



### HEADLINES

#### **EU/Regulation: Commission presents proposal for gender quotas on corporate boards**

On 14 November 2012, Vice-President of the European Commission for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding presented a Communication on gender equality in corporate boards, accompanied by a proposal for a Directive. The legislative proposal aims to raise the amount of women on non-executive corporate boards to 30% by 2015 and to 40% by 2020 (for publicly owned companies, the goal is 40% by 2018). However, after earlier drafts of the proposal were met with heavy criticism, including from several female Commissioners, the proposed Directive no longer includes fines or other sanctions for companies that do not comply with the targets. This legislation would only apply to large companies; non-listed companies and small and medium-sized enterprises are explicitly excluded from the proposal. The proposal is a response to two European Parliament resolutions (from July 2011 and March 2012) calling for legislation including gender quotas.

To read the Commission's Communication on gender equality on corporate boards, please click [here](#).

To read the legislative proposal, please click [here](#).

#### **ESBA Opinion**

"The European Small Business Alliance (ESBA) wholeheartedly supports equality between men and women in the workplace and advocates the elimination of glass ceilings in company cultures. However, pushing this quota is a form of positive discrimination, which cannot be supported. The 40% quota proposed by Commissioner Reding could mean that women are chosen on Boards at the expense of potentially better-suited male candidates, threatening the quality of these Boards. "A board should consist of people who have been selected as 'the best man or woman for the job' and not because of gender".

### IN BRIEF

#### **EU/MFF: European Council fail to agree on EU's budget for 2014 - 2020**

On 22 and 23 November 2012, the Heads of State and Government of the Member States discussed the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2014-2020. During the special summit of the European Council, the Member States could neither agree on the overall size of the EU budget nor on a fair balance of contributions of the individual Member States. After the Summit, both President of the Council Herman van Rompuy and President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso stated that the budget will be cut in real terms compared to the previous MFF. However, they also expressed their wish for the upcoming budget to contribute to the EU's 2020 strategy and be targeted at stimulating growth, jobs, innovation and research. Negotiations on the MFF will continue in January 2013.

For more information on the negotiations on the EU's next seven year budget, please click [here](#)

### **EU/Skills: Entrepreneurial education missing in many EU school programmes, study finds**

On 19 November 2012, the European Commission published a report on key competences to be imparted in EU school curricula. The report, prepared by the EU's education network *Eurydice*, found that especially in the fields of IT and entrepreneurial skills, many Member States do not have a national strategy in place to make sure students develop the competences that business are in need of. To tackle this specific problem, the European Commission launched its 'Rethinking Education' strategy on 20 November, calling for Member States to focus on 'learning outcomes' instead of on the mere duration of education.

To read the report on developing key competences at school in Europe, please click [here](#)

### **EU/Intellectual Property: Final Breakthrough for EU Unitary Patent?**

On 19 November 2012, the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER I) approved a package containing a draft regulation giving shape to the unitary patent system and a draft intergovernmental agreement outlining the court system. The European Parliament Committee on Legal Affairs reviewed the text in the evening, and many MEPs expressed their support to this new agreement. The package is expected to be adopted by the Competitiveness Council on 10 December 2012. This regulation is the last breakthrough in a series of attempts to establish a common patent applicable all over the EU.

To read more about the European Commission initiative, click [here](#)

### **EU/Access to Finance: EU surpasses the 15% target of research funding directed to SMEs**

On 16 November 2012, the European Commission published its ninth SME progress report. The key conclusion of the report is that the EU has exceeded the 15% target of making funds available to SMEs under the Cooperation heading of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7). Growth is mostly due to an increase of initiatives directed to SMEs and to the fact that SMEs respond more actively to projects specifically designed for them.

To read the Progress Report on SME participation in FP7, please click [here](#)

### **EU/Finance: Van Rompuy ties revenues from Financial Transaction Tax to own budget of EU**

On 13 November 2012, as part of his broader negotiation package for the EU's upcoming seven year budget, President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy proposed to link 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the potential revenues from a Financial Transaction Tax to the EU's own budget. This could give the EU another source of own resources, a deep-seated wish of the European Parliament. Negotiations on a Financial Transaction Tax are however still on-going. After required unanimous agreement in the Council could not be found, the European Commission is now preparing a proposal for Enhanced Cooperation on this subject.

