



HEADLINES

EU/ Red tape: Presentation of Stoiber Group Report on Reducing Admin Burden

On 21 February 2012, Dr. Edmund Stoiber, Chairman of the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens, presented a report on reducing administrative burdens to European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, who congratulated the Group on its excellent work. The document identifies 74 examples of best practices and includes recommendations such as the incorporation of the smart regulation principles into the legislative processes of all EU Institutions and the use of the "Comply or Explain" approach, which aims to prevent gold plating by national authorities. In 2008, the Stoiber Group was given a mandate to assist the Commission on the implementation of the Action Programme for Reducing Administrative Burdens. This was prolonged in 2010 to identify areas of improvement as well as new courses of action to reduce red tape on businesses. The report of the High Level Group shows that there is ample room for improvement. It is important to note that roughly 30% of administrative burden on business from EU legislation is due to improper implementation at Member States level.

ESBA Opinion

The European Small Business Alliance congratulates the Stoiber group on its remarkable results. ESBA has been a supporter of the group since its 2007 advent. ESBA particularly thanks its member Gabriel Côte-Real de Carvalho Goucha who has been an active first generation member of the group, for his hard work and commitment in the name of small businesses in Europe.

To read the full report, please click [here](#)

IN BRIEF

EU/ Taxation: Parliament Committee divided over shape and form of a Financial Transactions Tax

On 29 February 2012, the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary examined a draft report on the Commission proposal for a financial transaction tax. The report by Mrs Anni Podimata MEP proposes measures to counter the relocation effect and enforceability of the tax. Payment of the tax would be linked to the issuer of the financial instrument, and not only to the location of the trader, so as to apply to any transaction involving an instrument issued by an EU-registered entity. The opinions of the Members of the European Parliament differed widely over the possibility to introduce the tax in case it would not be applied globally or within the EU27.

To read the report by Mrs Anni Podimata, please click [here](#)

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EU/ SMEs: ALDE group launches campaign to support SMEs

On 29 February 2012, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) launched their campaign to support SMEs. In his speech at the campaign launch, Mr Jürgen Creutzmann MEP stressed the need to simplify the regulatory environment for SMEs, to facilitate access to finance and to enable small businesses to enter new markets. ALDE's manifesto aims at boosting entrepreneurship by pushing for the adoption of concrete and urgent measures.

To access ALDE's manifesto, please click [here](#)

EU/ Gender equality: Women's Rights Committee calls for action

On 28 February 2012, the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality presented its annual report on equality between women and men in the European Union. The report shows a persistent gender pay gap of 17, 5 % on average for 2011. Furthermore, it highlights that women are more affected by the economic crisis, mostly as a result of the fact that recovery projects tend to focus on male-dominated sectors such as industry and science. The FEMM Committee proposes a range of actions, among which a European equal pay target to reduce the pay gap by 10% in each Member State, and the introduction of quotas to increase the number of women in administrative, political and business bodies.

To read the report adopted by the FEMM Committee, please click [here](#).

EU/ Growth and Jobs: President Barroso at the Lisbon Council's Europe 2020 Summit

On 27 February 2012, at the 'Europe 2020 Summit - Unleashing Growth and Creating Jobs' event organised by Brussels based think-tank The Lisbon Council, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso called upon the Member States to strongly commit to the implementation of the Europe 2020 plan for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Mr Barroso reiterated that SMEs are Europe's economic backbone, and pledged the Commission's intent to further reduce red tape. The needs of small businesses must be taken into account when developing or revising policy. The Commission intends to focus on helping SMEs to reap the full benefits of a globalized market through co-financing internationalisation projects. Mr Barroso concluded by saying that completion of the Single Market, increased labour mobility as well as efficient investments and structural reforms will put Europe in the position to face its challenges towards reaching growth and prosperity.

To learn more about The Lisbon Council, please click [here](#)

EU/ Regional development: € 6 million to boost employment in Highlands

On 27 February 2012, it was made public that the Scottish Highlands and Islands region will receive € 6 million out of the European Structural Funds. The money is intended to provide a stimulus for economically inactive people to get back on the labour market. The funds will be used to finance 15 projects, most of which will focus on training people according to the needs of local industries who are in search of skilled employees.

To learn more about the European Social Fund, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the European Regional Cohesion Policy, click [here](#)

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To learn more about the Cohesion Policy for the United Kingdom, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the EU's Structural Funds Program for Scotland, please click [here](#)

EU/ Information technologies: Europe is doing well on cloud computing

On 22 February 2012, the Business Software Alliance (BSA) published its Global Cloud Computing Scorecard. The study ranks 24 countries according to the supportiveness of their policies towards cloud-computing. Five EU countries are in the top 10, which outlines the efforts made recently on the national level in fields such as data privacy, cyber security and IT infrastructures. The EU is not lagging behind, European Commissioner responsible for the Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes announced a European cloud partnership in January in order to establish common EU rules for cloud procurement.

To access the study by the Business Software Alliance, please click [here](#).

To read more on cloud computing, please click [here](#).

