



HEADLINES

EU/Small Business Act: Belated revision of Small Business Act to be published in February

A publication of the revised Small Business Act for Europe, initially planned for December 2010, has been postponed several times by the European Commission. A draft document that circulated in December was allegedly withdrawn for its lack of ambition and concrete measures and targets. The Commission acknowledges in the text that in some cases Member State involvement leaves something to be desired. A high quality final document is crucial for European small businesses that have been hit hard by the crisis and are in need of immediate actions at European and national level. The final document is expected to be published by the end of February.

ESBA Opinion

The 2008 Small Business Act for Europe has been the main SME policy framework for the past years. Although much can and should be improved, ESBA welcomes the Commission's initiative to further develop the framework by means of a review of the Small Business Act, to which ESBA has actively contributed. However, besides the delays, the contents of a December draft were less than impressive. While the document comprises of a number of good ideas, it reads as a 'statement of good intent' rather than offering concrete proposals and showing real commitment. ESBA sincerely hopes for the final draft to be more substantial.

To read the Small Business Act for Europe, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the Small Business Act, please click [here](#)

EU/Finances: Common framework for venture capital to become a reality in EU

The European Commission is planning to design common rules for cross-border venture capital funds within two years which would improve the access of start-up SMEs to finance. Currently legal obstacles exist in venture capital lending across Member State borders as the legal and tax systems from country to country are fragmented. In light of the Eurozone and sovereign debt crisis, the EU-wide venture capital regime would be of a great importance for innovative SMEs across Europe whose access to credit is at present considerably limited and identified as one of the biggest obstacles in running a business. The plan is also set to contribute to innovation and improvement of European competitiveness on the world market.

ESBA Opinion

ESBA welcomes the Commission's efforts in promoting venture capital within the EU. The current legislative regime has made the EU unpopular with venture capitalists, who have geared their focus towards Asia and the United States. Access to finance remains one of the major obstacles for SMEs, who largely depend on bank loans at present. In light of Basel III and the upcoming 4th Capital Requirement Directive, which could inhibit banks from lending even further, alternative sources of SME finance are an absolute necessity.

ESBA Bulletin of 31 January 2011 – Volume 13 – Number 2

IN BRIEF

EU/Consumer Rights: Consumer Rights Directive

Tomorrow (1 February), Members of the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee (IMCO) will vote on the revised Consumer Rights Directive. Opinions on the matter differ among the groups in Parliament. On 24 January, EU ministers agreed on a general position for the dossier in which they endorsed harmonisation of consumer rights in distance and off-premises selling. Consumer groups fear that deleting certain parts of the original proposal aimed at unifying consumer rights in a single directive might result in an unsatisfactory level of consumer protection across the EU. If the draft report is adopted by the lead (IMCO) committee tomorrow, it is likely to be put to a plenary vote in March. The Hungarian presidency has emphasized that it will strive for agreement with the Parliament in first reading.

To read the Commission's proposal on the Consumer Rights Directive, please click [here](#)

To read the draft report by the European Parliament's committee responsible, please click [here](#)

EU/Services Directive: European Commission unveils action plan to tackle hurdles in Single Market for services

On 27 January, the European Commission presented a plan consisting of a series of actions to remove remaining barriers in the Single Market for services by 2012. Although the deadline for the implementation of the Services Directive was reached over a year ago, obstacles still exist in cross-border trade in services. Member States that have problems implementing certain parts of the Services Directive will be involved in bilateral dialogues with the Commission. An overall assessment of the effects of the Services Directive on the internal market is expected to be published in 2011.

To read the Commission's Communication 'Towards a better functioning Single Market for services – building on the results of the mutual evaluation process of the Services Directive', please click [here](#)

EU/EU Patent: MEPs endorse enhanced cooperation for unitary patent

On 27 January, the European Parliament's Legal Affairs committee gave its consent to the draft proposal on an enhanced cooperation agreement in the area of a unified EU patent. The procedure is a result of long-lasting unsuccessful negotiations during which unanimity could not be reached. The proposal will now have to be endorsed by the full Parliament in the next plenary session in Strasbourg and then approved by the Member States during the March 2011 Competitiveness Council.

