



HEADLINES

EU/Sales Law: ESBA President Tina Sommer gives small business perspective at Trier conference.

On 9-10 February 2012, ESBA President Tina Sommer provided the ERA conference on European Sales Law (CESL) with a small business perspective on the proposal, which is currently in development at EU level. The issue of whether or not a new proposal on European Sales Law is necessary and whether it will increase legal certainty or rather cause more confusion is still heavily debated between both camps. Arguments were made that Rome I is less of an obstacle to business than is often claimed and that the new Consumer Rights Directive harmonizes consumer law to such a degree that CESL is not needed. Rapporteur Diana Wallis however called the idea 'exciting and smart'. Although Dirk Staudenmayer, Commission Head of Unit responsible for the proposal, was able to take away a lot of confusion during the conference, much remains unclear. A representative of the Danish Presidency advised to take the time to consider the proposal and potential confusion for businesses and consumers.

ESBA Opinion

ESBA President Tina Sommer said: "The proposal has a lot of potential and, if executed correctly, could alleviate the legal uncertainty which is currently keeping many small businesses from reaping the full benefits from cross-border trade. I have to agree with Rapporteur Diana Wallis that the principle idea behind this proposal is good. Having said that, this proposal is far from being finalised and clarification is still needed on many fronts.

IN BRIEF

EU/ Consumer Agenda: package to be presented in spring

On 9 February 2012, at a European Parliament Committee hearing on the EU's Consumer Agenda, Commissioner John Dalli and Vice-President of the Commission Viviane Reding presented the Commission's plans for the Consumer Agenda package which is to be unveiled in Spring. The future proposals will aim to increase consumer protection when shopping online or in other Member States, so as to improve consumer trust and support economic growth. They will outline measures such as e.g. the creation of out-of-court settlement schemes and a revision of the existing rules on product safety.

To read more about the EU's legislation on consumers, please click [here](#)

EU/ Data Protection: Commission VP Reding confident that the new data protection rules will reduce costs for SMEs

On 8 February 2012, during a briefing on the recently unveiled data protection proposal, Vice President of the Commission Viviane Reding said that the harmonised rules would strengthen the Internal Market. She stated: "It's very difficult for lots of small companies to comply with all the

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reporting requirements today” and that harmonisation would save companies €2.3 billion per year. The proposal puts in place one single reporting requirement for all 27 countries. Among the new rules are the obligation for businesses to obtain the explicit consent of consumers before processing data and the ‘the right to be forgotten’ for consumers.

To read the full Commission proposal on data protection, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the EU’s policies on data protection, please click [here](#)

EU/ Funding: Simplification of rules on EU funds

On 8 February 2012, the European Commission published a communication called “A simplification agenda for the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework”, aiming at combining the rules on the governance of EU funds in one single document. If taken up by the Member States, the practices established by the simplification agenda would ease the access to European funding for SMEs, local and regional authorities and researchers. Examples of initiatives in the communication are less regular audits, a shortening of the application period and a focus on project quality and results.

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

To read more about the European Union framework for funding, please click [here](#)

EU/ Taxation: Group of nine Member States push for a Financial Transaction Tax

On 7 February 2012, a letter was sent by nine Member States asking the Danish Presidency to speed up negotiations on a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) in the EU. Based on a proposal by the Commission, the tax is said to raise € 46 billion of revenues and to discourage short term financial speculations. Because of a possible relocation effect and a negative impact on growth, Europe is fiercely divided over an FTT. The letter could initiate an enhanced cooperation process which would enable proponents of the tax, most notably France, Germany, Spain and Italy, to establish such a tax among signatory countries.

To learn more about the Commission’s proposal for an FTT, please click [here](#)

EU/ Taxation: Meeting of Tax Policy Group

On 6 February 2012, the Tax Policy Group (TPG) - comprising representatives of the EU Finance Ministers - held its fifth meeting, during which it discussed the Commission’s progress in its dialogue with the US authorities on how to apply the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) without imposing a significant compliance burden on EU financial institutions. Furthermore, the TPG discussed the Commission’s communication on the future of VAT. This communication outlines the direction of reforms of the VAT. Measures would include a reduction of the administrative burden, streamlining national reduced rates arrangements and combatting fraud and evasion.

