparency and efficiency.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

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Green Paper from the Commission on policy options for progress towards a European Contract Law for consumers and businesses

Closes: 31 January 2011

The European Commission has issued a green paper on how the internal market could be strengthened by making progress in the area of European Contract Law. The Commission is interested in collecting opinions and suggestions from citizens, organizations and public authorities.

To access the consultation please click [here](#)

Public consultation on a possible successor to the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP)

Closes: 4 February 2011

The European Commission has launched a public consultation which aims to identify the key issues for the CIP II Programme. It strives to find ways to better support SMEs, reinforce competitiveness and innovation, and stimulate wider utilisation of ICT tools across the EU.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

Consultation on the Single Market Act

Closes: 28 February 2011

The European Commission has launched a consultation on 50 proposals included in the Single Market Act which was published on 27 October. The main objective of the consultation is to gather opinions from citizens and organisations in order to identify priorities for implementation.

To access the online consultation, please click [here](#)

Online consultation on administrative burdens reduction

Ongoing

The European Commission has launched an online consultation on the reduction of administrative burdens. Inspired by examples of Best Practice in Belgium and the Netherlands, the consultation invites entrepreneurs to identify unnecessary red tape in order to help the EU improve the quality of its legislation. The consultation is part of the Action Programme to reduce admin burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012.

To access this consultation, please click [here](#)

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

7 December 2010 – Economic & Financial Affairs Council

8 December 2010 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

10 December 2010 – Competitiveness Council

13 – 16 December 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

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13 – 16 December 2010 – European Parliament Plenary Session

14 December 2010 - Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

16 – 17 December 2010 – European Council

Other SME-related events

Youth Summit on Green Entrepreneurship

8 December 2010

Brussels, Belgium

The Generation Europe Foundation will gather young people, entrepreneurs, policymakers and researchers to discuss the opportunities regarding 'green entrepreneurship'. The event will offer a platform for an exchange of views by different groups involved in 'green projects' and will aim to encourage young people to participate in a sustainable future.

<http://www.eutrio.be/generation-europe-foundation-youth-summit-green-entrepreneurship>

Information and Networking days "SME initiative on Digital Content"

9 December 2010

Budapest, Hungary

The European Commission is organising an event to gather proposals for a Call on 'SME Initiative on Digital Content'. The aim of the event is to provide an opportunity for participants to meet potential partners, acquire information and get feedback on ideas from the European Commission.

http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/content-knowledge/events-201011-12-ict-callsme-infodays_en.html

Single Market Award

10 December 2010

Brussels, Belgium

The Belgian Presidency of the European Union in cooperation with the European Commission is organising an event to highlight the essence of the European Single Market. During the event, companies, citizens and organizations will be granted an award for contributing to the improvement of the single market.

<http://www.eutrio.be/single-market-award-demonstrating-usefulness-single-market-citizens-europe>

Future Internet Conference Week

13 – 17 December 2010

Gent, Belgium

A series of conferences, seminars and workshops organized under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union will focus on the significance of rapid development of the EU internet infrastructure.

<http://www.fi-week.eu/>

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