EU/ Administrative burden: Commission welcomes approval of amendment of 4th Company Law Directive

On 21 February 2012, the Commissioner responsible for the Internal Market and Services Michel Barnier welcomed the Council's approval of the amendment of the Fourth Company Law Directive. With this amendment the Member States are provided with the possibility to exempt micro-enterprises from certain reporting obligations under the Accounting Directives. Extensive financial reporting places a significant administrative burden on small businesses.

To learn more about the EU's accounting requirements for SMEs, please click [here](#)

EU/ Innovation: The first EIT Awards given to three promising entrepreneurs

On 21 February 2012, the first Entrepreneurship Awards of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) were awarded to 3 start-up companies working in the fields of climate change, ICT and sustainable energy. These promising entrepreneurs come from the KICs (Knowledge and Innovation Communities) or 'Innovation factories' set up by the EIT. This initiative aims to promote a culture of entrepreneurship in Europe, and to help young researchers and students develop their ideas and turn them into commercial opportunities.

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

EU/ Taxation: Paris and Berlin set an example on business tax convergence

On 21 February 2012, at the Economic and Financial Affairs Council, the French and German ministers of finance presented a common Green Paper on business tax convergence. This bilateral initiative comes at a time where a Commission proposal for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base is not getting the required unanimous support of the Member States. Paris and Berlin hope to create the necessary dynamic in the negotiations and to pave the way for 27 Member States to eventually reach a consensus.

To read the Commission proposal for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base, please click [here](#)

EU/ Enterprise and industry: Commission funds Corporate Social Responsibility program for SMEs

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On 23 February 2012, the European Commission announced to provide funding for the project 'Networking for better Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advice to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)'. The Commission hopes to translate CSR in business opportunities for small businesses by bringing together entrepreneurs and professionals in the field of CSR at a conference in Berlin in June 2012. The initiative fits into the Europe 2020 strategy's objective to build a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.

To learn more about the Networking for better Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advice to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) project, please click [here](#)

EU/Business: Commission opens a consultation on European company law

On 20 February 2012, the European Commission launched a public consultation on the future of European company law. A well-shaped company law is fundamental to support businesses while preserving the rights of shareholders, creditors and other stakeholders. The development of cross-border trade and e-commerce raises questions about whether the existing legal framework still fits today's society. The consultation requests inputs on several issues, such as cross-border mobility of companies, capital regimes and a possible codification of European company law.

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

To read the consultation as a pdf file, please click [here](#)

EU/ Research and innovation: assessment of the Horizon 2020 program

On 17 February 2012, rapporteur for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, Mrs Teresa Riera Madurell (S&D/ES), published a working document on the establishment of Horizon 2020, the European Union's future research framework. While welcoming the focus on societal challenges, competitiveness and simplification, Mrs Madurell deemed the proposed budget of € 80 billion to be insufficient and emphasised the lack of clear quantified objectives and private sector involvement.

To read the full report of Mrs Teresa Riera Madurell MEP on Horizon 2020, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the Horizon 2020 program, please click [here](#)

EU/ Employment and Social Affairs: Commission questions continued labor restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian workers

On 17 February 2012, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council discussed the transitional arrangements on free movement of Bulgarian and Romanian workers within the EU. Currently 9 Member States continue to restrict access to their labour markets for these nationals and under the transitional arrangements may do so until 31 December 2013. However, the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, László Andor, urged these countries to lift the restrictions.

To access the Commission's note to the Council, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the transitional measures for free movement of Bulgarian and Romanian workers, please click [here](#)

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EU/ Twelve Member States call for growth and jobs in the European Union

On 20 February 2012, a letter was sent by 12 Member States to President of the Commission Barroso and Council President Van Rompuy, calling for a new agenda for growth and jobs in Europe. The letter asked for the true liberalization of the EU's services' market, the creation of a digital single market by 2015, the establishment of an internal market for energy and a European research area. On top of that, the letter addressed the need to reduce the regulatory burden on companies.

To read the letter by 12 Member States to the Commission and the Council, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

EU/ Eurostat: Second estimates for the fourth quarter of 2011

On 6 March 2012, Eurostat published its second estimates of GDP in the EU for the fourth quarter of 2011. Results show that the GDP of the euro area and of the EU27 went down by 0.3% compared with the previous quarter.

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

EU/ Commission: Business climate indicators for the euro area

On 28 February 2012, DG ECFIN published the business climate indicators (BCI) for the euro area. It shows a marginal increase, driven by a more positive assessment of production expectations, order books and stocks of finished products.

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

EU/ Commission: Economic sentiment indicator

On 28 February 2012, DG Economic and Financial Affairs published the economic sentiment indicator (ESI) for February. The ESI rose by 1.1 points in the EU and by 1.0 point in the euro area. Confidence in industry improved, while confidence in services decreased in the EU27 and remained stable in the Eurozone.

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

EU/ Commission: DG Economic and Financial Affairs publishes the EU interim forecast of the European economy

On 23 February 2012, DG Economic and Financial Affairs published an interim forecast showing a stagnation of the EU economy and a mild recession in the euro area. Growth differences between Member States remain profound. The report predicts a modest return to growth in the second half of 2012.

