



HEADLINES

EU/Admin burdens: European Parliament votes YES for small businesses

On 10 March, the European Parliament in plenary decided to adopt the Commission's proposal to exempt micro entities from certain EU accounting burdens. The exemption allows Member States to align micro-entities' reporting requirements with the real needs of users and preparers of financial statements, enabling them to remain the EU's main providers of employment. The exemption is the first real EU effort specifically aimed at micro-businesses and can be seen as the 'flagship' of the EU's overall commitment to reduce administrative burdens by 25% by 2010. The measure is estimated to account for savings of EUR 6.3 billion EU-wide, and is a major step towards achieving this 25% goal.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes the European Parliament's decision to adopt the Commission's proposal to exempt micro entities from certain EU accounting burdens. This decision is a much-awaited signal from the EU towards the small business community in Europe, showing that the European Union indeed has their interest at heart and is willing to help them survive the crisis. It increases the credibility of EU claims towards reducing administrative burdens and will positively affect the trust of the small business community in the EU's efforts to support our smallest and most vulnerable businesses. ESBA urges the Council to follow in the Commission's and Parliament's footsteps and commit to the EU's promise to reduce administrative burdens.

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

To read about ESBA's position and recent activities in this field, please click [here](#).

EU/Europe 2020: Commission unveils its economic strategy for the next decade

On 3 March, the European Commission unveiled its long-awaited economic strategy for the coming decade. A successor to the Lisbon Agenda, the new strategy takes account of Europe's structural weaknesses and sets out an ambitious set of measures to "turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion". No less ambitious than its predecessor, the Commission's business plan for Europe is based on a 3+5+7 strategy: 3 mutually reinforcing priorities, 5 quantified EU headline targets, and 7 'flagship initiatives' to propel Europe's economic growth.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes the Commission's ambitious growth plan, which aims to improve the business environment by removing structural barriers to growth. The Commission's policy aspirations are a step the right direction by focusing on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Economic growth and job creation are inseparably linked to a favorable business environment in which SMEs in particular can focus on their core activity, which is to conduct business. ESBA and its members are clearly committed to shaping Europe's future by driving economic growth and creating jobs. Yet, small and micro businesses demand the same determination and perseverance from policy-makers at supranational, national, regional and local levels in order for a business environment based on innovation, sound public finances and entrepreneurship to be supported.

To read more about the Europe 2020 strategy, please click [here](#)

IN BRIEF

EU/Employment: Parental leave vote postponed, impact assessment requested

On 15 March, the coordinators of the Parliament's Women's Rights Committee requested an impact assessment of the proposed EU-wide extension of fully paid parental leave. Among other topics, the study will analyze the economic and budgetary costs and benefits of this measure. On 23 February, the same committee voted in favor of a proposal to change the pregnant workers directive, which would oblige member states to offer 20 weeks of fully paid maternity leave and a fortnight of remunerated leave for fathers. The plenary vote on this proposal, which was originally scheduled for 25 March in Brussels, will now be moved to the 18 May session in Strasbourg.

To read more about the protection of pregnant workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, please click [here](#).

EU/Employment: Council takes action to prevent injuries among healthcare workers

On 8 March, EU employment ministers adopted a directive, which aims to prevent injuries and infections to healthcare workers, resulting from the use of needles and other sharp objects. The directive mandates that, if a risk of injury is identified, measures will have to be taken to ensure safe use of sharp objects at the workplace. Experts estimate that over 1 million sharp object injuries occur in the healthcare sector every year, significantly raising costs and burdening healthcare systems. Member states will have three years to transpose the new directive into national law.

To read more about the launch of the new directive on preventing injuries to healthcare workers, please click [here](#).

EU/Employment: Council moves to strengthen rights of the self-employed and their spouses

On 8 March, the Council adopted its first reading position on a draft directive, which aims to strengthen social protection for self-employed workers and assisting spouses. Under the provisions of the draft directive, self-employed women, assisting spouses, and life partners of self-employed workers, will be granted a maternity allowance, enabling them to leave work for at least 14 weeks. Member states will be able to decide the amount of this allowance at their own discretion. The new draft directive also mandates that assisting spouses and life partners receive autonomous social protection rights.

To read the Council's first reading position, please click [here](#).

EU/Employment: Council extends minimum parental leave for all workers

On 8 March, EU employment ministers adopted a directive extending minimum parental leave from three to four months for each parent. A couple will therefore have at least 8 months of parental leave available to them in the EU. The new directive applies to all workers, regardless of whether they have a fixed-term, temporary agent or part-time contract. Member states will have two years to transpose it into national law, and changes will be required to existing legislation in the UK, Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, Romania and Malta. This directive is different from the proposals on parental leave in the Parliament (discussed above), since it does not address the issue of parental leave payments.

To read about the original Commission proposal, please click [here](#).

EU/Equal rights: Commission strengthens commitment to reduce the gender pay gap

On 5 March, the European Commission published plans for a series of measures aimed at significantly reducing the gender pay gap over the next five years. Currently, in terms of average gross hourly earnings, men earn 18% more than women in the EU. Action to reduce this gap will

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figure prominently in the new EU strategy for gender equality (2010-2015), due to be published by the Commission in the second half of 2010.