For more information on the negotiations on the EU's next seven year budget, please click [here](#)

For more information on the financial transaction tax, please click [here](#)

### **EU/Energy: European Commission pushes to complete EU energy market**

## ESBA Bulletin of 26 November 2012 – Volume 14 – Issue 16

On 15 November 2012, the European Commission released a Communication on the EU's internal energy market. Stressing the advantages for consumers and businesses of a fully integrated energy market, Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger called on Member States to fully implement the third energy market package. The European Commission announced it will "vigorously enforce competition rules", because it estimates annual savings for consumers could amount to €13 billion.

To read the Communication 'Making the internal energy market work', please click [here](#)

To access the Commission's website on the internal energy market, please click [here](#)

### **EU/Innovation: Manufacturing SMEs to benefit from Commission's Cloud Computing initiative**

On 12 November 2012, the European Commission announced it would support the creation of a network of specialist centres which will provide cloud computing services to SMEs. Those centres will be funded via an ICT Programme under the European Commission's Factories of the Future Initiative. The aim is to provide assistance to SMEs that encounter difficulties during different stages in the manufacturing process. Small companies currently have difficulties in developing prototypes or a proof of concept as a result of limited funds or expertise to use highly advanced software. This initiative is expected to let SMEs benefit from cheaper services, thereby boosting productivity in Europe's manufacturing industry.

To read the Communication 'Unleashing the Potential of Cloud Computing in Europe', please click [here](#)

To read more about the Factories for the Future initiative, please click [here](#)

## **PUBLICATIONS**

### **EU/Eurostat: Euro area international trade in goods posts 9.8 billion euro surplus in September**

On 16 November 2012, Eurostat published the first estimate for euro area and EU27 international trade in goods in September. While the euro area posted a €9.8 billion surplus, up from €5.2 billion in August, the EU27 saw a €12.6 billion deficit in goods, compared to €13.2 billion in August. From January to August 2012, exports are up compared to the same period in 2011 (except to India).

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

### **EU/Eurostat: GDP down by 0.1% in euro area, up by 0.1% in EU27 during third quarter**

On 15 November 2012, Eurostat published a flash estimate of the euro area and EU27 GDP in the third quarter of 2012. Compared with the previous quarter, GDP fell by 0.1% in the euro area, while it rose by 0.1% in the EU as a whole. While both indicators are higher than in the last quarter (-0.2% for both areas), compared to the third quarter of 2011 GDP fell by 0.6% in the euro area and by 0.4% in the EU27.

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

### **EU/Eurostat: Euro area annual inflation down to 2.5%, EU down to 2.6%**

**European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office**

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## ESBA Bulletin of 26 November 2012 – Volume 14 – Issue 16

On 15 November 2012, Eurostat published new annual inflation numbers for the euro area and the EU27. Euro area annual inflation was 2.5% in October (down from 2.6% in September and down from 3.0% in October 2011); EU annual inflation was 2.6% in October (down from 2.7% in September and down from 3.4% in October 2011). Greece had the lowest annual inflation rate in October (0.6%), while annual inflation was highest in Hungary (6.0%).

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

### **EU/Eurostat: Industrial production down by 2.5% in euro area, down by 2.3% in EU27**

On 14 November 2012, Eurostat published the monthly industrial production numbers for September 2012. Compared to August, industrial production was down in both the euro area (-2.5%) and the EU as a whole (-2.3%). Compared to a year earlier, industrial production was down by 2.3% in the euro area and by 2.7% in the EU27. Compared to September 2011, Ireland saw the biggest decrease (-12.8%), while Slovakia saw the biggest increase in industrial production (+13.0%).

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

## CONSULTATIONS

### **NEW:**

#### **Generation adequacy, capacity mechanisms and the internal market in electricity**

*Closes: 7 February 2013*

The Commission invites all interested parties to submit their contributions in response to the questions raised in the consultation document 'Generation adequacy, capacity mechanisms and the internal market in electricity, with the goal of ensuring a more coordinated approach to assessing generation adequacy and security in the internal electricity market.

