



HEADLINE

EU/Data Protection: Data Protection reform postponed until after European Parliament elections

A final agreement on the Data Protection Reform package is to be postponed until after the May 2014 elections in the European Parliament. The European Commission, the two lead rapporteurs on the issue in the European Parliament, together with the Greek Presidency and the incoming Italian Presidency agreed to set the deadline for the adoption of the Data Protection bill at the end of 2014. The Civil liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee adopted the package on 22 October 2013. However, strong divisions between the Heads of Government of the EU 28 Member States during the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in December 2013 have put negotiations at a standstill, where they stated that the reform on Data Protection would be “timely” and achieved in 2015 “at the latest”. At the occasion of the European Data Protection Day on 28 January 2014, Commission Vice-President and Justice Commissioner Mrs. Viviane Reding expressed the urgency to close the Data Protection reform file and strongly advocated for negotiations in the Council to be restarted as quickly as possible.

ESBA opinion:

ESBA welcomes the delay in reaching agreement, as it allows for a much-needed rethink of the dossier. Whilst we acknowledge and supports the need for revision of Data Protection regulations, a balance must be found which allows for maximum consumer protection, whilst being mindful of the capacity of micro and small businesses. Certain provisions within the proposal, such as costly impact assessments and Data Protection Officers, can be disproportionately burdensome on Europe’s smallest businesses. Moreover, these provisions are not necessary for most businesses, as they do not handle data as a primary activity and are therefore not in a risk category. Whereas the Commission’s proposal foresees exemptions for SMEs for these reasons, the European Parliament’s lead committee chose to remove these exemptions. ESBA urges 8th Legislature, to consider the concerns of our small businesses and to opt for a more sensible and realistic approach.

To access more information, please click [here](#).

IN BRIEF

EU/ Access to finance: A new framework for states’ risk finance for SMEs

On 15 January 2014, the European Commission adopted a Communication in which the new guidelines for State Aid for SMEs and midcap corporations were presented. The Commission action aims at simplifying, extending and making more flexible Member States’ abilities to provide capital for European companies. This had been limited by EU restrictive regulation on State Aid in previous years. The new rules are particularly welcomed as the economic and



financial crisis has dramatically reduced both bank lending and private investment, particularly in start-ups and in companies with both small and medium capitalisation.

For more information on the Communication (2014/C 19/04), click [here](#).

EU/Digital Agenda: SMEs take the lead to digitalisation

On 23 January, in an effort to raise awareness as to the benefits of internet-driven growth, European Commission Vice-President Neelie Kroes, responsible for the Digital Agenda, announced the launch of two new initiatives during the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, under the Startup Europe program: the Startup Europe Partnership and the European Digital Forum. European SMEs are increasingly focussing their attention towards the opportunities that information and communication technology (ICT) creates for them in this digital era. Although digitalisation can bring important efficiency gains for companies, its true potential remains largely unexplored.

To find more about Startup Europe initiative, please click [here](#).

EU/Entrepreneurship: Empowering Social Entrepreneurs for Innovation, Inclusive Growth and Jobs

On 16 and 17 January, a gathering of over 2000 social entrepreneurs and affiliates agreed that the role which social entrepreneurship plays in Europe must become bigger. During the event, which took place in Strasbourg, a number of ideas and action items were identified to better exploit the potential for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

For more information on the Declaration, please click [here](#).

EU/Trade: EU – US Investment and Trade Partnership: The European Commission establishes an advisory group

On 27 January 2014, the European Commission launched an Advisory Group in the context of current negotiations on the EU – US Transatlantic Investment and Trade Partnership (TTIP), which in December 2013 saw its third round of negotiations concluded.

The Advisory Group is composed by 15 representatives of diversified sectors, associated with environmental advocacy groups, trade unions, consumer rights associations and the health sector, as well as business-related representatives. The objective, as states by the Commission, is to ensure transparency and stakeholders' involvement in the negotiation process and to guarantee high quality in advisory procedures, in order to overall benefit European citizens from the outcomes of the TTIP negotiations.

For more information on TTIP, please click [here](#).



EU/Employment: Improving pan-European job search network EURES

On 17 January 2014, the European Commission launched a proposal which aims at strengthening the pan-European job search network EURES. The proposal is an action undertaken to facilitate the application of workers' rights to free movement. Established in 1993, the EURES is a co-operation network between the European Commission and the Public Employment Services of the EU Member States (plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) and other partner organizations which provides daily contacts between jobseekers and employers across Europe. The new rules proposed would make the job network more efficient to improve coordination and information exchange among Member States, making mobility an integral part of their employment policies. Furthermore, the proposal would make SMEs able to afford the recruitment of workers abroad.

