



HEADLINES

EU/ Gender Equality: European Parliament calls for Commission action to close the gender pay gap

On 24 May 2012, the European Parliament voted in favour of a report presenting recommendations to the Commission on the application of the principle of equal pay. The report, drafted by MEP Edit Bauer (EPP/SK), aims at closing the widening gender pay gap, something current legislation has been unable to sufficiently achieve. The document supports mandatory pay audits for companies employing at least 30 people and full transparency on salaries through publication of wage statistics. Furthermore, it stresses the need for women to be able to combine work and family life and outlines the necessity to reinforce sanctions in case of non-compliance. Some MEPs expressed concern that new regulation would only further increase red tape for companies.

To know more about the EU's initiatives in the field of Equal pay, please click [here](#)

ESBA Opinion

The European Small Business Alliance (ESBA) welcomes the European Parliament recommendations on equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value. ESBA specifically welcomes the Bauer report's call to limit mandatory audit requirements for the smallest companies. ESBA stresses the necessity to take into account the specific characteristics of the different categories within the SME spectrum and to avoid administrative burden where possible. However, ESBA urges the Commission not to consider any recommendations, falling outside of the scope of the issue of equal pay. The debate on equal pay should not shift its focus to the balance between work/personal life or the discussion on parental leave, both complex and sensitive issues which should be addressed separately.

EU/ Capital Requirements: Council and EP adopt on new rules for banks

On 15 May 2012, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council reached agreement on the Commission proposal for the revision of the Capital Requirements Directive. One day prior, the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee unanimously adopted the draft report by rapporteur Othmar Karas (EPP, AT) aimed at making the banking sector more resilient to systemic risks and losses on outstanding credit. Inter alia, the new rules lay down the requirement for banks to retain a higher amount of capital vis-à-vis outstanding loans, to reserve higher liquidity ratios and to be more transparent about outstanding risks. Both the Council position and the Karas report carry specific provisions for SMEs, particularly with regard to the evaluation of the risk weighting of SME loans.

ESBA Opinion

ESBA welcomes the adoption of the Council Conclusions and the report by Mr Othmar Karas MEP. The revision of the Capital Requirements Directive has the potential to make the financial sector more stable and risk averse. However, the measures must be approached with caution as a stricter

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

regime may have adverse effects on banks' SME lending. It should be noted that multiple studies have shown that SMEs access to finance has fallen sharply since the beginning of the crisis. Safety measures to this end are crucial. ESBA welcomes the special provisions for the risk weighting of SMEs as well as the evaluation of the correct credit risk weight in order to reflect the actual economic risks of outstanding loans to SMEs.

IN BRIEF

EU/ Taxation: European Parliament in favour of Financial Transaction Tax

On 23 May 2012, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of a Financial Transaction Tax on the territory of the European Union. The tax intends to stabilise the financial sector by providing disincentives to short term financial speculation. In the debate preceding the vote, multiple MEPs stressed that the tax would result in better transparency of the financial system, fight speculation, encourage long-term investment and ensure a fair contribution from the financial sector. However, MEPs also voiced concerns about the potential relocation effect of the tax and about the use of its revenues. In a reaction to the vote, Algirdas Šemeta, the Commissioner responsible for Taxation, expressed his hope that the Council would reach the unanimous agreement needed to adopt the tax.

For more information about the EU's efforts to tax the financial sector, please click [here](#)

EU/ Taxation: Eurostat reports average increase of taxation rates in the EU

On 21 May 2012, Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, published the report 'Taxation trends in the European Union' revealing an increase of average taxation rates in the Member States of the EU, Iceland and Norway. Eurostat highlights a slight rise of the EU average corporate tax rate, which had previously been on a declining trend. France (36.1%) and Malta (35%) are the Member States where statutory tax rates are the highest, while taxation is lowest in Bulgaria (10%) and Cyprus (10%). The report showed that very different VAT rates co-exist across the territory of the EU and that the average VAT rate increased in 2012 up to 21% (20.7% in 2011).

To access Eurostat's report, please click [here](#)

EU/ Growth: EU delegation in Colombia to support SME internationalisation

On 16 May 2012, a European delegation of entrepreneurs and business representatives arrived in Colombia to promote further business partnerships between European and Colombian SMEs. Led by Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani, the trip in Colombia was the fourth of a series of official visits abroad known as 'Missions for Growth'. The tour aims at supporting European SMEs access to emerging markets and at attracting foreign investments in Europe.

To learn more about the 'Missions for growth' series, please click [here](#)

EU/ Taxation: Council adopts conclusions on the Future of VAT

On 15 May 2012, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council adopted conclusions on the future of VAT, and on priorities for future actions. The Council welcomed the Commission Communication on the Future of VAT issued in December 2011. The main aim of the Communication is to modernise the

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

current VAT system, which was designed more than 40 years ago. The Council approved the broad objectives set by the European Commission of simplification, greater efficiency, fraud-resistance, and better suitability to cross-border transactions.

To read the Communication on the Future of VAT, please click [here](#)

To read the Council conclusions on the Future of VAT, please click [here](#)

EU/ Finance: EIB brings €400 million to Spanish SMEs

On 14 May 2012, the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed financing agreements with two Spanish banks, Banesto and Banco Popular. Each bank will receive a €200 million loan to finance SME investment projects. Both banks will add another €200 million to the initial amount, and will pass on the favourable conditions concerning interest rates and loan maturity to borrowing SMEs. The EIB mentions support to SME investment as one of its key priorities. EIB figures show that in 2011, €13 billion have been provided to SMEs and midcaps, reaching more than 120 000 companies.

