



HEADLINES

EU/ Maternity leave: Council sticks to its guns

On 25 October, Deputy Minister of Labour Radoslaw Mleczko, spoke on behalf of the Polish Council Presidency in response to an oral question posted by European Parliament's Eva-Britt Svensson, representing the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Since the Parliament adopted its position on the issue of maternity leave on 20 October 2010, the Council has been in a deadlock.

In accordance with existing EU legislation, in force since 1992, female workers are entitled to take at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, partially at reduced pay (equivalent to 'sick pay') after they have a baby. In October 2008, the European Commission proposed an increase in the minimum level of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks. However, the European Parliament decided to push the envelope by increasing this period even further to 20 weeks at full pay. The Council's response was not to take the Parliament's position as a realistic basis for debate.

In attempt to break the deadlock, the FEMM Committee's oral question seeks compromise in the length of maternity leave as well as the payment ceiling. However, as the Parliament and Council still hold significantly diverging views on the matter, the Council in its response showed to feel no immediate hurry to push this issue through. "All the parties involved have the same goal [when supporting the rights of female workers] but look towards different directions", the Council states. The matter is likely to be transferred to agenda of the upcoming Danish Presidency.

ESBA Opinion

ESBA President Tina Sommer said: "ESBA supports the Council's resilience in the matter. 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."

To access the oral question, please click [here](#)

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

IN BRIEF

EU/ Public Procurement: Rules for public procurement should be more SME friendly

On 25 October 2011, the European Parliament voted for a revision of the current EU legislation for public procurement. One of the main aims is to make it easier for small companies to bid for these contracts. To alleviate the administrative burden on SMEs, the setup of an EU-wide "electronic procurement passport" was proposed. The Parliament wishes to move away from just awarding contracts to the lowest bidder, but rather to the most innovative, or to those who will propose the most substantial environmental and social benefits. The European Commission is now expected to table reform proposals in December.

To learn more about the current rules for public procurement, please click [here](#)

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To access the full report of the European Parliament on the modernisation of public procurement, please click [here](#)

EU/ CSR: new definition, more growth in Europe?

On 25 October the European Commission presented a set of measures aiming to encourage responsible business, facilitate social entrepreneurship, to cut red tape for SMEs and to generate a higher level of trust and consumer confidence. The package includes a revision of both the Transparency Directive (2004/109/EC) and the Accounting Directives (78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC) as well as a new communication on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) containing a new simpler definition and an agenda for action for the period 2011-2014 for Corporate Social Responsibility.

To read more on the Social Business Initiative, please click [here](#)

For the Commission's communication on Social Business Initiative, please click [here](#)

More information about the Commission's communication on Corporate Social Responsibility, can be found [here](#)

EU/ Digital Agenda: 9.2 billion to be invested in high speed broadband networks

On 19 October 2011, the European Commission proposed to allocate €9 billion towards investments in broadband infrastructure. One of the aims of the Digital Agenda for Europe is to provide every EU citizen with a high speed internet connection by 2020. By providing grants, equity and guarantees to loans, which will be part of the envisaged 'Connecting Europe Facility', the European Commission hopes to enhance public and private sector investments in order to achieve these broadband targets. At least €7 billion would be invested in high-speed broadband infrastructure.

To learn more about the Digital Agenda for Europe, please click [here](#)

For more information on the Connecting Europe Facility, please click [here](#)

EU/ Late Payments: Commission Vice-President Tajani calls for early transposition of Late Payments Directive

On 17 October 2011, European Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani announced he would send a letter to the Member States, asking for an early transposition of the Late Payments Directive. This directive regulates the period within which bills need to be paid, most notably with a 30 day time limit for public authorities. Late payments cause severe cash flow problems for small businesses. Since SMEs already face difficulties in accessing finance due to the crisis, early transposition would be highly welcomed.

To read more about the Commission's efforts on late payments, please click [here](#)

EU/ Internal Market: More effective cross-border recognition of professional skills

On 17 October 2011, the European Parliament Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) adopted a non-legislative report by MEP Emma McClarkin on the implementation of the Professional Qualifications Directive. Submitting its input to the Commission, who is looking to revise current EU legislation on cross-border mobility for professionals, the IMCO committee stated that Member States must recognise qualifications quicker. However, this must not happen at the expense of the reliability and security of its services to citizens. The report is scheduled for a vote in the European Parliament's Plenary on 15 November 2011.

To access the full report of the committee IMCO, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the professional qualifications directive, please click [here](#)

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PUBLICATIONS

EU/ Commission: Annual European competitiveness reports

European competitiveness is at the centre of analysis of the yearly competitiveness report of the European Commission. Its main focus is on recent changes of the EU's productivity growth, which is the key driver of competitiveness in the long run.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Unemployment in the Eurozone by September 2011

This publication unveils the latest figures on unemployment within the Euro area during 2011.