To read the European Commission proposal on the EURES network, please click [here](#)

To read the Common criteria for the authorisation of organisations to act as EURES Partners, please read [here](#).

EU/Industry: European Enterprise Promotion Awards 2014

On 27 January 2014, the European Commission launched the new edition of the European Enterprise Promotion Awards. Since 2006, the competition rewards the most original and successful initiatives from EU public and public-private partnership with the aim to encourage entrepreneurship and, in particular, small and medium businesses at a national, regional and local level. The competition foresees six entry categories and two selection phases, the first one at national and European level. By May 2014 the Member States will nominate two entries for the European Enterprise Promotion Awards, after this stage the European Jury will select a shortlist of nominees for the final award. In October 2014, the winner will be rewarded during a ceremony at the 2014 SME Assembly which will take place in Naples (Italy).

To read more about the European Enterprise Promotion 2013, please read [here](#).

For further information on the European Commission initiative for entrepreneurship, please read [here](#).



COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

- 27-30 January 2014 – European Parliament committee meetings
- 28 January 2014 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council meeting
- 29 January 2014 – COREPER II and I
- 31 January 2014 – COREPER I
- 3-6 February 2014 – European Parliament Plenary Session
- 5 February 2014 – COREPER II and I
- 6 February 2014 – COREPER II (possibly)
- 7 February 2014 – COREPER I
- 10 February 2014 – Foreign Affairs Council meeting
- 11 February 2014 – General Affairs Council meeting
- 12 February 2014 – COREPER I
- 13-14 February 2014 – European Council meeting
- 17-18 February 2014 – Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting
- 17 February 2014 – EUROGROUP Council meeting
- 18 February 2014 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council meeting
- 19 February 2014 – COREPER II and I
- 20-21 February 2014 – Competitiveness Council meeting and Informal Council of Defense Ministers
- 20 February 2014 – COREPER II (possibly)

Other SME-related events

Taking Action: Promotion of Employee Share Ownership – Debating concrete policy options

30 January 2014

Brussels

On 30 January, the European Commission's DG Internal Market and Services organizes a debate on the potential policy options on employee financial participation.

The 4th Annual Conference of Economic Forum of Entrepreneurship & International Business

31 January 2014

Paris

On 31 January, ECO-ENA: Economics & ECO-Engineering Associate, Inc. is organizing The Fourth Annual Conference of Economic Forum of Entrepreneurship & International Business.

Innovative Regions: How can the EU support regional growth?

5 February 2014

Brussels

European Small Business Alliance – Brussels Office

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On 5 February, Science Business Innovation Board organizes a high-level conference on innovative regions to discuss the best practices of regional innovation and how to use structural funds in order to produce economic return.

Info Day – Enterprise Europe Network

6 February 2014

Brussels

On 6 February, the Executive Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation (EACI) is organising an Information Day to cover all the information needed to submit a proposal under the call for proposals for a new phase of the Network under the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME).

Beyond the crisis? Business in Europe 2014

10 February 2014

Brussels

On 10 February, the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, is bringing together high-level experts to discuss what is being done at the EU level to help small and big businesses.

European Competition Forum 2014

11 February 2014

Brussels

On 11 February, the European Commission DG Competition is organizing the European Competition Forum 2014 that will look at the internal market and beyond, examining the challenges facing modern competition policy.

Modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive: safe mobility

12 February 2014

Brussels

On 12 February, the European Commission DG Internal Market and Services is organizing a conference that will give the participants the opportunity to discuss the changes introduced by the modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive.

What small business can do?

12 February 2014, 6.30-8.00 p.m.,

Lecture Theatre L03, Aberconway Building, Cardiff Business School (United Kingdom)

(In conjunction with Cardiff Business School and the Institute of Welsh Affairs)

Professor Karel Williams, Professor of Accounting and Political Economy. Manchester Business School.

Is it time to question the assumption that small business is an economic dynamo which can solve our national problem by adding jobs or growing fast?

