



HEADLINES

The tragic news has reached ESBA that Member of the European Parliament Alexander Alvaro has been involved in a car accident on Friday night, 22 February 2013. Our thoughts are with him and his family, we wish him a speedy recovery.

EU/Data protection: MEPs focus on proposed Regulation's impact on small businesses

On 19 February 2013, members of the European Parliament's SME Intergroup engaged stakeholders during a breakfast meeting on the proposed General Data Protection Regulation. Jürgen Creutzmann MEP (ALDE, DE) moderated the panel discussion. Françoise Le Bail, the European Commission's Director General for Justice, defended the balance struck in the Commission's proposal. Axel Voss MEP (EPP, DE), shadow rapporteur on the LIBE Committee and rapporteur of the original own-initiative report calling for new legislation, stated that more clarifications are needed and highlighted the positive German experiences with Data Protection Officers. Luc Hendrickx, Enterprise Policy and Legal Affairs Director at UEAPME, warned against the threshold of 500 data subjects proposed by the rapporteur, Jan Albrecht MEP (Greens/EFA, DE), stating that almost all companies would be included under this criterion. Finally, Seán Kelly MEP (EPP, IE), rapporteur for opinion on the ITRE Committee, explained his approach focuses on reducing red tape to prevent the new rules from stifling SME growth and investment. Mr Kelly's draft opinion was adopted on 20 February.

ESBA opinion

Ever since the European Commission presented its proposals in January 2012, ESBA has underlined the need to reform and harmonise European data protection rules, bringing them up to date with technological developments and providing a clear framework to small businesses ready to innovate. However, the current debate seems to focus on US versus EU, at the expense of small businesses that are getting caught in the crossfire as MEPs increase obligations for SMEs. Small businesses should be able to invest their often scarce resources on hiring staff and creating innovation, rather than on unnecessary burdens such as expensive Impact Assessments and Data Protection Officers. The opinion by Mr Kelly adopted by the ITRE Committee on 20 February rightly reflects this point, by exempting those SMEs that only process data as an activity that is ancillary to their core business. ESBA urges MEPs on the LIBE Committee to take the considerations expressed in the Kelly opinion on board as they prepare to table their amendments.

To read more about the Commission's initiatives on data protection, please click [here](#).

To read the draft report by Jan Philipp Albrecht MEP, please click [here](#).

To read the joint position paper by ESBA, FSB and ACT, please click [here](#).

EU/Budget: Van Rompuy – A bad deal for SMEs

On 18 February 2013, President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy presented to the European Parliament the agreement reached on 8 February on the new Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2014-2020. In his speech Mr Van Rompuy highlighted his vision that the agreement shows a clear path for the future of the EU and that it is to be considered 'a good deal for Europe as a whole.' In particular Mr Van Rompuy stated that he believes a good balance has been struck between the goal of achieving a rationalisation of the overall financial envelope of the budget while, at the same time, promoting funds for growth and employment. In his speech, during the

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same meeting, President of the Commission Manuel Barroso regretted the further cut of the overall budget agreed upon by the Council and called for fruitful negotiations on the matter between the Council and the Parliament. His general lukewarm approach was openly criticised by several MEPs, who expressed their disappointment both in the financial impact of the new agreement and in the lack of communication and consideration of the role and prerogatives of the Parliament. The three largest EP Groups (EPP, S&D and ALDE) voiced their concerns and did not rule out delaying the vote on the MFF (now scheduled for March) or even voting against it.

ESBA opinion

The European Council's decision will have a negative impact on Europe's small businesses, as the two main funding streams for SMEs, COSME and Horizon 2020 have undergone significant cuts. The headers Cohesion and Agricultural policy have remained largely untouched, while the header 'Competitiveness for Growth and Jobs', has suffered a disproportionate reduction. Although short term gains for the Member States might seem attractive, it should not have gone at the expense of research, growth and innovation, which has the potential to yield long-term benefits for all EU Member States. ESBA therefore urges the Member of the European Parliament to carefully scrutinise the agreement between the Member States.

To read more about the Parliament meeting on the new budget, please click [here](#).

To learn more about the new Multiannual Financial Framework, please click [here](#).

IN BRIEF

EU/Innovation: Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn announces significant cuts to the Horizon 2020 budget

On 18 February 2013, in occasion of the press conference following the Competitiveness Council held in Brussels, Seán Sherlock, Irish Minister for Research and Innovation, stressed the importance of focusing on smart, targeted and innovative projects. Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, Commissioner responsible for Research, Innovation and Science, noted that Heads of State acknowledged the key role the Horizon 2020 Programme will play to enhance economic growth and job creation; nevertheless she announced that the agreement reached on 8 February 2013 on the Multiannual Financial Framework will impose significant cuts to the Horizon 2020 budget.

