



HEADLINES

EU/Working Time: Parliament delays vote on working time for truck drivers

On 17 May, the European Parliament postponed the vote on a report by Edit Bauer on the regulation of working time in mobile road transport. The postponement was requested by the EPP group and passed by a narrow margin, with 158 MEPs voting in favour, 137 voting against, and 7 abstaining. The vote on Bauer's report is now scheduled to be held during the June Plenary session.

The European Commission's original proposal excluded self-employed drivers from working time regulation, arguing that monitoring and regulating their working time would be practically unenforceable. However, on 28 April, the Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs voted against this view. While Bauer's report on the Commission proposal did give individual Member States the option of including self-employed drivers in working time regulation, the Committee still voted, by a margin of 30 votes to 19, in favour of subjecting all EU truck drivers to the same rules on working hours.

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

To read Edit Bauer's draft report on the Commission proposal, please click [here](#).

ESBA: A small business perspective on the 'Digital Agenda for Europe'

On 5 May, the European Parliament adopted a report on "a new Digital Agenda for Europe: 2015.eu". MEPs called on the Commission to come forward with a proposal for an ambitious digital agenda and action plan enabling Europe to progress towards an open and prosperous digital society offering all citizens economic, social and cultural opportunities. The report makes it abundantly clear that access, capacities, and e-skills for SMEs are an absolute necessity to make the Digital Agenda a success.

On the very same day, ESBA organised a high-level event in the European Parliament in order to sensitize EU policy-makers to the obstacles that prevent small businesses from reaping the full potential of ICT and the digital economy. Despite the already existing EU regulatory framework in these areas, and the key achievements obtained in e.g. communication technologies, e-government, telemedicine services and e-commerce practices, businesses, and in particular SMEs, cannot fully capitalize on the opportunities provided by ICT and the digital economy in their daily operations.

Hosted by MEP Pilar del Castillo Vera, lead rapporteur on the Parliament report, the event gathered ICT experts, policy-makers and small business owners to discuss issues pertaining to the EU's forthcoming digital agenda initiatives. Tina Sommer, President of the European Small Business Alliance, presented ESBA's manifesto, "[Digital Agenda for Europe: a Small Business Perspective](#)", which outlines 6 key obstacles that prevent small businesses from taking advantage of the digital economy. These include lack of IT skills, lack of confidence in new technologies, lack of reliable and affordable internet connectivity, and an inadequate EU information policy.

The European Commission is currently finalising a Communication on a "Digital agenda for Europe", to be unveiled this month. One of the 'flagship initiatives' included in the EU2020 strategy, the digital

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agenda will aim to exploit the potential of ICT as a major enabling technology for moving to a low-carbon, knowledge-based and competitive economy.

To read ESBA's manifesto, "Digital Agenda for Europe: a Small Business Perspective," please click [here](#)

To read Pilar del Castillo Vera's report on a new Digital Agenda for Europe, please click [here](#).

IN BRIEF

EU/Gender Equality: Parliament supports maternity leave rights for self-employed women

On 18 May, the European Parliament voted in favor of a proposal which would oblige Member States to provide at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave for self-employed women. According to the proposal, female "assisting spouses" or life-partners of self-employed workers should also receive the same rights. Nevertheless, individual Member States will be able to choose whether to make signing up to a standard social insurance programme mandatory or voluntary for self-employed women and female spouses of self-employed workers. The Council is expected to approve the proposal, thus making it binding on Member States, on 7 June.

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

EU/Internal Market: 'Monti Report' on the future of the EU Single Market

On 10 May, Mario Monti, former Commissioner for the Internal Market, Financial Services and Tax Policy (1995-1999) and for Competition (1999-2004), presented his keenly awaited report on a future strategy for the EU Single Market. The report argues that completion of the Single Market is essential for Europe's future economic prosperity. It proposes a series of new measures to remove barriers to the market's functioning, restore its popularity among citizens and policy-makers, and combat protectionism. The Commission will use this report as a basis for developing new legislative initiatives, to be presented this summer. Commission President Barroso originally gave Monti the task of compiling a report on the single market in October 2009.

To read Mario Monti's report, titled "A new Strategy for the Single Market", please click [here](#).

EU/Access to Finance: Commission aims to remove barriers to financing of SMEs

On 6 May, the European Commission hosted the SME Finance Forum, a high-level symposium which discussed the adverse impact of the economic crisis on the ability of small businesses to access funds. At the forum, Antonio Tajani, the Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, proposed the creation of a permanent high-level dialogue, which will recommend ways of ameliorating access to finance for SMEs. It will also be responsible for observing the financial situation for small firms in Europe. Financial institutions, venture capital firms and small businesses will all have a chance to participate in this dialogue.