To read more on the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA), please click [here](#)

To read the full text of the Commission’s Communication on the future of VAT, please click [here](#)

EU/ Mobility: Resolution calling for proposal on intra-EU company mobility

On 2 February 2012, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the Commission to prepare a proposal aiming at facilitating the migration of company seats within the EU. The

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Parliament wishes to enable limited liability companies to move their headquarters to another Member State. The transfer would be subject to the condition that the company does not attempt to escape social or fiscal rules. Approval of shareholders would be necessary, and employees' representatives would have to be consulted. The European Parliament stated that company mobility would strengthen the Internal Market. Earlier attempts by The Commission to propose legislation on this matter were withdrawn at the last moment.

To read the resolution adopted by the parliament, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

EU/ Eurostat: Industrial production down by 1.1% in euro area

On 16 February 2012, Eurostat published the industrial order index for December 2011. In December 2011 compared with November 2011, seasonally adjusted industrial production fell by 1.1% in the euro area (EA17) and by 0.6% in the EU27. In November production remained stable in both zones.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Basic figures on the EU – Spring 2012

On 15 February 2012, Eurostat published its latest Eurostat data on a small number of key indicators in the economic and social fields. The tables show information for the EU, the euro area, the EU Member States and three EFTA countries. The indicators concern areas such as public finance, living conditions and education and employment.

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

EU/OECD: Harmonised Unemployment Rates

On 14 February 2012, the OECD published its statistics about unemployment in December 2011. The unemployment rate remained stable at 8.2%, but there were still differences among national rates. The euro area unemployment rate was at 10.4%.

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

EU/OECD: Composite Leading Indicators (CLIs), February 2012

On 13 February 2012, the OECD published its composite leading indicators, aiming at anticipating turning point in the economy given the trend. The euro area is still pointing below trend growth, but there are signs that seven of the Eurozone countries are pointing towards a positive change.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure Scoreboard

On 30 January 2012, Eurostat published its scoreboard, which regroups data used to identify emerging or persistent macroeconomic imbalances in a country. It is a signalling device that comprises a small number of relevant, practical, simple, and available macro-economic and macro-financial indicators for Member States.

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

CONSULTATIONS

ONGOING:

Consultation on the review of the EU state aid rules for research, development and innovation

Closes: 24 February 2012

This public consultation follows publication of a mid-term review on the application of the current Community Framework for State aid for R&D&I in August 2011. By way of a questionnaire, the Commission invites Member States and interested parties to submit their input and views on the review of the EU state aid rules for supporting R&D&I ahead of the expiry of the R&D&I Framework end of 2013. The Commission is in particular interested in statistical information and qualitative comments on national R&D&I policies at large and on national state aid support measures for R&D&I in particular.

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

Consultation on the review of directive 96/53/EC: Weights & Dimensions

Closes: 27 February 2012

Weights and dimensions of heavy-duty vehicles operating international and national transport in the EU are ruled by Directive 96/53/EC. This Directive aims at ensuring fair competition between hauliers, ensuring that transport operations may not be refused between two Member States on the basis of the dimensions of the vehicle used. The present questionnaire will provide input for the considered revision of Directive 96/53/EC and the impact assessment to be carried out beforehand. The questionnaire addresses issues related to the energy and CO₂ performance of heavy-duty vehicles, inter-modality and innovation in transport needs, specific legal issues raised by the current directive, and improvement of compliance with the regulations through controls and enforcement.

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

Consultation on the revision of Directive 2009/142/EC on appliances burning gaseous fuels (GAD)

Closes: 11 March 2012

The main objective of the public consultation on the revision of Directive 2009/142/EC on appliances burning gaseous fuels (GAD) is to collect views and opinions of stakeholders and citizens on various issues that may need to be addressed when the GAD is revised.

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

Consultation on the restructuring and anticipation of change: What lessons from recent experience?

Closes: 30 March 2012

This Green Paper aims to identify successful practices and policies in the field of restructuring and adaptation to change in order to promote employment, growth and competitiveness as part of the

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Europe 2020 strategy and in particular the industrial policy flagship initiative of October 2010, the "Agenda for new skills and jobs" adopted in November 2010.

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

Consultation on Delivering more Sustainable Consumption and Production

Closes: 3 April 2012

The European Commission wants to gather views and additional information on the possible introduction of EU wide measures related to Sustainable Consumption and Production. The consultation offers an opportunity to all interested parties to express their views, to give their opinion on the proposed policy options.