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Relationship Banking: The Small Business Experience in Wales

18 February 2014, 7.30-9.00 a.m. (breakfast seminar),

FSB Wales Office, Cardiff (United Kingdom)

Professor Kent Matthews, Cardiff University Business School

What are the main determinants of the credit conditions faced by small firms and does relationship banking make a difference to loan conditions?

PUBLICATIONS

EU/Eurostat: International trade

On 15 January 2014, Eurostat published a document giving a first estimate for the euro area trade in goods balance with the rest of the world. In November 2013 there was a 17.1 billion euro surplus, compared with +12.5 bn in November 2012. The October 2013 balance was +16.8 bn, compared with +9.6 bn in October 2012. In November 2013 compared with October 2013, seasonally adjusted exports fell by 0.2% and imports by 1.3%.

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

EU/Eurostat: Inflation

On 16 January 2014, Eurostat stated that the Euro area annual inflation was 0.8% in December 2013, down from 0.9% in November. A year earlier the rate was 2.2%. Monthly inflation was 0.3% in December 2013. European Union annual inflation was 1.0% in December 2013, stable compared with November. A year earlier the rate was 2.3%. Monthly inflation was 0.3% in December 2013.

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

EU/Eurostat: Production in construction

On 17 January 2014, Eurostat stated that in November 2013 compared with October 2013, seasonally adjusted production in the construction sector fell by 0.6% in the euro area (EA17) and by 1.1% in the EU28. In October 2013, production in construction decreased by 1.1% and 0.3% respectively. In November 2013 compared with November 2012, production in construction declined by 1.7% in the euro area and by 1.6% in the EU28.

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

EU/Eurostat: Government debt

On 22 January, Eurostat published a document on government debts to GDP ratio. At the end of the third quarter of 2013, the government debt to GDP ratio in the euro area (EA17) stood at 92.7%, compared with 93.4% at the end of the second quarter of 2013, the first fall in absolute terms since



the fourth quarter of 2007. In the EU28 the ratio increased from 86.7% to 86.8%, mainly due to exchange rate effects. Compared with the third quarter of 2012, the government debt to GDP ratio rose in both the euro area (from 90.0% to 92.7%) and the EU28 (from 84.9% to 86.8%).

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

EU/Eurostat: External current account

On 23 January 2014, Eurostat stated that the EU28 seasonally adjusted external current account recorded a surplus of 31.4 billion euro (1.0% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2013, down from a surplus of 46.3 bn (1.4% of GDP) in the second quarter of 2013 and from a surplus of 33.3 bn (1.0% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2012, according to a second estimate released by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union.

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

EU/Eurostat: Business investment

On 28 January 2014, Eurostat published on business investment rates. In the third quarter of 2013, the business investment rate was 19.0% in the euro area, compared with 19.3% in the second quarter of 2013. This fall was the result of a decrease in investment (-0.9%) and an increase in gross value added (+0.4%). Total stocks (materials, supplies and finished goods) rose. In the EU28 the investment rate was 18.9% in the third quarter of 2013, stable compared with the previous quarter.

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

CONSULTATIONS

Review of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation

DEADLINE: 31/01/2014

This consultation is open to stakeholders and all those with an interest in enforcement of consumer rights across national borders within the Single Market. The EU has developed a solid set of rules on the consumers' economic interests to provide a level playing field to companies and equal consumer conditions to citizens in the single market.

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

Consultation on the draft Commission Evaluation Policy Guidelines

DEADLINE: 25/02/2014

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The Commission Guidelines for Evaluation will be used by Commission services when they conduct evaluations of the performance and continued need for existing EU actions (e.g. financial programmes, legislative and policy measures).

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

Public consultation on information provided to consumers about characteristics of furniture products

DEADLINE: 04/03/2014

Information about specific furniture product characteristics, provided to consumers at the time of purchase, may be insufficient for them to compare between different furniture products sold on the EU market as a basis for informed choices.

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

Consultation on the Notice on the notion of State aid

DEADLINE: 14/03/2014

The notice on the notion of aid is an integral part of the Commission's State aid modernisation (SAM) programme. The notice intends to provide practical guidance in order to identify State aid measures pursuant to Article 107 (1) of the TFEU, which have to be notified to and approved by the Commission before being lawfully implemented.

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

Consultation on Review of existing VAT legislation on public bodies and tax exemptions in the public interest

DEADLINE: 25/04/2014

One of the priority areas in this regard is the review and possible revision of the VAT rules on the public sector including the special rules for public bodies and the tax exemptions in the public interest.

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