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

### **ONGOING:**

#### **Consultation on the proposed EU Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria for waste water infrastructure works**

*Closes: 14 December 2012*

In order to facilitate the uptake of Green Public Procurement, the European Commission is developing EU GPP criteria to assist the contracting authorities throughout the European Union. The development process includes a consultation inviting comments by interested parties. The present consultation relates to waste water infrastructure works.

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

#### **Consultation on: Bio-based industries, towards a public-private partnership under Horizon 2020?**

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*Closes: 14 December 2012*

This public consultation is intended to provide opportunities for input on the state of play of the full bio-based industries value chain in Europe, in particular with regard to aspects related to research and innovation. A public-private partnership is being envisaged to implement research and innovation activities under Horizon 2020. This consultation is specifically seeking input in connection therewith.

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

### **Consultation on the urban dimension of the EU transport policy**

*Closes: 17 December 2012*

The European Commission wishes to consult the public and all other relevant stakeholders on how best to contribute with targeted EU-level action to high-quality and sustainable urban transport and mobility for all users in the 27 EU Member States.

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

### **Consultation: Which are the top 10 most burdensome EU legislative acts for SMEs?**

*Closes: 21 December 2012*

The European Commission is looking for concrete proposals to reduce the administrative burden on businesses. With this in mind, the European Commission is calling upon businesses: "Let us know what could be done better - we would like your ideas for reducing red tape!". This consultation process for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and their representative organisations should help to identify the top ten EU legislative acts considered most burdensome by micro-companies and SMEs.

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

### **Consultation on a possible framework for the recovery and resolution of nonbank financial institutions**

*Closes: 28 December 2012*

This consultation looks to ascertain how and when the failure of a financial institution other than a bank can threaten financial stability. The main institutions considered in this respect are financial market infrastructures, such as central counterparties and central securities depositories, and systemic insurance companies. Second, it considers what arrangements could be needed to prevent their failure from compromising financial stability.

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

### **Consultation on the future of transnational company agreements**

*Closes: 31 December 2012*

With its new staff working document "Transnational company agreements: realising the potential of social dialogue", the European Commission takes stock of the TCA expert group's work and outlines options for further steps. The European Commission now invites all interested parties to share their views on the challenges and opportunities faced by TCAs and on the specific options put forward.

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

### **Consultation on review of existing legislation on VAT reduced rates**

*Closes: 4 January 2013*

The European Commission invites all interested parties to submit their contributions in response to the questions raised in the consultation document 'Review of existing legislation on VAT reduced rates'. The European Commission services have made a first evaluation of the current VAT rates structure and the goods and services mentioned hereafter are the ones which require to be examined further in the light of the above three guiding principles. With this public consultation, the European Commission is now seeking the opinion of stakeholders.

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

### **The Commission consults on e-invoicing in public procurement**

*Closes: 14 January 2013*

The European Commission seeks in particular contributions from public authorities and enterprises directly involved in e-invoicing in public procurement. Among the points taken into consideration in the consultation, in view of the decision of several Member States to make e-invoicing mandatory for their public procurement, the extension of this requirement to all public procurement in the EU is one of the options under consideration.

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

### **Consultation on the European Union e-Freight Initiative**

*Closes: 17 January 2013*

The EU aims at establishing the adequate structural conditions for fostering growth of the EU economy. A main element needed to support growth is the facilitation of the transport of goods. E-Freight will help improving the efficiency of freight transport and thus contribute to growth and competitiveness.

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

## **COMING UP**

### **EU Institutions: Important dates**

26-29 November 2012 – Committee Meetings of the European Parliament

26-27 November 2012 – Education, Youth, Culture & Sport Council

28 November 2012 – COREPER I

28 November 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners

29 November 2012 – Foreign Affairs Council (Trade)

29-30 November 2012 – Plenary session of the Committee of the Regions

30 November 2012 – COREPER I

3 December 2012 – Eurogroup

4 December 2012 – COREPER II

4 December 2012 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council

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5 December 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners  
6 December 2012 – Justice and Home Affairs Council  
6 December 2012 – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council  
10-13 December 2012 – European Parliament Plenary Session  
10 December 2012 – Competitiveness Council  
11 December 2012 – General Affairs Council  
12 December 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners  
12 December 2012 – COREPER I  
13-14 December 2012 – European Council  
17 December 2012 – Environment Council  
19 December 2012 – COREPER I  
19 December 2012 – Weekly meeting of the College of Commissioners  
20 December 2012 – Transport, Telecoms and Energy Council  
21 December 2012 – COREPER I

