



HEADLINES

EU/Hearings: European Parliament to grill Commissioner designates

From 11 until 19 January, the European Parliament is conducting its hearings of the Commissioner designates, who were unveiled by Commission President Barroso on 27 November 2009. Each candidate faces a Q&A session by the Parliament Committee responsible for the relevant portfolio. Thus, on 13 January, the Commissioner designate for Internal Market and Services, Michel Barnier, is set for the hearing by the IMCO and ECON committees. Antonio Tajani, who returns to the new Commission with the Industry and Entrepreneurship portfolio, will face the ITRE Committee on 18 January. All the hearings can be followed live on an interactive website, specially created by the Parliament. The Parliament's final vote on the whole Commission is expected on 26 January.

ESBA OPINION

In the light of the upcoming hearings, ESBA calls on the European Parliament to test the candidates' knowledge of SME-relevant issues. In 2009, ESBA carried out a campaign in which it tested the newly elected MEPs. The results of the campaign have revealed some knowledge gaps as far as European SMEs are concerned. Since SMEs make up 99% of the EU economy, it is crucial that all policy-makers are aware of the problems and challenges they are facing. ESBA will closely monitor the European Parliament hearings and is keen to learn about the Commissioner designates' stance with regard to SMEs.

To test your knowledge of European SMEs, please click [here](#)

EU/Council Presidency: Spain at the helm of EU for the next 6 months

On 1 January, Spain took over the rotating 6-month EU Presidency from Sweden. Its top priorities include ensuring a smooth exit from the current economic crisis and the approval of the next EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the 'EU 2020' Strategy. In this light, on 7 January Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero proposed to set binding economic targets for all 27 EU Member States, with sanctions imposed on those who fail to comply. On the same day, Spain declared that the establishment of the European Systemic Risk Board (ESRB) would be its priority with regard to financial services supervision. Spain has closely coordinated its work with Belgium and Hungary, who have jointly elaborated the Trio Presidency Programme as dictated by the Lisbon Treaty.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes Spain as the next holder of the EU Presidency. Equally, it welcomes the country's commitment to the Better Regulation Agenda and the strengthening of SMEs' competitiveness, as outlined in the 'Trio Programme'. The Spanish Presidency's priority of exiting the crisis cannot be realised without paying sufficient attention to SMEs, who are crucial in order to put the EU economy back on track. In this light, attention should be paid to the full implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA), in particular the full application of the 'Think Small First' principle and better access to finance.

EU/Services Directive: 2010 marks a new era in EU services sector

On 28 December 2009, the Services Directive officially entered force in the Member States, after being ratified by the Parliament and the Council 3 years ago. It seeks to remove legal and

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administrative obstacles to allow service providers to be established freely and to enable the free movement of services between EU Member States. If fully implemented, the Directive is estimated to generate 60-140 billion Euros in economic benefits. However, despite the fact that the deadline for its transposition has passed, the Commission and the Parliament have raised concern that some Member States have failed to implement the Directive timely and correctly. The Commission is expected to conduct an evaluation of the Services Directive implementation and present its report at the end of 2010.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA urges the Member States to step up their efforts to ensure that the Services Directive is implemented into their respective domestic law fully, correctly, and as soon as possible. Equally, the Commission should stay fully committed to the effective monitoring of the implementation process and provide any assistance necessary. A more liberalized services sector can stimulate economic recovery and boost the Internal Market, with SMEs being the key beneficiaries of this process.

