



HEADLINES

EU/ Red tape: Removal of unnecessary obstacles to improve SMEs' competitiveness

On 8 May, at a hearing of the European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, ESBA Member Gabriel Côte-Real de Carvalho Goucha spoke on the subject of regulatory burdens on businesses in his capacity as member of the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders (HLG). The HLG is mandated by the European Commission President Barroso to identify administrative burdens on businesses and to propose concrete initiatives and best practices to reduce red tape. Mr Goucha stressed the need to put the Think Small First principle at the core of all legislative initiatives. There is a need to tailor legislation to small businesses. In the meantime, however, there should be scope for lighter regimes and where necessary room for exemptions. He stated: *"When we talk about large companies and micro businesses, we speak of two different worlds, these differences need to be reflected in our legislation"*.

To access the best practice report by the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders, please click [here](#)

To access the European Commission better regulation webpage, please click [here](#)

ESBA Opinion

ESBA supports the notion that the *Think Small First* principle should be at the core of each new legislative proposal. If this principle were implemented fully and perfectly, there would not exist a need to exempt small businesses from regulations. However, the current reality is that the principle is far from being an integral part of new legislation. Still companies are struggling and the figures show that small businesses are hit by the crisis much harder than larger companies. Between the crisis and an imperfect implementation of *Think Small First*, ESBA sees exemptions and lighter regimes for micro businesses when and where needed as acceptable measures.

EU/Finance: Micro and small companies in dire need of financing

On 8 May, at an event on improving SME finance, co-organised by FOLKES Malta and the EPP's SME Union, ESBA President Tina Sommer stressed the immediate need for access to funds by *all* small businesses. Ms Sommer warned the European Institutions to drop their exaggerated focus on highly innovative SMEs and Venture Capital and urged them to concentrate on Europe's core, which is made up of 'low-tech', mainstream SMEs. The companies often hailed as the 'backbone of the EU economy' suffer the most from the crisis. SMEs account for 85% of all new employment, 92% of these SMES are micro businesses and the large majority of these companies are neither highly innovative, nor are they of any real interest to Venture Capitalists. *"Who is financing the small guys?"* Sommer asked the stakeholders.

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ESBA Opinion

The EU is so focussed on innovation to be able to compete with third markets and is therefore spending lots of money on high tech and fast growing companies, but forgetting to take care of its base. Yes, we are part of a globalising market and we need to stay competitive. But if we do not take care of our ‘backbone’ which is made up of everyday non high-tech but profit making European businesses, we will never stand a chance. ESBA urges the Institutions to channel European Funding towards the small businesses that need it the most in order to make them healthy and profitable again, employing more people and feeding back into the economy. By doing so, we will ensure a strong basis on which our highly innovative companies can build.

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

IN BRIEF

EU/ Intellectual Property Rights: Commission Vice-president Kroes yields on ACTA

On 4 May 2012, in her speech at the Internet Freedom ‘Re:publica’ conference "The European public on the Net" in Berlin, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes admitted that the adoption of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) has become unlikely. From the beginning ACTA sparked important opposition, both from citizens and MEPs, fearing that it would infringe personal freedoms on the Internet. On 25 April 2012, the ALDE group of the European Parliament had expressed its refusal to adopt the Treaty if no re-negotiations would take place. With ALDE joining the S&D and the Greens in the opponents’ camp, ACTA is unlikely to get a majority of the votes when the European Parliament adopts its position scheduled for July 3rd.

To read more about the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, please click [here](#)

EU/ Education and training: Promotion of youth entrepreneurship

On 3 May 2012, the Commissioner in charge of Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth Androulla Vassiliou, stated that risk-taking and entrepreneurship need to be promoted as a way of tackling youth unemployment. The European Commission adopted an Employment Package on 18 April, identifying growth and employment opportunities in areas such as health, the green economy and ICT. Commissioner Vassiliou stressed that self-employment could be greatly enhanced by improving language skills, reducing the start-up time and the cost for new enterprises and by stimulating working and studying abroad. Particular emphasis was placed on the “Erasmus for all” programme (starting in 2014) and its potential to stimulate entrepreneurship.

To learn more about “Erasmus for all”, please click [here](#)

To learn more about the European Employment Strategy, please click [here](#)

EU/ Finance: Public Private Partnerships to increase impact of Research and Innovation funds

On 3 May 2012, the Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn held a speech at the Conference of the Italian Association of Technology Districts where she pointed at the potential of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Horizon 2020. Possibilities for Public-Private

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Partnerships are present in Horizon 2020 by combining EU funds with private sector funds in key research areas. According to the Commission's proposal for Horizon 2020, the pooling of resources through PPPs will result in a greater impact of EU funding.