### **Other SME-related events**

#### **Electronic payments in the EU: The Interplay between Legislation and Technology**

**26 November 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

The European payments landscape is undergoing significant market and regulatory changes. The EU legislators are reviewing the Payment Services Directive and at the same time considering the legislative steps required to promote the efficiency and security of electronic payments and the SEPA Framework. This ECRI/CEPS event will provide an overview of the key aspects of the legislative proposals currently on the table, and provide relevant stakeholders with an opportunity to exchange views concerning the direction and focus of the on-going regulatory work.

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

#### **Conference on Remedies in Public Procurement - State of Play, Challenges and Opportunities**

**26 November 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

The European Commission is organising a Conference on the EU's legal framework for review procedures in the context of public procurement and its application in the Member States. The conference aims to take stock of stakeholders' experiences with regard to the application of the EU legal framework on remedies and in particular any breaches of the rules in tendering procedures.

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

#### **Transport Business Summit "Connect to Compete"**

**27 November 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

Business leaders and major players in industry and the economy will come together to discuss the challenges faced by transport in Europe today. In an innovative setting, the event will bring together transport service providers and users, policy makers and the media.

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

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### **European Employment Forum**

**27-28 November 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

The Forum's 2012 conference programme, entitled "Creating Jobs for Growth", will cover all of the key areas around the issues of unemployment, including ageing workforce, youth mobility across borders and improving social inclusion.

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

### **"Boosting Europe! Innovative work practices can make it happen!"**

**30 November 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

As part of the efforts to promote the concept of workplace innovation at the European level and as a follow-up to earlier EESC work on this theme, the aim of the high-level seminar is to conduct an awareness-raising debate with selected speakers and to present the results of a Eurofound study on Work Organisation and Innovation.

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

### **Boosting the potential of the Single Market: The effectiveness of Points of Single Contact**

**30 November 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

This seminar features speakers from the Commission and stakeholders to discuss the role of the Points of Single Contact in the Single Market. Speakers include Florence François-Poncet, Head of Unit for Business to Consumer Services at the European Commission's DG Markt, and Jeroen Hardenbol, Adviser for Services at BusinessEurope.

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

### **The EU Takeover Bids Directive, fit for purpose?**

**11 December 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

The event will be hosted by Karel Lannoo, and will linger on the implementation of the takeover bids Directive. The conference will also provide a presentation of the study conducted by CEPS-ECMI and Marccus Partners entitled 'A Legal and Economic Assessment of European Takeover Regulation'.

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

### **7th Meeting of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council on Energy**

**12 December 2012**

**Lefkosia, Cyprus**

The Permanent Partnership Council, to which participate the Commissioner of Energy, the Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation and the Presidency of the Council of the EU, will trigger the 7<sup>th</sup> dialogue between EU and Russia on energy-related topics.

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

### **Joint Research Centre Conference – “Innovation in Service Sector”**

**13 December 2012**

**Lefkosia, Cyprus**

In the light of the recent economic crises that Europe has been undergoing, innovation in services should be the keyword to boosting growth and competitiveness in the EU. The Member States that are part of the Joint Research Conference will debate on the issue.

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

### **Youth on the Move: perspective of regional and local authorities**

**13 December 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

Regarding the unemployment digits of youngsters in the EU and the importance of this issue within the Europe 2020 strategy, the Committee of the Regions will hold a conference presenting all relevant aspects surrounding this strategy.

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

### **Conference on reforming EU fiscal governance**

**13 December 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

The European Central Bank, together with the International Monetary Fund, is holding a joint debate on the necessity of reforming the EU fiscal framework. Indeed, in order to bolster economic growth, fiscal disparities should disappear to ensure a better coordination at EU level.

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

### **Seminar on Electronic Procurement - An opportunity to provide feedback on Commission projects**

**14 December 2012**

**Brussels, Belgium**

During this conference organized by the DG EU Single Market, a study lingering on e-procurement measurements will be presented, as well as a Golden Book and recommendations by an expert group on e-tendering and the way it is conducted, especially for SMEs.

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