EU/Internal Market: New system to boost product safety and consumer confidence in the EU

As from 1 January 2010, the new Legislative Framework for the marketing of products is fully applicable throughout the EU. Adopted by the Council in June 2008, the new legal framework entails a broad package of measures (the so-called 'good package') to ease the sale of goods within the EU and to boost consumer choice and confidence. The legislative package has been introduced by the Commission within the framework of the revision of the New Approach Directives with the aim to tackle the outstanding obstacles to the free movement of goods in the EU. A strengthened market surveillance system as well as an improved system of accreditation will allow for products to circulate more freely within the Internal Market, while boosting the credibility of the CE-marking. The package also puts forward recommendations to facilitate the trade of goods, which are not subject to EU harmonization, as well proposing the establishment of Product Contact Points so that SMEs can obtain information about the law of the country in which they are seeking to sell their goods.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA supports the objectives set out in the new Legislative Framework and calls on Member States to fully implement the measures at national level. Removing barriers to trade enabling small businesses to trade across the Union, is a key driver of European growth and jobs. Whilst accreditation is often necessary for the quality control of goods, ESBA stresses, however, that it must not be allowed to create more red tape. The establishment of Product Contact Points represents a positive step toward improving legal certainty for SMEs trading abroad.

IN BRIEF

EU/Council President: Van Rompuy calls a special EU summit

On 4 January, Council President Herman Van Rompuy announced that he would hold an extraordinary economic summit on 11 February, which will focus on the exit from the current economic crisis and look at the future EU economic and social agenda. The EU summit will address the soaring unemployment across the EU and the dire state of public finances in the Member States. Earlier, Van Rompuy declared his top priorities for 2010 to be ensuring a stable recovery and consolidating public finances. He also stressed the importance of the 'EU 2020' Strategy in ensuring sustainable growth and jobs.

To access the Commission Working document on the future EU 2020 Strategy, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: “Impact of the economic crisis on key sectors of the EU – the case of the manufacturing and construction industries”

The Commission has published the December 2009 update of its monthly report that looks at the economic crisis ramifications across the EU industry. The December issue reports that the EU economy is showing signs of recovery, but the manufacturing output still remains low.

To download the Commission report, please click [here](#)

EIM: “Institutions and Entrepreneurship: The Role of The Rule of Law”

The publication looks at the entrepreneurship trends across the G20 countries, relating them to the financial and economic institutional structures in place. A surprising finding is revealed: the better the rule of law, the lower entrepreneurship development in the countries studied.

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

CONSULTATIONS

ONGOING:

Public Consultation on the final report of the Expert Group on e-Invoicing

The European Commission has launched a public consultation in relation to a report by the Expert Group on e-Invoicing published earlier this month. The consultation particularly welcomes contributions from SMEs, with the aim of collecting and analysing stakeholders’ opinions on the use of electronic invoicing.

To read more about the consultation and to access the questionnaire to be filled in by stakeholders, please click [here](#)

Public consultation on the EU 2020 Strategy

Closes on 15 January 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on its working document for the EU 2020 Strategy, which is to replace the current Lisbon Agenda due to expire next year. The document focuses on prosperous, green and socially inclusive growth. All interested parties are invited to send their suggestions to EU2020@ec.europa.eu.

To access the Commission working document and read more about the consultation, please click [here](#)

Public consultation on the International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities

Closes on 12 March 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the International Financial Reporting Standard for SMEs, with the aim of analysing the views of EU Stakeholders. The consultation is part of the review of the 4th and 7th Company Law Directives by the Commission Directorate-General for Internal Market and Services.

To read more about the consultation and to access the questionnaire to be filled in by stakeholders, please click [here](#)

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: important dates

11-19 January 2010: Commissioner designates' hearings in the Parliament, Brussels, Belgium

18-21 January 2010: Parliament convenes for its plenary in Strasbourg, France

Other SME-related events

18-20 January: The Centre for Research in Six Sigma and Process Excellence is organising the 2nd European Research Conference on Continuous Improvement & Lean Six Sigma to take place in Glasgow, UK. The event will bring together academics and industry representatives interested in deploying the Continuous Improvement initiatives, with the aim of improving operational performance of SMEs.

<http://www.strath.ac.uk/siom/conferences/siomfutureconferences/siomresearchconferencejanuary2010/>

8 February: The Commission is organising a conference on international developments in Accounting and Auditing to take place in Brussels, Belgium. The conference aims at stimulating a debate between policy-makers, regulators and entrepreneurs.

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fmi/scic/AudAC10/start.php>