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

EU/ Commission: Flash consumer confidence indicator for the EU and Euro area

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On 21 February 2012, DG Economic and Financial Affairs published flash estimates of consumer confidence indicators for the month of February 2012, computed on the basis of consumer survey data. It shows an improvement in both the EU and the euro area in comparison to January.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW

Consultation on the future of European Company Law

Closes 14 May 2012

European company law is a cornerstone of the internal market. EU company law has evolved significantly over the last 40 years. The scope of EU harmonisation covers: the protection of interest of shareholders and others, the constitution and maintenance of public limited-liability companies' capital, takeover bids, branches disclosure, mergers and divisions, minimum rules for single-member private limited-liability companies, shareholders' rights and related areas such as financial reporting and accounting. Considerable work has also been accomplished on different legal forms such as the European Company (SE), the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) and the European Cooperative Society (SCE). The purpose of this consultation is to collect views from all interested stakeholders on the future of European company law.

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

Public consultation on Financial Support for Energy Efficiency in Buildings

Closes 18 May 2012

The objective of this consultation is to obtain the views of stakeholders on how the financial support for energy efficiency measures aimed at improving the energy performance of buildings, both at EU as well as at national/regional/local level, could be improved.

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

Consultation on Gender imbalance in corporate boards in the EU

Closes 28 May 2012

This consultation will feed into an assessment of possible EU-level measures to enhance female participation in economic decision-making, which will inform the Commission's decision on whether to propose action and on the form it should take.

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

Consultation on the Internal Market: Factual examples of double non-taxation cases

Closes 30 May 2012

It is undesirable that in the EU Internal Market a taxpayer is subject to double non-taxation on his/her cross-border activity as this gives the taxpayer a competitive advantage compared to other taxpayers who are subject to ordinary taxation. The Commission is presenting this consultation to the public in order to gather evidence of double non-taxation within the EU and in relation with Third Countries. The results of the consultation will be used to identify and develop the appropriate policy response to double non-taxation.

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

ONGOING:

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 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

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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 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

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

12 March – Eurogroup meeting

12-16 March – Plenary session of the Parliament

13 March - Economic and Financial Affairs Council

16 March - Foreign Affairs Council (trade issues)

19-20 March – Agriculture and fisheries Council

21 March – EESC Public hearing "Tax and financial havens: a threat to the EU's internal market"

22-23 March – Foreign affairs Council

28-29 March – Mini plenary

30-31 March – Informal ECOFIN meeting

Other SME-related events

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

15 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

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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 Growing the Extended Enterprise: integrating SMEs in smart digital supply chains 15-16 March

Stuttgart, Germany

The one and a half day event will bring together more than 200 automotive players from across Europe to present concrete business cases on how auto-gration improved the functioning of the automotive supply chain and aftermarket, how it helped smaller dynamic businesses to link to larger industry players and participate in global supply chains, and will prepare the way for wide-scale implementation of the auto-gration Architecture.

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](#)

Stakeholders opening conference of the European e-Skills Week 2012 19 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The conference will bring together all stakeholders – such as high-level public authorities, key industry representatives and research organisations - to discuss the current situation and needs of the e-Skilled workforce. The event will feature a plenary session on e-Skills policy in practice, as well as panel debates on the topic of e-Skills with both young people and ICT professionals.

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

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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](#)

3rd Bruges European Business Conference

20 March 2012

Bruges, Belgium

The conference will debate how European business can effectively have access to lucrative markets outside Europe. This requires mutual trade and investment liberalisation with key trading partners. Globalisation and the ever more critical significance of worldwide value chains render good market access imperative for European business competitiveness in Europe as well as elsewhere.

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

2012 European Cloud Computing Conference: Making the Transition from Cloud Friendly to Cloud Active

21 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The aim of The 2012 European Cloud Computing Conference is to debate how to implement a well-defined European Cloud Computing Strategy. It will examine the numerous opportunities offered by the Cloud; discuss the issues related to the technology from policy, business, technology and user perspectives; and will highlight the need for a EU Cloud policy and regulatory framework. Finally, the conference will be the opportunity to look into the necessity of standardisation to guarantee interoperability between Cloud providers in order to create a competitive European market for Cloud services and to “make Europe not just Cloud-Friendly but Cloud Active”.

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](#)

Data privacy: building trust in the digital economy

26 March 2012

Brussels, Belgium

Many see the issue of data protection as a zero-sum game: the more users' rights are protected, the greater the burden for businesses. This event will look at how to strike the right balance between protecting citizens' rights to privacy and avoiding stifling the growth of new companies and services in the digital economy. The event will feature senior policy-makers, politicians, business representatives and consumer rights' advocates.

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

Venture Academy and Investment Forum for SMEs

25-26 March 2012

Lisbon, Portugal

Designed specifically for SMEs operating in the ICT sector, the Venture Academy consists of a one-day, coaching event where experienced coaches from relevant industry areas will help these SMEs pragmatically to develop their pitching skills towards potential investors. The Investment Forum offers entrepreneurs the opportunity to showcase their business in front of an international network of venture capital and corporate investors, strategic partners and expert advisors.

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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](#)