To read more about the proposed Commission policies on the gender pay gap, please click [here](#).

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: “Effective tax levels – using the Devereux/Griffith Methodology”

The European Commission intermediate report on effective tax levels in the European Union estimates the effective tax rates on investment and saving at the shareholder level when calculating effective tax rates on domestic investment. Based on the method for the calculation of effective tax rates, the report addresses taxes on corporations in different countries and considers both cross-border investment and investment by SMEs.

To read more about the Commission’s report on effective levels of company taxation within an enlarged EU, please click [here](#).

European Commission: “Joint report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion”

The European Commission 2010 Joint report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion addresses the social situation in the EU, while focusing more specifically on the impacts of the economic crisis and Member State’s responses to it. The report addresses the issues of poverty, the role of social protection in addressing inequalities, the adequacy and sustainability of pension systems, health care systems, and the importance of housing in the context of the current economic crisis.

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

OECD: “Economic Policy Reforms 2010 – Going for Growth”

The OECD report “Going for Growth” takes stock of structural policy measures which have been taken in response to the current financial and economic crisis, assesses their possible ramifications on long-term economic growth and considers reforms to strengthen the economic recovery. In addition, the report provides an overview of progress made since 2005 in the implementation of policy reforms, which have led to employment and labour productivity in OECD member countries.

To read more about the new OECD’s “Going for Growth” report, please click [here](#).

➤ **CEPS: Future impacts of climate change across Europe**

This new Working Document from the Center for European Policy Studies reviews the potential impacts of climate change on major EU policy areas, such as health, tourism, crop yields, biodiversity, flooding, water supply and energy.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation on the European Food SCP Round Table draft principles for assessment and communication

Closes: 26 April 2010

The European Food Sustainable Consumption and Production Round Table has launched an online consultation on draft guiding principles for voluntary environmental assessment and communication of environmental information along the food chain. The consultation invites citizens, organizations and public authorities to submit comments on how these draft guiding principles might affect communication at the business-to-business and business-to-consumer levels.

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

ONGOING:

Online consultation on administrative burdens reduction

Ongoing

The European Commission has launched an online consultation on the reduction of administrative burdens. Inspired by examples of Best Practice in Belgium and the Netherlands, the consultation invites entrepreneurs to identify unnecessary red tape in order to help the EU improve the quality of its legislation. The consultation is part of the Action Programme to reduce admin burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012.

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

18 & 19 March 2010 – European Economic and Social Committee Debate on “Sustainable Economic and Social Recovery”

18 & 19 March 2010 – European Consumer Summit

22-23 March 2010 – European Parliament Committee on Transport Meeting

22-23 March 2010 – European Parliament Committee on Budgetary Control Meeting

22-26 March 2010 – EU Sustainable Energy Week

24 March 2010 – Meeting of the College of Commissioners

24-25 March 2010 – European Parliament Part Session

25-26 March 2010 – Spring European Council

29 March 2010 – Market Access Advisory Committee (MAAC) meeting

31 March 2010 – Meeting of the College of Commissioners

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Other SME related events

22-23 March 2010 – The State of Play in Implementation of the Services Directive, Brussels, Belgium

The conference will provide an overview of the legal and practical challenges in the process of implementing the Services Directive.

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/services/docs/services-dir/conferences/100122_era_210d14_en.pdf

22-23 March 2010 - Annual Conference on European Company Law

Trier, Germany

This Academy of European Law (ERA) conference aims to inform specialists about the latest trends and developments in the field of company law.

http://www.era.int/cgi-bin/cms?_SID=223221df0905ad5e0f7b5215b841465ad8f692d500056195660354&_sprache=en&_persistent_variant=/Our%20programme/Browse%20all%20events&_bereich=artikel&_aktion=detail&id_artikel=121151

22-26 March 2010 – EU Sustainable Energy Week

The EU Sustainable Energy Week features a large number of events, all of which seek to raise awareness about sustainability issues in Europe. It brings together EU institutions, policymakers, experts, social partners, businesses and other stakeholders for conferences, workshops and networking seminars. 87 key events will be held in Brussels throughout the week.

<http://www.eusew.eu/>

30 March 2010 – European Voice Innovation Forum, Brussels, Belgium

This forum will discuss the future development of the EU's innovation policies, the possible benefits of innovation-friendly policies, and the bottlenecks that reduce marketability of research products.

<http://www.europeanvoice.com/page/2677.aspx>

20-21 April 2010 – Making Eco-Innovation Happen in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, Bilbao, Spain

The EU's Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP) is holding its 8th Eco-Innovation Forum, with a focus on exploring how SMEs can contribute to this policy area. Entrepreneurs will have a chance to discuss barriers to their development in eco-innovation, in addition to examining the role of government policy in stimulating eco-innovation among SMEs.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoinnovation2010/1st_forum/index_en.htm