To watch the video of Ms Geoghegan-Quinn's press conference, please click [here](#).

To know more about the Horizon 2020 programme, please click [here](#).

To know more about the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, please click [here](#).

EU/Taxation: France, UK and Germany take the lead to fight tax evasion

On 16 February 2013, France, UK and Germany reiterated their commitment to fight tax fraud and tax evasion by announcing a common framework of action to be presented at the G20 in Moscow, June 2013. Strengthened tax rules will close loopholes, used by large corporations. Multinational corporations shift revenues from country to country, placing smaller firms at a disadvantage. The European Commission has expressed similar ambitions in an action plan and two recommendations to fight tax fraud and tax evasion in December 2012.

To learn more about the European Commission's policies on tax fraud and tax evasion, please click [here](#).

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EU/Entrepreneurship: New enterprise promotion awards presented

On 15 February 2013, the European Commission launched the new edition of the European Enterprise Promotion Awards (EEPA). The awards highlight best practices and initiatives aimed at fostering entrepreneurial growth and culture. This year, the awards are articulated in six categories, including 'Promoting of entrepreneurial spirit'; 'Improving the business environment' and 'supporting the internationalisation of businesses'. Candidate projects have to pass first a scrutiny at national level, before being able to compete at the EU Level. Entries can be submitted now, by June 2013 the pan-European competition between the national nominations will take off.

To learn more about the 2013 European Enterprise Promotion Awards (EEPA), please click [here](#).

EU/Access to finance: €100 million delivered so far under the Progress Microfinance Facility

On 12 February 2013, the European Investment Fund (EIF) reported that since the launch of Progress Microfinance two years ago, €100 million euros have reached micro-businesses via intermediaries. Through these intermediaries, Progress Microfinance allocates loans to microbusinesses all over the EU that are less likely to obtain a traditional bank financing. Loans of up to € 25 000 are made available to for instance female and young entrepreneurs as well as businesses started by people from minority groups. Richard Pelly, Chief Executive of the EIF, announced that agreements will continue to be signed in 2013 and by 2020 €500 million of microloans are expected to be delivered.

To learn more about Progress Microfinance, please click [here](#).

EU/Trade: US and European leaders endorse talks on Transatlantic trade deal

On 12 February 2013, United States President Barack Obama, addressing a joint session of the US Congress in his annual State of the Union, endorsed the idea of a free trade agreement between the world's two largest markets, the EU and the US. Mr Obama echoed what European leaders set out in the Conclusions of the 7/8 February European Council, also calling for the start of negotiations on a free trade agreement with the US. While both the EU and the US are eager to tap into this source of economic growth, tough talks are expected on issues such as agriculture and data protection rules.

To read more about EU-US trade relations, please click [here](#).

EU/Innovation: High-speed broadband infrastructure budget slashed by EUR 8.2 billion

On 8 February 2013, the EU Heads of State reached a deal on the Multiannual Financial Framework. After the agreement, it became clear that the greatest cut will be made in the projected roll out of high-speed broadband infrastructures among the EU. In June 2011, the European Commission proposed a €50 bn Connecting Europe Facility to develop energy, transport and digital cross-border networks, of which €9.2 bn was reserved for the improvement of a high-speed broadband infrastructure. The MFF agreement lowers this budget by €8.2 bn to a meagre €1 bn. In a reaction to the agreement, Vice-President of the European Commission Neelie Kroes remarked that the decision will make it much harder to successfully pursue the targets set forth in the EU's Digital Agenda.

To know more about the Connecting Europe Facility, please click [here](#).

To know more about the Digital Agenda, please click [here](#).

To know more about the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, please click [here](#).

EU/Entrepreneurship: Vice-President Tajani stresses importance of education at SME Envoy meeting

On 8 February 2013, European Commission Vice-President for Enterprise and Industry Antonio Tajani highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship education in his keynote speech to the Network of EU SME Envoys in Bologna, Italy. Mr Tajani listed the Commission's initiatives to date, such as a Summer Academy for educators on how to teach entrepreneurship, and the creation of new teaching

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materials. Entrepreneurship is the first pillar of the Commission's recently published Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, which sets out ten action points to be taken by the Commission and the Member States to improve entrepreneurial skills and mind-sets among the EU.