To learn more about the EIB action towards SMEs, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

EU/ Commission: Flash Consumer Confidence Indicator

On 22 May 2012, DG ECFIN published the flash Consumer Confidence Indicator (CCI) in the EU and euro area for May 2012. It found an improvement of the CCI in both areas, to -19.4 compared to -20.2 in April in the EU, and to -19.3 compared to -19.9 in April in the euro area.

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

EU/ OECD: Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship

On 22 May 2012, the OECD published its final report on gender equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship. It finds that women's representation among entrepreneurs remains low, women-owned businesses representing 30% of businesses in OECD countries.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Euro-indicator on inflation

On 16 May 2012, Eurostat published its indicator on inflation for April 2012. The annual inflation in the euro area was 2.6% in April, down from 2.7% in March. In the EU27, it went down from 2.9% in March to 2.7% in April.

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

EU/ Eurostat: Flash estimate GDP in volume

On 15 May 2012, Eurostat published its flash estimates of the GDP in volume for the first quarter of 2012. It found that the average GDP remained stable in both the EU 27 and the euro area.

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

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation on Industrial Policy Communication 2012

Closes: 7 July 2012

The European Commission industrial policy flagship of 2010 laid out a strategy for sustainable growth, competitiveness and job creation in the context of Europe 2020. The 2012 review of the industrial policy communication will be adopted by the Commission in September. The new communication should focus on a limited number of new initiatives capable of effectively delivering results to tackle the economic crisis in the short to medium term, as well as actions aiming at correcting or eliminating problems that may have been detected in the implementation of our industrial policy strategy. The responses to the questionnaire will help the Commission identify policy priorities and develop appropriate policy responses.

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

ONGOING:

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 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: 1 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](#)

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

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

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](#)

The provision, where possible, of road safety related minimum universal traffic information free of charge to users under the ITS Directive 2010/40/EU

Closes: 5 June 2012

The objective of this public consultation is to collect the opinions of stakeholders and EU citizens on the provision, where possible, of road safety related minimum universal traffic information free of charge to users. The aim of the European Commission is to support the coordinated and coherent deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) within the EU and to set out the general conditions necessary for that purpose. The present consultation will provide inputs for the development of specifications on road safety related minimum universal traffic information, and the impact assessment that will be carried prior to the adoption of the aforementioned specifications.

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 analyse 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](#)

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

Consultation on an 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 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](#)

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.

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](#)

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

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

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

29 May 2012 – General Affairs Council
29-31 May 2012 – European Parliament committee meetings
30 May 2012 – Competitiveness Council - Industry and Internal market issues
30 May 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
30-31 May 2012 – Meetings Coreper I & II
31 May 2012 – Competitiveness Council - Research issues
31 May 2012 – Foreign Affairs Council -Trade
1 June 2012 – Meetings Coreper I & II
3-5 June 2012 – Informal meeting of Ministers for Agriculture and Fisheries
5 June 2012 – Meeting Coreper I
6 June 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners
6 June 2012 – Meetings Coreper I & II
6 June 2012 – Governing Council Meeting of the European Central Bank
5-7 June 2012 – European Parliament political groups meetings
7-8 June 2012 – Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council
7-8 June 2012 – Justice and Home Affairs Council

Other SME-related events

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](#)

Public hearing on 'Female Entrepreneurs'

30 May 2012

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](#)

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

Brussels Economic Forum

31 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The Brussels Economic Forum is a high-profile forum to debate current economic issues. Decision-makers, opinion leaders, business representatives, journalists, academics and European officials will gather to discuss the euro-crisis, ways to boost economic growth despite fiscal austerity and the challenges of the global economy.

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

Conference on a Common EU Standard VAT Return

31 May 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The leading consulting firm PWC organises a conference to give stakeholders the possibility to get involved in the study on the feasibility and economic impact of a common EU standard VAT return it is currently conducting for the European Commission.

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](#)

Debate on 'Corporate governance, no one size but fit for all'

6 June 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The Parliament Magazine, in association with the European Confederation of Institutes of Internal Auditing (ECIIA) is organising a debate at the European Parliament which will look at what measures should be taken in order to strengthen corporate governance in Europe and what the 'minimum size' for governance should be.

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

Conference 'EU's Research and Innovation ecosystem: what's in it for SMEs?'

7 June 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The group of the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament will hold a conference to debate on how the research and innovations priorities set up in the EU strategy Horizon 2020 can support SMEs.

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

Conference on Education in Entrepreneurship

18-19 June 2012

Horsens, Denmark

Organised in Denmark by the Danish presidency this conference will focus on the methods of learning and learning outcomes of education in entrepreneurship and creativity.

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

rue d'Idalie 9-13, B - 1050 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32 (2) 639 62 30 – Fax. : +32 (2) 644 90 17 – email : secretariat@esba-europe.org

ESBA Bulletin of 25 May 2012 – Volume 14 – Number 8

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

2nd Digital Agenda Assembly

21-22 June 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The two-day conference aims at identifying and assessing problems and solutions in the implementation of the Digital Agenda for Europe, the European Commission's roadmap comprising different initiatives to boost growth through the digital economy. Stakeholders are invited to give their opinion online in preparation of the event.

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](#)

Public Hearing 'Improving access to finance for SMEs'

28 June 2012

Brussels, Belgium

The European Economic and Social Committee will gather representatives from SMEs and financial institutions to conduct a public hearing on the Commission's Action plan to improve access to finance for SMEs. In a context of crisis, it is particularly difficult for SMEs to access capitals.

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