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

Consultation on Green Paper - Towards an integrated European market for card, internet and mobile payments

Closes: 11 April 2012

The purpose of this consultation is to collect information from all interested stakeholders on the existing situation of the card, internet and mobile payments market and the potential hurdles for integration at European level in these markets.

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

Consultation on the revision of the European Union rules on regional state aid

Closes: 26 April 2012

As a derogation to the general prohibition to grant aid the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides that state aid to promote regional development can, under certain conditions, be considered compatible with the internal market pursuant to Articles 107(3)(a) or (c) of the TFEU. The compatibility criteria to be fulfilled as regards such aid are defined by the European Commission and laid down in the Guidelines on national regional aid for 2007-2013 (RAG), the Communication concerning the criteria for an in-depth assessment of regional aid to large investment projects (IDAC) and the relevant provisions of Commission Regulation (EC) No 800/2008 of 6 August 2008 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the common market in application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty (GBER). The RAG and the GBER will expire on 31 December 2013. The present public consultation offers stakeholders the opportunity to provide input to the Commission at an early stage of policy making. Member States and other interested parties are invited to express their views on the EU rules currently applicable to regional state aid and to suggest possible amendments to these rules.

To access this 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

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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 administrative burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012.

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

20 February 2012 – Meeting of Eurogroup
20 and 21 February 2012 – Competitiveness Council
21 February 2012 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council
22 February – EC weekly meeting of the College
22 and 23 February 2012 – Coreper I and II
27 February 2012 – Foreign Affairs Council
27 February 2012 till 1 March 2012 – European Parliament Committee meetings
28 February 2012 – General Affairs Council
28 February 2012 – Public hearing on the road haulage sector
29 February 2012 – Coreper I
29 February 2012 – EC weekly meeting of the College
29 February 2012 – Regulation on central securities depositories
1 and 2 March 2012 – European Council
5 and 8 March 2012 – European Parliament Committee meetings
6 and 7 March 2012 – Coreper I and II
7 March 2012 – EC weekly meeting of the College
8 and 9 March 2012 – Justice and Home Affairs Council
9 March 2012 – Environment Council
9 and 10 March 2012 – Informal Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers

Other SME-related events

European entrepreneurship summit

21 February 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The EIT's 2011/2012 Entrepreneurship Competition highlights and encourages entrepreneurial ventures within the EIT's three thematic areas: climate change adaptation and mitigation, the future of information and communication society and sustainable energy.

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

The Europe 2020 Summit - Unleashing Growth and Creating Jobs

27 February 2012

Brussels, Belgium

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Organised in collaboration with the Danish EU Presidency and convening just three days before the Spring European Council, The Europe 2020 Summit will focus on developing a successful growth and jobs strategy as an antidote to the economic crisis – and the concrete actions that should be taken now to kick-start employment and stimulate innovation.

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

Conference on a single digital market by 2015

27 and 28 February 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

The conference will focus on the establishment of a fully functioning single market for e-commerce and digital services, thereby contributing to economic growth in Europe. The full title of the conference is "A single digital market by 2015 – A driver for economic growth and jobs".

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

Brussels tax forum 2012

5 and 6 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The Brussels tax forum is an annual conference that brings together policy makers, experts, stakeholders and the general public from all over the world to discuss tax issues of particular political and general interest. The topic chosen for 2012 is 'Tax policy under a common currency'. The conference will focus on the tax policy challenges that the need for fiscal consolidation and growth-enhancing reforms poses to countries belonging to a monetary union.

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

Innovation 2012: Science, Technology and Competitiveness

5 and 6 March 2012

London, United Kingdom

The Innovation 2012 conference will discuss the expectations and political constraints placed upon science and technology's contribution to global prosperity. It will examine the circumstances under which curiosity-driven innovation flourishes and assess what systems and networks need to be in place to optimize its opportunities.

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

Conference on scientific support for the transition to a low-carbon economy

6 March 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

The Copenhagen Accord of 2009 has recognised the scientific view that to combat climate change the increase in global temperature should be below 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels. This conference will provide a forum for discussions on how scientific advice can best contribute to robust policy frameworks.