To read the Commission's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, please click [here](#).

To read ESBA's response to the Action Plan, please click [here](#).

PUBLICATIONS

EU/Commission: European Economic Forecast Winter 2013

On 22 February 2013, the European Commission's DG Economic and Financial Affairs published the latest economic forecasts per Member State and for the EU as a whole. Due to shrinking GDP in the fourth quarter of 2012, the Commission expects the start of the economic recovery to be delayed until mid-2013. The report also notes the large divergence between different Member States in terms of economic growth.

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

EU/Purchasing Managers' Index

On 21 February 2013 February data Eurozone PMI Composite Output Index were released. This index is a widely used benchmark for assessing economic trends in the Member States. In February the index signalled a generalised downturn in economic performance in Europe, with the lone exception of Germany. The new data also flags a worrying widening of the gap between Germany most of the other Member States' economies, including France.

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

EU/Eurostat: Production in the construction sector decreased by 1.7%

On 19 February 2013, Eurostat published statistics on production in the construction sector. According to the December 2012 figures, the production index went down by 1.7% in the euro area and by 2.7% in the EU27 area. These figures respectively fell by 4.8% and 8.5% compared to last year at the same period.

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

EU/European Commission: 20 years of the Single Market, 20 achievements in transport

On 15 February 2013, in the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Single Market, the European Commission published a booklet listing the 20 main achievements that made transports in the EU more secure and simple, while respecting the overarching idea of a sustainable Europe.

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

EU/Eurostat: Euro area notes 81.8 billion euro goods trading surplus in 2012

On 15 February 2013, Eurostat published its first estimates of the trade in goods balance during December 2012 for both the euro area and the EU27. The euro area noted a 11.7 billion euro trading surplus, while the EU as a whole ran a 0.7 billion euro deficit in international trade of goods. With these figures for December, Eurostat estimates the euro area's 2012 surplus to be 81.8 billion euros, while the EU27 is estimated to have noted a 104.6 billion euro deficit in international trade in goods.

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

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EU/Eurostat: EU GDP down 0.5% in final quarter of 2012

On 14 February 2013, Eurostat published flash estimates of GDP development in the euro area and the EU as a whole during the fourth quarter of 2012. The EU's GDP shrunk by 0.5% compared to the previous quarter (down 0.6% compared to the fourth quarter of 2011), while the euro area contracted by 0.6% (or 0.9% compared to 2011). This puts the yearly GDP development for 2012 at -0.5% for the euro area and -0.3% for the EU27.

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

EU/Eurostat: EU Industrial production up 0.5% in December 2012

On 13 February 2013, Eurostat published the latest figures regarding the industrial production in the EU27. In December 2012 compared with November 2012, seasonally adjusted industrial production grew by 0.7% in the Euro area and by 0.5% in the EU27. In December 2012 compared with December 2011, industrial production decreased by 2.4% in the Euro area and by 2.3% in the EU27.

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

EU/Eurostat: EU energy consumption shrinks in 2011

On 13 February 2013, Eurostat released the latest figures relative to energy consumptions and dependence in the EU. EU 27 gross energy consumption fell from 1.760 million tonnes of oil equivalent (TOE) in 2010 to 1.700 million TOEs in 2011. Between 2008 and 2011, energy consumption in the EU27 has decreased by 6%. The energy dependence rate, defined as net imports divided by gross consumption, and which shows the extent to which a country is dependent on energy imports, was 54% in the EU27 in 2011, nearly stable since 2008.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation on the draft proposal for a revised block exemption for technology transfer agreements and for revised guidelines

Closes: 17 May 2013

The rules on how to assess technology transfer agreements are set out in two instruments, the technology transfer block exemption regulation ("TTBER") and accompanying Guidelines. These instruments will expire on 30 April 2014. The Commission has now drafted a proposal for a revised TTBER and Guidelines. The current consultation is seeking stakeholders' views on this proposal.

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

Consultation: Revision of the EU legal framework on environmental inspections

Closes: 26 May 2013

The purpose of this consultation is to collect the views of all relevant stakeholders, at national and EU level, and the public at large on the possible main concepts for the revision of the current EU framework on environmental inspections. It builds on previous consultations and seeks to complement them with stakeholder views on ideas for the design of a new horizontal binding instrument on environmental inspections which the Commission, subject to the conduct of a full impact assessment, intends to propose later in 2013.