To learn more about the EU's initiatives on Public Private Partnerships, please click [here](#)

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

EU/ Finance: Tension over bids for further financial regulation

On 2 May 2012, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council convened to discuss the new capital requirements for the banking sector. George Osborne, UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer, sparked a vehement debate by taking the lead of a block of countries that wish to remain free in setting higher capital ratios than those commonly agreed upon by the EU. Further developments in regulating the financial sector followed on 4 May 2012 when the European Commission published a package of reports on the impact of a potential Financial Transaction Tax. The negotiations in the Council on the proposal of the European Commission on this tax came to a dead end due to the uncertainty of the estimated revenues, the problems posed by the enforceability of the tax and the relocation effect on the financial sector.

To read more about EU's proposed regulatory framework for the banking sector, please click [here](#)

To access the documents published by the Commission on the FTT, please click [here](#)

EU/ ECB: Decline in access to finance, say Euro area SMEs

On 27 April 2012, the European Central Bank published a survey on access to finance for SMEs in the Euro area from October 2011 to March 2012. The survey found an increase in SMEs' demand for bank loans compared to the previous six months. At the same time, SMEs reported deterioration in the availability of external finance, all together bank loans, bank overdrafts and trade credit.

To read the survey released by the ECB, please click [here](#).

EU/ Growth and Jobs: EU executive to present substantial investment plan to boost growth

On the 26th of April 2012, amidst increasing demands for a growth pact to be delivered alongside austerity measures and budget cuts, José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, announced that his services were working on an EU-wide plan to open up new opportunities for economic recovery. The initiative, building on the EU's '2020 strategy for growth', will aim at boosting public investment at EU level, notably by raising the capital of the European Investment Bank, and allocating funds to infrastructural projects.

To learn more about the current EU 2020 strategy for growth, please click [here](#)

EU/ Enterprise and industry: Clusters as a means to enhance SME innovation and competitiveness

On 19 April, on the occasion of the European cluster conference in Vienna, policy makers, experts and business representatives came together to discuss the role of clusters in stimulating SME internationalisation, competitiveness and innovation. Clusters can stimulate economic output by positioning businesses and research institutions close to each other. This allows them to share expertise and specialise in business niches. The participants of the conferences emphasised the vast

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potential of clusters and adopted a manifesto calling upon the Commission, national and regional actors to cooperate in order to improve cluster excellence and innovation.

To read the Vienna cluster manifesto, please click [here](#)

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

PUBLICATIONS

EU / Eurostat: Euro area unemployment rate

On 2 May, Eurostat made public the figures of the unemployment rate in the Euro area. The average rate was culminating at 10.9% in March 2012, while it was estimated at 9.9% at the same period last year. The average unemployment rate in the whole EU 27 is slightly better, at 10.2%.

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

EU / Commission: Monthly Note on Economic Recovery in Industry

On 3 May, the DG Enterprise and Industry issued a note on the economic recovery in the industrial sector, based on recent Eurostat data. The report shows that in the first three months of 2012, manufacturing production declined by 0.2% compared to last year and that most of the manufacturing sector has not yet reached its pre-crisis level.

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

EU / Eurostat: Industrial producer prices increased in Euro area

On 3 May, Eurostat indicated that in March 2012 the industrial producer price index rose by 0.5% in the Euro area, compared to the figures of February 2012. The same index rose by 0.6% in the EU 27.

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

EU / Eurostat: Rise of the retail trade volume

On 4 May, euro indicators released by Eurostat showed an increase of 0.3% of the volume of retail trade in the Euro area compared to the month of February. However it represents a drop of 0.2% compared to March 2011.

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

EU / Eurostat: Basic EU figures – Summer 2012 Edition

On 7 May, Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Commission, released the summer edition of its compact guide on basic EU figures. The document notably displays a small increase in the cost of labour during the fourth quarter of 2011, as well as a decline of the Gross Domestic Product in the EU – 27 during the same period.

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

EU / Commission: Key indicators for the Euro area

On 10 May, the Directorate General (DG) Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission updated a number of key economic statistics on different trends (investments, private consumption, labour market...). The figures depict a looming economic situation, with consumer confidence down by 0.8 point in April and industrial production falling by 1.8% since last year.

