



IN BRIEF

EU/Council: Finance and Economic Affairs Ministers agree to simplify VAT invoicing rules

On 16 March, the Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN) Council discussed a European Commission draft directive, which aims to modernize VAT invoicing rules by requiring tax authorities to treat electronic invoices in the same way as paper invoices. The Commission estimates that up to EUR 18 billion could be saved for businesses if legal restrictions to the use of electronic invoices are eliminated. Awaiting the European Parliament's opinion, the Council has reached agreement on a general approach and is likely to adopt the directive.

To read the full ECFIN Council conclusions from 16 March, please click [here](#).

EU/Food Labeling: Parliament committee rejects “traffic light system”

On 16 March, the European Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety adopted a report on a European Commission proposal that sets basic standards for information on food product labels. The report requires increased amounts of data about nutritional content to be displayed on the front of all food packages sold in the EU. However, the Committee also rejected attempts to enforce a UK-style “traffic light system,” which would use green, yellow and red colors to indicate the health quality of food products.

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

EU/Working Time: Commission seeks social partners' views on working time rules

On 24 March, the Commission issued a first-phase consultation of workers' and employers' representatives, with the purpose of starting an evaluation of current rules on working time. In the wake of last year's failure to agree on a proposal to amend the Working Time Directive, the Commission is looking to revitalize the issue by asking social partners whether any further EU initiatives on working time are necessary. At the same time, the Commission will undertake a study of socio-economic issues related to working time.

To read the Commission Communication on this consultation, please click [here](#).

To read more about the Working Time Directive, please click [here](#).

EU/Currency: Commission encourages accepting of big euro banknotes and small change

On 22 March, the European Commission issued a Recommendation encouraging Member States, businesses and citizens to accept cash payments in large 200 and 500 Euro banknotes, as well as in small one and two cent coins. While this Recommendation is not binding, the Commission may propose further regulatory measures after a three-year evaluation period. The Commission affirms that the occasional rejection of very large and very small currency is tolerable – for example, on the grounds of not having enough change. However, it strongly discourages structural refusal to accept such payments.

To read a draft of the Commission Recommendation, please click [here](#).

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EU/Spring European Council: Heads of State agree on targets to boost jobs and growth

On 25-26 March, European Heads of State and Government met in Brussels to discuss the EU's new strategy for growth and jobs. The European Council approved its general framework and agreed on three EU headline targets to improve the conditions for research and development by bringing combined public and private investment levels to 3% of GDP, to improve employment rates from 69% to 75% for women and men aged 20-64, and to underline EU's commitment to the 20/20/20 climate & energy targets. The EU headline targets constitute shared objectives to be implemented through concrete actions at EU and national levels.

Faced with opposition from several Member States, EU leaders failed to reach consensus on targets for education and tackling poverty. In June, European leaders will reconvene to continue their discussions on appropriate target levels in the remaining areas and are expected to set national targets based on objectives agreed at EU level.

To read the Spring European Council conclusions, please click [here](#):

PUBLICATIONS

European Competitiveness Report

The European Commission DG Enterprise and Industry has published its annual European Competitiveness Report, focusing mostly on the impact of the economic crisis on prospects for Europe's current and future competitiveness. It also addresses the challenges posed by international economic competition and the role of migration, ICT and Research & Development in stimulating a competitive economy.

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

Bolstering Europe's Creative Industries

Enterprise & Industry Magazine reports on plans for starting up a European organization to foster development within the "creative arts" sector. While the sector itself is very diverse, featuring disciplines such as architecture, music and textiles, the "European Creative Industries Alliance" (ECIA) would seek to develop a united policy framework for promoting the sector's success. The ECIA project is the result of a Commission initiative and has the support of a variety of stakeholders in the creative arts industry.

To read this article, please click [here](#).

European Innovation Scoreboard, 2009

The 9th edition of this publication, by the European Commission's DG for Enterprise and Industry, examines the innovation performance of EU Member States, on the basis of indicators such as the availability of highly skilled employees, the number of innovations on the market, and the ease of financing innovative projects. The scoreboard suggests that last year's economic crisis could significantly delay improvements in innovation, particularly for states that were already lagging behind in this area.

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

European Commission: "ICT contribution to sustainability, competitiveness and innovation"

The European Commission has published the results of the "Sectoral e-Business Watch" studies, measuring the impact of ICT and e-business on businesses, different industries and the economy in

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

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general. The project examined ICT contributions to sustainability, competitiveness and innovation in various industrial sectors.

To read more about the policy context of the “Sectoral e-Business Watch”, please click [here](#).

To access all study reports, please click [here](#).

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

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

Closes: 26 April 2010

This consultation by the European Food SCP Round Table seeks the views of stakeholders on the draft guiding principles on voluntary environmental assessment and communication of environmental information along the food chain, on both business-to-business and business-to-consumer levels. The guiding principles will serve as a basis for developing a framework assessment methodology for food and drink products and for identifying suitable voluntary communication tools.

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

Consultation: Review of the European Standardization System

Closes: 21 May 2010

The European Commission has issued an Open Consultation in order to gather stakeholders' opinions on a review of the European Standardization System (ESS). While standardization in Europe is voluntary and overseen by independent organizations, the Commission is considering additional reforms to bolster the role of the ESS in this process. The consultation is open to citizens, organizations and public authorities.

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

Consultation on the European Company Statute (SE)

Closes: 23 May 2010

The Commission has launched a public consultation on the European Company Statute, otherwise known as the 'Societas Europaea' (SE). The SE allows businesses working cross-border within the EU to register as a single company and operate under a unified set of Community rules. It frees them from the costs of setting up subsidiaries and constantly adjusting to national legal frameworks. The consultation asks stakeholders to comment on the results of a recent external study on the functioning of the SE.

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

ONGOING:

Online consultation on administrative burdens reduction

Ongoing

The 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

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legislation. The consultation is part of the Action Programme to reduce admin burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012.

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

31 March 2010 – Meeting of the College of Commissioners

31 March 2010 – Adoption of Commission Work Programme

7 April 2010 – Meeting of the College of Commissioners

7 April 2010 – European Parliament Plenary Session

6-8 April 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

14 April 2010 – Meeting of the College of Commissioners

15 April 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

16-18 April 2010 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council (Informal)

Other SME related events

8-9 April 2010 – Conference: “New Skills and New Jobs for Europe,” Barcelona, Spain

As a part of the Spanish EU Presidency, this conference provides an opportunity to debate and discuss the European Commission’s “New Skills for New Jobs” Proposal. Conference speakers include Laszlo Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and Celestino Corbacho, the Spanish Minister for Employment and Immigration.

http://www.eu2010.es/en/agenda/parleuropeoycomision/abr08_conf nuevosempleos.html

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

26 April 2010 – 2nd High Level Conference on Industrial Competitiveness, Brussels, Belgium

This conference, organized by the European Commission DG for Enterprise and Industry, will discuss the development of a post-crisis strategy for EU Industry, which should aim to maintain Europe’s competitiveness in the face of global challenges. Featuring speakers such as Commission President Barosso, the conference will also be an occasion for EU policymakers to present, and receive feedback on, the Europe 2020 strategy.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/industrial-competitiveness/economic-crisis/2nd_high_level_conference_en.htm

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