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

ONGOING:

Consultation on options for revision of the EU Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and related policies

Closes: 4 March 2013

The objective of the consultation is to gather views on the review of the EU's Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and on the possible options identified by such review for a comprehensive air pollution policy package that would aim to ensure full implementation of the existing legal framework and make further progress to reduce the negative impacts of air pollution in the longer term. This consultation marks the final stage of a broad consultation on the review of EU air policy foreseen to end in 2013 at the latest.

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

Revision of the EU provisions on coordination of long-term care benefits and unemployment benefits

Closes: 5 March 2013

The aim of the consultation is to gather ideas on how to remove existing problems or obstacles in the area of coordination of unemployment and long-term care benefits for persons who are in a cross-border situation.

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

Consultation on the protection of business and research know-how

Closes: 8 March 2013

With a view to offering the optimal legal protection for European businesses' confidential information and boosting innovation, the European Commission is gathering and analysing detailed opinions and experience related to the misappropriation of corporate data in cross-border exchanges. Indeed, considering the differences in the laws of Member States and the fact that not all data can be patented, it appears that the legal framework on the protection of intellectual property could be improved.

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

Consultation on the Communication on energy technologies and innovation

Closes: 15 March 2013

The European Commission has foreseen a Communication on energy technologies and innovation for the first half of 2013. It intends to give a European energy technology policy perspective in the follow-up to the Energy Roadmap 2050. As part of the preparation of this Communication, the present consultation seeks the opinion from all relevant stakeholders. Its purpose is to consult on possible options for a European energy technologies policy and to receive feedback and additional ideas on this proposal. A public consultation by means of this online questionnaire offers the opportunity to all interested stakeholders to express their views in the preparation stage of the Communication.

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

Consultation on the State aid instruments in the agricultural sector

Closes: 20 March 2013

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Three state aid instruments in the agricultural sector will expire at the end of the year 2013. As a result, the European Commission is launching a consultation to determine what new rules on state aid should be implemented for the development of this sector. These new rules should lead to reduced procedural burdens and allow for faster decisions, while at the same time ensuring that competition within the Internal Market is not hampered.

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

Consultation on civil enforcement of intellectual property rights: the efficiency of proceedings and accessibility of measures

Closes: 30 March 2013

This technical survey aims at gathering specific information on the efficiency of proceedings and accessibility of measures used in the context of civil enforcement of intellectual property rights. These data should enable the European Commission to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the functionality of civil enforcement systems put in place in the Member States in order to improve the situation of all the actors active in the innovative sectors of European economy.

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

Consultation on the revision of Directive 97/68/EC on emissions from non-road mobile machinery engines

Closes: 8 April 2013

The non-road mobile machinery (NRMM) sector covers a large variety of equipment types which are used in many different economic activities such as construction, agriculture, rail or inland waterway transport. Despite the limits set by Directive 97/68/EC and its subsequent amendments, the NRMM sector has become an increasingly important source of air pollution, in particular of NO_x and particulate matter. In order to reverse this trend, the European Commission has been exploring different options for revising the Directive. The overall objective of the revision is to further contribute to the improvement of the air quality in Europe while at the same time ensuring the correct functioning of the internal market. In this context, the European Commission is launching a public consultation to gather views from relevant stakeholders.

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

Consultation on the cross-border transfers of registered offices of companies

Closes: 16 April 2013

The purpose of the consultation is to get more in-depth information on the costs currently faced by companies transferring their registered offices abroad and on the range of benefits that could be brought by the EU action on the cross-border transfer of them. The responses will be taken into account in assessing the need for and impact of a possible new instrument.

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

Consultation: Review of the internal market legislation for industrial products

Closes: 17 April 2013

In the view of modernizing the rules of the Internal Market to improve competitiveness, the European Commission launched a consultation so as to gather opinions and experience from various stakeholders on the biggest obstacles that hinder the effective circulation of industrial products at EU level. Indeed, as it was put forward by Director-Generate Daniel Calleja Crespo recently, it is essential that 2013 be the year when the safety of European products is strengthened and administrative burdens for businesses are significantly reduced.

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

Consultation on the Green Paper on unfair trading practices in the business-to-business food and non-food supply chain in Europe

Closes: 30 April 2013

On 31 January 2013, the European Commission decide to launch a consultation so as to assess the common trading practices in the food and non-food supply chain and their effects on companies. Indeed, unfair behaviours between companies are a definite obstacle to development and innovation for SMEs, and significant improvement in the enforcement of the rules related to B2B relationships in the area of food and non-food supply chain activities is needed.