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

EU / Commission: Spring Economic Forecast

On 11 May, the spring European Economic Forecast was published by the DG Economic and Financial Affairs of the European Commission. Even though the Gross Domestic Product is expected to stagnate this year in the EU 27, a progressive recovery is anticipated for the second-half of the year, accelerating in 2013.

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

EU / Commission: Statistical Annex to European Economy

On 11 May, the Commission released the spring statistical annex of its publication 'European Economy'. It contains a large number a macroeconomic data covering, among other things, labour market, prices, wage costs, foreign trade...

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW

Consultation by the High-level Expert Group on reforming the structure of the EU banking sector

Closes: 1 June 2012

The High-level Expert Group is launching a consultation on reforming the structure of the EU banking sector. The Group was set up in February 2012 and has the mandate to consider in depth whether there is a need for structural reforms of the EU banking sector or not, in order to establish a banking system matching the needs of citizens, the EU economy and the internal market. Among other things, the High level group seeks to know what impact the ongoing financial regulatory reforms have on the availability and cost of financing, or if those reforms would lead to a shift away from bank finance to other sources of finance.

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

Consultation on the governance of the 'Internet of Things'

Closes: 10 July 2012

The Internet of today offers access to content and information through connectivity to web pages and to multiple terminals (e.g., mobiles, TV). The next evolution will make it possible to access information related to our physical environment, through a generalised connectivity of everyday objects. The Internet of Things holds the promise of significant progress but it is likely to have a profound impact on society, in areas like privacy, security, ethics, and liability.

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

Exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services

Closes: 15 July 2012

The staff working document on personal and household services aims to have views of all stakeholders to comment on possible actions to address the issue of promoting new jobs in the personal and household services sectors. In particular, the Commission is interested in ways to improve measurement and monitoring of the employment levels in PHS, taking into account the impact of the on-going crisis, loss of purchasing power, labour market exclusion issues and the potentially positive effect on the creation or growth of SMEs.

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

Public Consultation on an EU Initiative to Reduce the Cost of Rolling Out High Speed Communication Infrastructure in Europe

Closes: 20 July 2012

High-speed Internet underpins all sectors of the economy and will be the backbone of the Digital Single Market. For every 10% increase in the broadband penetration the economy grows by 1 to 1.5%. In this context the European Commission is seeking views on how to cut the costs of setting up new networks for high speed internet in the EU. In particular, the Commission wants to explore how to reduce the costs associated with civil engineering, such as the digging up of roads to lay down fibre, and which can account for as much as 80% of the total cost. The Commission believes it could cut the cost of broadband investments by a quarter. Input is sought from all interested public and private parties including telecoms and utility companies for instance, investors, public authorities and consumers.

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

ONGOING:

Consultation on the future of European Company Law

Closes: 14 May 2012

The purpose of this consultation is to collect views from all interested stakeholders on the future of European company law. The revision will have great effect on the legal structure with regards to 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.

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

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 publication, please click [here](#)

Consultation on the internal market: Factual examples of double non-taxation cases

Closes: 30 May 2012

The Commission wants the views of all relevant stakeholders to gather evidence of double non-taxation within the EU and in relation with Third Countries. The results of the consultation will be

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used to identify and develop the appropriate measures to avoid double non-taxation which creates an unfair competitive advantage to the taxpayer.

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

Consultation on the EU environment policy priorities for 2020: Towards a 7th EU Environment Action Programme

Closes: 1st June 2012

This consultation aims at gathering the views of informed stakeholders and of the general public on the policy priorities for the environment up to 2020. The Commission welcomes opinions on the sectors which should be addressed in priority and on the most effective instruments the EU should use to take up the challenges described in the consultation document.

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

The provision of information and reservation services for safe and secure parking places for trucks and commercial vehicles under the ITS Directive 2010/40/EU

Closes: 8 June 2012

The Commission is seeking the opinions of stakeholders and EU citizens on providing information and reservation services for safe and secure parking places for trucks and commercial vehicles.

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

Consultation on bank accounts

Closes: 12 June 2012

The Commission is willing to collect stakeholders' viewpoints on the necessity of taking action and on the possible policy tools to be used to improve the transparency and comparability of bank account fees, bank account switching and access to a basic payment account.