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

Conference on broadband coverage at the local level

6 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

Based on the Europe 2020 strategy, one of the vital goals of the digital agenda is the provision of EU-wide coverage regarding high speed internet connections. But what role does the EU play when it comes to local implementation? Against this background the conference offers a forum for presenting best practices regarding broadband provision at the local level in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Saxony and to discuss the challenges arising from that with representatives from the EU institutions.

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

Conference on CAP and food sovereignty

7 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The main topic of the conference is the European agricultural and food policy and it's re-focusing towards local food systems, along with more ecological modes of production and provisioning, based on the principle of food sovereignty. In the morning there will be a workshop to present the results of the Nyeleni Europe Forum on Food Sovereignty. There will be a conference in the afternoon to promote a debate on the future of the common agricultural and food policy (CAP) at regional and local levels between the regional representatives who participated in the forum and the European institutions.

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

European Competition and Consumer Day

8 March 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

This conference will focus on how to strengthen competition and how to promote consumer active behaviour. A more vibrant competition and active consumption will be exposed as a possible solution to the challenge raised by European productivity and growth.

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

European Consumer Day

15 March 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

The 14th edition of the European Consumer Day will be held in Copenhagen on 15 March 2012 and will focus on sustainable consumption.

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

Conference on ageing populations and new opportunities for business in Europe and Japan

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15 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

In the context of the 2012 - the European year of active aging and intergenerational solidarity, and the fact that Japan is a couple of decades ahead of Europe in terms of fiscal, social and economic 'experience'; it would be useful to exchange best practices with Japan to determine the challenges of an ageing population and the opportunities this presents for businesses.

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

Conference on privacy and protection of personal data

19 March 2012

Washington, D.C., USA and Brussels, Belgium

The EU is currently reviewing its legal framework on data protection and this conference will contribute to reinforcing transatlantic dialogue at a time of concurrent policy and legislative initiatives in the EU and US. The main conference venue is in Washington DC. It will also be possible to participate from a conference room in Brussels via a two-way audio and video connection. The conference will be web cast.

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

Financial Regulation and the Real Economy: Balancing growth and stability

19 March 2012

London, United Kingdom

Post-financial crisis, policy-makers in the US, Europe and the UK are considering and writing regulation in an attempt to establish financial stability and to protect taxpayers from bearing the cost of future systemic failure. But in the context of dramatically deteriorating economies and turmoil in financial markets on both sides of the Atlantic, should regulators soften their approach?

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

High Level Seminar on Compliance and Compliance Risk Management in Customs

19 to 21 March 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

The purpose of the seminar is to increase knowledge of compliance in customs by giving practical examples from the member States. Moreover the purpose is to promote debate, share experiences and identify strategies and methods to strengthen the implementation of compliance and compliance risk management in the area of Customs in Europe.

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

International Conference on research infrastructures - ICRI2012

21 to 23 March 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

The conference will contribute to the negotiations of the coming European framework programme for research and innovation - horizon 2020. The delegates at the conference will be European and

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international ministers, representatives from the European Commission and relevant stakeholders from leading research environments in Europe and around the world.

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

Public hearing on tax and financial havens: a threat to the EU's internal market

21 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The event will bring together civil society representatives and policy makers to define lines of action for treating tax and financial havens. The European Economic and Social Committee is currently drawing up an opinion on that topic, and the hearing will provide further insights that will be taken up by the EESC rapporteurs.

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

Conference on collective redress in a European perspective

22 and 23 March 2012

Copenhagen, Denmark

In view of the Commission's incoming communication on collective redress, the seminar will address key topics such as safeguards against abusive litigation, representation and funding issues, among others, aiming at providing elements for future discussions on a coherent European approach to collective redress. The event will be attended by officials from the Member States, the Commission and relevant private actors.

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

European e-skills week 2012

26 to 30 March 2012

Europe-wide

The European Commission - DG Enterprise and Industry - is to organise a European e-skills week in 2012 on 26-30 March 2012, with the cooperation of DIGITALEUROPE and European Schoolnet. Industry partners - including leading ICT companies such as Nokia, Microsoft, Cisco, Intel and numerous SMEs across Europe - in partnership with education bodies and public authorities, will deliver a large and diverse programme of events and activities in more than 30 European countries. Ministries of Education have embraced the importance of ICT and are working with industry to deliver an exciting choice of options for people looking for work, and for young people thinking about what career options are open to them.

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

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