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

EU/ Eurostat: 2011 inflation rate in the Eurozone

This publication unveils the rate of inflation for October 2011 within the Euro area to will stay on 3 %, remaining, thereby, unaltered from September.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Industrial orders in the Eurozone rose in August 2011

This publication shows that industrial orders within the Euro area have risen by 1,9 % in August 2011 after sinking by 1,6 % in July the same year.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Business investment rate by 2nd quarter of 2011

This publication reveals that while business investment rate during the second quarter of 2011 within the Euro area has remained on the same level as in the first quarter of the year, it has increased within the EU 27 in total.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation on reducing CO2 emissions from road vehicles

Closes: 9 December 2011

This consultation seeks to collect opinions on EU strategy and options for reducing CO2 emissions from road vehicles.

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

Consultation on Directive 2006/114/EC concerning Misleading and Comparative Advertising and on unfair commercial practices affecting businesses

Closes: 16 December 2011

The European Commission is launching a public consultation to gather more information from companies and others affected on the nature and scale of the unfair practices, including online

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scams. Following the consultation, the Commission will then assess how best to stop rogue traders exploiting loopholes in the rules and make sure that legitimate traders are effectively protected.

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

ONGOING:

Online consultation on administrative burdens reduction

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, 10 November 2011 – European Parliament Committee Meetings
9 November 2011 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
14-17 November 2011 – European Parliament Committee Meetings
14-17 November 2011 – European Parliament Plenary Session
17 November 2011 – Governing Council of the European Central Bank
15 November 2011 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
21-23 November 2011 – European Parliament Committee Meetings
23 November 2011 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
29 November 2011 – European Parliament Committee Meeting
30 November 2011 – European Parliament Plenary Session
30 November 2011 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners

Other SME-related events

Conference: Modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive

7 November 2011

Brussels, Belgium

The modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive is one of the priorities for the EU under the Single Market Act. The Commission is committed to delivering a legislative proposal before the end of this year in order to meet the Act's ambitious objectives. To this end, an extensive evaluation of the Directive over the last year and a half culminated in a Green Paper PDF which set out ideas for enhancing the mobility of professionals in the Single Market. There has been large interest from stakeholders; we have received around 400 responses to the Green Paper. The Conference will be an opportunity to take stock of the various positions in advance of the Commission's proposal in December.

To learn more about this event, please click [here](#)

Private sector forum organised by the European Commission and the European Public-Private Partnership Expertise Centre (EPEC)

8 November 2011

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Brussels, Belgium

The Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission and the European PPP Expertise Centre (EPEC), in cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee, are organising the next meeting of the private sector forum.

To learn more about this event, please click [here](#)

Supporting SME and Enterprise Development through EU Programmes and Policies 17/18 November 2011

Brussels, Belgium

This event will focus on a vast number of policy fields (e.g. Small Business Act, State Aid), which constitute the framework for the development of enterprises. An overview of European programmes and funding opportunities for SMEs will also be provided.

To learn more about the event, please click [here](#)

3rd High-Level Conference on Industrial Competitiveness: "Delivering an Integrated Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era"

24 November 2011

Brussels, Belgium

The High-Level conference will take place approximately one year after the adoption by the Commission of the Europe 2020 flagship initiative on industrial policy, which puts forward a fresh approach to industrial policy and identifies the key actions to be implemented in order to maintain a strong, competitive and diversified industrial manufacturing value chain in the EU.

To learn more about the event, please click [here](#)

Conference: ICT Standards and Patents – the public authority and international perspective

24 November 2011

Brussels, Belgium

Throughout the world, public policies increasingly rely on innovative and interoperable ICT solutions to implement major projects for the benefit of society in domains such as e-Health, efficient energy use, cloud computing, integrated transport systems and smart grids.

To learn more about the event, please click [here](#)

Property taxation and enhanced tax administration in challenging times

24 November 2011

Brussels, Belgium

This workshop will discuss the potential of both property taxation and enhanced tax administration for addressing high consolidation needs, while optimising the impact on growth in response to key challenges on the current agenda of taxation policy.

To learn more about this event, please click [here](#)

Conference: Doing business made easier? Making the most of the "Points of Single Contact"

28 November 2011, 14.45-18.00

Brussels, Belgium

The conference will address these questions and explore the potential of the PSCs. It will feature the presentation of the results of a large benchmarking study carried out on behalf of the European Commission in the second half of 2011. This is followed by panel discussions with business representatives, politicians and PSC managers to discuss the practical solutions put in place and

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explore ways forward. Particular attention will be paid to the PSCs role in helping businesses start or expand their activities in other EU countries.

To learn more about the event, please click [here](#)

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Innovation Convention organised by the European Commission

5-6 December 2011

Brussels, Belgium

This first edition of the Innovation Convention will be opened by President Barroso one year after the adoption of the Innovation Union flagship initiative, the EU's roadmap to turn Europe into a more innovation-friendly and competitive continent. Research and innovation are the main motors for sustainable job creation and the only way to achieve a sustainable exit from the current economic crisis. This conference will bring together world leading experts in research and innovation to share their views on building a global innovation economy.

To learn more about the event, please click [here](#)

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