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

25-26 February 2013 – European Parliament committee meetings
25-26 February 2013 – Meeting of Agriculture and Fisheries Council
26 February 2013 – Weekly meeting of College of Commissioners
27 February 2013 – Meetings COREPER I and II
27-28 February 2013 – European Parliament plenary session
28 February 2013 – Meetings COREPER I and II
28 February 2013 – Meeting of Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
28 February 2013 – European Parliament committee meetings
1 March 2013 – Meeting COREPER I
4 March 2013 – European Parliament committee meetings
4 March 2013 – Eurogroup
4-5 March 2013 – Informal Meeting of Ministers for Health
5 March 2013 – Meeting of Economic and Financial Affairs Council
6 March 2013 – Weekly meeting of College of Commissioners
6 March 2013 – Meeting COREPER II
7 March 2013 – European Parliament committee meetings
7 March 2013 – Meeting of the Governing Council of the European Central Bank
7-8 March 2013 – Meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Council
11-14 March 2013 – European Parliament plenary session and committee meetings
11 March 2013 – Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council
11 March 2013 – Meeting of the General Affairs Council
11 March 2013 – Meeting of the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council
12 March 2013 – Weekly meeting of College of Commissioners
14-15 March 2013 – European Council
18-21 March 2013 – European Parliament committee meetings
18-19 March 2013 – Meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council
20 March 2013 – Weekly meeting of College of Commissioners
20-21 March 2013 – European Economic and Social Committee plenary session
21 March 2013 – Meeting of the Environment Council
21 March 2013 – Meeting of the Governing Council of the ECB

Other SME-related events

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Basel III and the CRD IV and CRR proposals: reshaping European banking

28 February – 1 March 2013

Trier, Germany

The Academy of European Law (ERA) is organising a two-day conference on the overhaul of capital requirements for European banks. The state of play will be discussed and panellists will debate the Commission's proposals for a new Capital Requirements Directive (CRD IV) a Capital Requirements Regulation (CRR), flowing from the Basel III reforms.

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

Enforce it! The Posting of Workers Directive

5 March 2013

Brussels, Belgium

The European Parliament's S&D group is organising a seminar on the posting of workers, aiming to provide MEPs with input from social partners and other stakeholders for their work on the so-called Enforcement Directive.

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

REACH Review: Re-opening a can of worms?

7 March 2013

London, UK

EurActiv is organising a high-level event on the recently published REACH Review. The workshop will deal with issues such as the impact on SMEs, the relationship between REACH and other EU policies, and its impact on the European and global market. Speakers include Jan Krauss, Political Officer at the European Commission Representation in the UK, and David Caro, President of the European Small Business Alliance.

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

5th European Forum Co-operative Banks and SMEs: "Facing SMEs' Financing Challenges in Turbulent Times"

8 March 2013

Brussels, Belgium

For the 4th European Forum of co-operative banks and SMEs, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the International Confederation of Popular Banks (CIBP), the European Association of Co-operative Banks (EACB) and the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME) are organising a conference on access to finance for SMEs. The main topic of discussions will be the EESC opinion on the European Commission's action plan on access to finance for SMEs. High-level panellists will be available for stakeholders to exchange views.

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

Is securitisation dead? Opportunities in closing the funding gap for project finance and SMEs

19 March 2013

Brussels, Belgium

The Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) is organising a seminar on the risks and opportunities of securitisation, both to finance big projects and to improve SMEs' access to credit. Panellists include Miguel de la Mano, Head of Unit for the analysis of financial markets issues at the European Commission; Ian Bell, Head of the Prime Collateralised Securities (PCS) Secretariat; and Janet Mitchell, Senior Advisor in the Department of Financial Stability of the National Bank of Belgium.

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

Banks for Growth

20 March 2013

Brussels, Belgium

The European Banking Federation (EBF) is organising its first Annual Conference, focused on the role banks play in supporting economic recovery. Another aim of the conference is to engage stakeholders for cooperation.

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

ECHA's Stakeholders' Day on SMEs

26 March 2013

Helsinki, Finland

The Stakeholders' Day conference organised by the European Chemicals Agency, will concentrate on the European Community Regulation on chemicals and, specifically, analyse its impact on SMEs.

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

Europe as a Location for Industry and Innovation

23 April 2013

Bruges, Belgium

The Bruges European Business Conference, organised by the College of Europe and Deloitte, will focus on how innovation and competitiveness programmes can make Europe a more appealing place of production for industry. Speakers will include Mr Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Regional Policy and Mr Kris Peeters, Minister-President of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Economy, Foreign Policy, Agriculture and Rural Policy.

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