



HEADLINES

EU/Commission: European Commission ready to get started at last

On 9 February, the European Parliament gave its starting signal for the new College of Commissioners. Although criticized by some, The Barroso II Commission received an overwhelming backing by the elected assembly, with 488 votes in favour, 137 against and 72 abstentions. According to Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, a sustainable recovery from the current crisis, within the framework of the new 'EU 2020 Strategy' to be unveiled in spring, is expected to be at the centre of his team's five-year mandate. Moreover, each Commissioner has presented their ambitious action programme within their portfolios. The Parliament also agreed on the new terms of cooperation with the Commission, the move that will increase Parliament's powers and put it on the par with the Council, as dictated by the new Lisbon Treaty.

ESBA Opinion

ESBA welcomes the new College of Commissioners and urges it to start its work without delay in order to deliver on its promises. The small business community from across the EU expects a strong and decisive leadership from the new European Commission and will especially measure President Barroso and his team's performance on the basis of the promise to cut red tape. While the backing from the European Parliament is indeed needed, the Commission President must provide leadership and take ownership of the Commission Action Programme to reduce administrative burden for European businesses by 25% by 2012.

To access information on the new Commissioners, please click [here](#)

EU/Council: EU leaders to discuss economic recovery

On 11 February, EU Heads of State and Government convene in Brussels for an informal meeting, the first of its kind to be chaired by new Council President Herman van Rompuy. The main focus of the meeting will be the recovery of the EU economy, ravaged by growing unemployment and the recent crisis. In this light, the 'EU 2020' vision will be discussed, which will form the basis for the new Strategy for Growth and Jobs, set to replace the current Lisbon Agenda. In the run-up to the meeting, some Member States struggle to reach consensus, notably on the issue of sanctions in the case of non-compliance with the new strategy. The lack of penalizing measures is widely believed to be one of the main reasons for the failure of the Lisbon Strategy.

ESBA Opinion

The EU's ambitious aspirations to become the "most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world" by 2010 have not yet materialized. In fact, ten years later, Europe is still far from reaching its targets. ESBA urges the EU's leaders to ensure that the 'EU 2020 strategy', to be discussed by EU leaders today, will not become yet another unreachable yardstick, without clear political guidance and support from the Commission and national governments. Full support of Europe's SMEs, the lifeblood of the European economy, is an essential element to reach Europe's ambitious targets to remain a prosperous, peaceful and future-oriented society. It is equally important to ensure effective ownership of the new strategy with regard to local, regional, national and European actors.

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To access the Commission Working Document on the ‘EU 2020’ Strategy, please click [here](#)

IN BRIEF

EU/Micro-finance facility: Parliament and Council reach compromise

On 5 February, the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers’ Spanish Presidency reached an informal compromise with regard to the funding of the new EU Micro-finance Facility, proposed by the Commission in July of last year. According to the compromise, part of the 100 million Euros, earmarked for the facility, will come from the PROGRESS programme. The rest will comprise of unallocated margins in the EU budget. The compromise is set to be voted on by the European Parliament on during today’s plenary session in Strasbourg. The new facility aims at providing credits to entrepreneurs across the EU who wish to start-up or expand their micro-business but face difficulty obtaining loans from banks and other financial structures.

To access the text of the proposal, please click [here](#)

EU/Commission: Public broadband funding on the rise

On 8 February, the European Commission presented a mounting number of state aid measures channeled by the Member States to the development of broadband networks. Following the adoption of guidelines for the assessment of broadband projects under EU state aid rules in September 2009, the Commission approved 10 initiatives in different European countries. The main aim is to allocate public funds to those spheres where private operators lack incentives to invest. The guidelines for the financing of broadband networks were adopted in the framework of the European Economic Recovery Plan, and provide a clear course of action as to how public funding can be allocated in line with the EU state aid rules.

To read the Commission’s Guidelines, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: “How to close the productivity gap between the US and Europe: A quantitative assessment using a semi-endogenous growth model”

The European Commission publication “How to close the productivity gap between the US and Europe” discusses three differences between the EU and US that determine productivity discrepancies: higher investment in productivity and knowledge and a greater bonuses related to skills in the US. It also provides policy recommendations to improve the situation in the EU.

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

European Commission: “New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now”

This report, published by the Expert Group on New Skills for New Jobs, highlights that urgent action is necessary in order to tackle skills deficiencies across the EU. Among its numerous conclusions and policy recommendations, the Expert Group emphasises the importance of lifelong learning and a greater coordination between education, training and the labour market.

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

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European Commission: “Study on e-Inclusion initiatives from private and non-profit European entities”

This new report from DG Information Society aims to analyse various e-Inclusion practices across the EU. The study presents specific policy recommendations and stresses the importance of the non-governmental and private sector in boosting digital literacy.

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

CONSULTATIONS

ONGOING:

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

Closes on 26 February 2010

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 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](#)

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 February 2010 - Informal meeting of Heads of State and Government, Brussels, Belgium

16 February 2010 - Economic and Financial Affairs Council, Brussels, Belgium

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d’Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

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Other SME related events

18 February: The European Commission is organising an EU Finance Day for SMEs, to take place in the Hague, the Netherlands. The event is part of the series of events organised by the Commission to raise awareness with regard to financial instruments available for SMEs and is aimed at enterprises and national government representatives.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemshortdetail.cfm?item_id=3995&lang=en

1-5 March: The European Commission is organising the first European e-Skills Week, to take place Brussels, Belgium. The event aims to bring together a vast number of participants and will focus on the rising demand for skilled ICT staff in the industry.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=3998&lang=en

4 March: The European Commission, together with eBSN and CeBIT, is organising a European Forum for competitiveness and growth in SMEs, to take place in Hanover, Germany. The event will particularly focus on the deployment of ICT technologies.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=4006&lang=en

8-9 March: The European Commission is organising an event entitled 'Women in ICT: The Way Forward', to take place in Cyprus. The aim of this event is to attract more women to take up careers in the ICT sector.

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/itgirls/conference_0310/index_en.htm

17-18 June: The Faculty of Management and Economics of Gdansk University of Technology and ICAN Institute - Harvard Business Review Polska are organising the Fourth Enterprise in Modern Economy (ENTIME) Conference, to take place in Gdansk, Poland.

http://www.zie.pg.gda.pl/ekonomia/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=44&Itemid=147