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

Consultation on the Access to Interoperability Information of Digital Products and Services

Closes: 20 June 2012

The Commission will analyze how the market situation could change if the significant market players were legally forced to disclose interoperability information and if necessary will draft Commission Communication or a Directive by 2012. This consultation particularly focuses on owners and potential users of interoperability information that is not covered by standards.

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

Consultation on the future of European Insolvency Law

Closes: 21 June 2012

As part of the revision of the Insolvency Regulation (Reg (EC) 1346/2000), the European Commission has published a public consultation to obtain the views of all relevant stakeholders.

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

Consultation on a EU strategy to reduce injuries resulting from road traffic accidents

Closes: 22 June 2012

This consultation will serve as input for the drafting of a strategy to reduce the severity of injuries caused by road traffic accidents. The questionnaire addresses general issue related to road safety

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and more specific issues on how to improve the data available on victims of accidents and their collection at EU level, and on how to target some specific groups of road users.

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

- 14 May 2012 – Foreign Affairs Council
- 14 May 2012 – Eurogroup meeting
- 14-15 May 2012 – Agriculture and Fisheries Council (development issues)
- 15 May 2012 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council
- 16 May 2012 – Weekly meeting of College of Commissioners
- 16 May 2012 – Meetings Coreper I and II
- 16 May 2012 – Governing council meeting of the European Central Bank
- 21-24 May 2012 – European Parliament committee meetings
- 21-24 May 2012 – European Parliament plenary session
- 22 May 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
- 23 May 2012 – Meetings Coreper I and II
- 23-24 May 2012 – European Economic and Social and Committee plenary session
- 25 May 2012 – Meeting Coreper I
- 29 May 2012 – Environment, Consumers and Health Council
- 30-31 May 2012 – Meeting Coreper II
- 30-31 May 2012 – Competitiveness Council
- 30 May 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
- 31 May 2012 – Foreign Affairs (Trade) Council

Other SME-related events

ALDE stakeholders' consultation seminar on Horizon 2020

15 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The ALDE group in the European Parliament organises a seminar on Horizon 2020 to determine its stance on the Horizon 2020 - new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This seminar will bring together European Commission representatives, industry and research institutes/universities, as well as policy makers at EU, national and regional levels.

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

JRC Conference on "Scientific support for growth, jobs and sustainability: the example of the Eco-Industries"

15 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

This conference organised by the Commission Joint research centre will aim at identifying where scientific support is needed to strengthen Eco-Industries in Europe. Eco-industries have a high potential for growth and job-creation at local level.

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

SME Intergroup Conference on 'Recognising Patient Capital and Family Entrepreneurship'

15 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

Organised by the SME Intergroup of the European Parliament in cooperation with GEEF, this conference will put the focus on the role of taxation in access to finance and on transfers of family businesses in Europe.

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

Workshop on 'Social Business Financing'

16 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

In the framework of the SME Finance Forum, the DG Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission is organising a workshop on social business financing to build on its Social Business Initiative presented last year. The workshop aims at bringing together social enterprises and financial institutions from the EU to discuss access to finance for social business.

To learn more about the SME Finance Forum, please click [here](#)

Green Week Conference 2012

22 – 25 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The 2012 edition of the Green Week conference will focus on water, stakeholders will exchange best practices and experiences.

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

Conference "Mission Growth" - Innovation for the competitiveness of European industry

29 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

This conference is organised by DG Enterprise and Industry. It will focus on how Europe can boost its industrial competitiveness and innovation capacity to generate growth and create jobs. José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, as well as vice-President Antonio Tajani will be present.

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

EESC Public hearing on 'Female Entrepreneurs'

30 May 2012

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Brussels, Belgium

The European Economic and Social Committee, in view of an upcoming own-initiative report entitled “Female entrepreneurs -Specific policies to increase EU growth and employment”, will be holding a public hearing to gather inputs and experiences of women entrepreneurs. Particular accent will be put on women entrepreneurship in SMEs.

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

Conference Vocational Education and Training – A Vital Tool for Youth Employability and Growth 6 June 2012

Brussels, Belgium

Eurochambres, in the context of the negotiations on the 2014-20 EU ‘Erasmus for All’ education & training programme, is organising a conference on the role of internships, traineeships and vocational education and training in boosting the employability of young graduates. The possibility for SMEs to better engage with those tools will be particularly highlighted.

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

Conference on Electronic Procurement – Challenges and Opportunities 26 June 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The European Commission has recently proposed that e-procurement should become mandatory across the EU by mid-2016. This conference is co-organised by the Commission and the European Parliament.

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