To read the Draft recommendation by MEP Klaus-Heiner Lehne, please click [here](#)

To read the Commission's proposal on enhanced co-operation on EU patent, please click [here](#)

EU/Energy: EU Commissioner presents energy efficiency action plan

On 25 January, EU Commissioner for Energy Günther Oettinger presented an ambitious action programme targeted at improving competitiveness of the EU energy market. As a result of Member States' lagging behind the 20% reduction objective of EU energy consumption by 2020, he stressed that obligatory criteria for each EU country are necessary to accelerate efforts on energy efficiency. Likely to be discussed further during the February 2011 EU summit.

EU/Research and Innovation: EU simplifies rules for research funding

On 25 January, the European Commission introduced concrete simplification measures to the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7) with the aim of making it easier for more

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innovative businesses and researchers to access the EU research funding. After complaints uttered by FP7 participants, the EU has taken an action in decreasing accounting hurdles by dropping the requirement of a parallel accounting systems for EU research grant holders. It has also introduced flat rate payments for those entrepreneurs taking part in research projects that do not have formally recorded incomes. A steering group has been set up to eliminate discrepancies in the application of funding rules across the EU. Further simplification steps are expected after the consultation which is scheduled to be launched in spring 2011.

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: 'Financing Renewable Energy in the European Energy Market'

The European Commission has issued a publication that evaluates costs of renewable energy technologies to achieve the targets by 2020. It also reviews the existing and alternative support and financing instruments.

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

European Commission: 'Entrepreneurial Dimension of the Cultural and Creative Industries'

The European Commission's Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry published a study which intends to point out some major problems and obstacles for cultural and creative industries. The document also provides the main elements that could contribute to smooth functioning and growth of these industries.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW

Consultation on the modernisation of EU public procurement policy

Closes: 18 April 2011

The European Commission has launched a consultation with the aim of updating the European public procurement legislation. The purpose of the consultation is to find ways to make the process of public procurement more effective, less bureaucratic and easier for small and medium sized companies to access. Another major target is to link the environmental and innovation objectives with obtaining a public contract.

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](#)

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

Closes: 31 January 2011

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The European Commission's has launched a consultation on its Green Paper setting out a number of proposals for progressing towards a European Contract Law for consumers and businesses. The Commission is interested in collecting opinions and suggestions from citizens, organizations and public authorities.

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

Consultation on the Review of Rescue and Restructuring aid Guidelines *Closes: 2 February 2011*

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](#)

Public consultation on a possible successor to the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) *Closes: 4 February 2011*

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](#)

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](#)

Public consultation on Energy Roadmap 2050

Closes: 7 March 2011

The European Commission has issued a public consultation on the future energy policy. It seeks to gather contributions from relevant stakeholders and citizens on priorities of the EU energy policy to be taken into consideration in the Energy Roadmap 2050, scheduled for adoption in the second half of 2011.

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

ESBA Bulletin of 31 January 2011 – Volume 13 – Number 2

Consultation on the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution as a means to resolve disputes related to commercial transactions and practices in the European Union

Closes: 15 March 2011

The European Commission launched a public consultation on alternative dispute resolution schemes which aims to boost consumers' trust in cross-border shopping in the single market by guaranteeing easier, less expensive non-judicial dispute settlement between buyer and seller at EU level. The outcome of the consultation will constitute a basis for the legislative proposal due to be published in November 2011.

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](#)

Online consultation on administrative burdens reduction

On-going

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

2 February 2011 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

2 – 3 February 2011 – European Parliament Mini Plenary (Brussels)

4 February 2011 – EU Summit

9 February 2011 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

14 – 17 February 2011 – European Parliament Plenary Session (Strasbourg)

14 – 17 February 2011 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

Other SME-related events

The Single Market – Time to Act

8 February 2011

Brussels, Belgium

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The European Commission is organising a conference which forms a part of the public debate on the Single Market Act. It will focus to identifying obstacles and challenges in the European single market with the aim of finding the priority proposals to be adopted.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=4824&lang=en&tpa=0&displayType=calendar&ref=newsbytheme%2Ecfm%3Flang%3Den%26displayType%3Dcalendar%26fosuatype%3D%26tpa%3D0%26period%3Dlatest%26month%3D%26page%3D1

REACH for Downstream Users

9 February 2011

Brussels, Belgium

A conference organised by ReachCentrum will be dealing with new challenges after the registration of chemicals to REACH has been finalised in 2011. The focus will be put on the downstream users in the supply chain and their obligations relating to the next phase.

<http://www.reachcentrum.eu/en/workshops/reach-conferences/reach-for-downstream-users.aspx>