To read the conclusions of the SME Finance Forum, please click [here](#).

To read more about the EU's policies on access to finance for SMEs, please click [here](#).

EU/Late Payments: MEPs support EU-wide measures against late payments

On 28 April, the European Parliament's Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted a report by Barbara Weiler (S&D) on late payments in commercial transactions. In contrast to the European Commission proposal, which would only regulate payments between public bodies and private companies, the Committee voted in favor of including business-to-business transactions in the legislation. Weiler's report further stipulates that all bills must be paid within 30 days. In

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exceptional cases, public bodies would be allowed to extend this period to a maximum of 60 days, whereas businesses could agree to even longer payment periods in contracts with each other.

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

To read Barbara Weiler's report on the proposal, which has been tabled for a first reading in Parliament's plenary session, please click [here](#).

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: Digital Competitiveness Report

The European Commission has published a report which outlines the opportunities and challenges provided by the EU's digital economy. The report argues that, while ICT is responsible for much of the union's recent productivity growth, its impact could be even greater if the EU invested in faster and more reliable internet connections, e-skills and ICT innovation.

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

World Bank: World Development Indicators 2010

The World Bank has published its World Development Indicators for 2010. This document provides a collection of quantitative data about development-related issues, covering topics such as the environment, demographics, economics and global linkages. The statistical information provided will assist in the formulation of development policy at the international level.

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

OECD: Are the New Millennium Learners Making the Grade?

The OECD has published a book titled, "Are the New Millennium Learners Making the Grade?" This publication analyzes the relationship between technology and educational achievement. It concludes that access to new technology is not in itself a guarantee of educational success. Rather, students should be taught practical ICT skills that will enable them to take advantage of new technologies.

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

OECD: Dedicated Public-Private Partnership Units

The OECD has published a book entitled, "Dedicated Public-Private Partnership Units: A Survey of Institutional and Governance Structures." This book examines how different governments manage their partnerships with private companies. In particular, it explores the experience of countries that have set up dedicated government bureaus for public-private partnerships.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation: Review of customs legislation on enforcement of intellectual property rights

Closes: 25 May 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on its review of Council Regulation EC 1383/2003, which regulates the measures customs officers can take if they identify a breach of intellectual property rights rules. Subject to the results of this consultation, and the outcome of

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further interactions with stakeholders, the Commission may propose a revision of this Regulation. The consultation is open to citizens, organizations and public authorities.

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

Consultation: Review of rules for assessment of horizontal co-operation agreements

Closes: 25 June 2010

The European Commission has issued a public consultation on new draft Regulations and Guidelines, which will provide a basis for evaluating agreements between competitors, or so-called “horizontal agreements.” The Commission aims to update existing rules in this area by the end of 2010, after consultation with stakeholders.

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

Consultation: Double Taxation in the EU

Closes: 30 June 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the phenomenon of double taxation in the EU. The consultation asks respondents to describe real-life examples of cases where more than one Member State has taxed the same income or asset. Respondents are also encouraged to recommend methods of reducing double taxation in the EU. This consultation is open to all taxpayers, but contains separate questionnaires for experts, corporate officials, and individuals.

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

ONGOING:

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 European 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](#).

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

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

17-20 May 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings, Strasbourg

17-20 May 2010 – European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg

18 May 2010 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

**19 May 2010 – Meeting of the European Economic and Social Committee
Single Market Observatory**

25-26 May 2010 – Competitiveness Council Meeting

25-26 May 2010 – Brussels Economic Forum

Other SME-related events

25 May – 1 June 2010 – European SME Week

The European Commission DG for Enterprise and Industry is overseeing the second annual European SME Week. Events will be organized in 37 countries, with the purpose of promoting entrepreneurship, showcasing the activities of small businesses, and informing the public about the resources that government institutions can provide for SMEs.

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/entrepreneurship/sme-week/>

26 May 2010 – Conference on the Statute for a European Company, Brussels, Belgium

The European Commission is organizing a conference with the goal of gathering insights for a report on the Statute for a European Company (SE). Participants will debate the costs and benefits of registering as a European Company. They will also attempt to formulate suggestions for improving the system.

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/company/se/index_en.htm#news

2 June 2010, “High Speed Internet for All,” Brussels, Belgium

The European Competitive Telecommunication Association (ECTA) is organizing a conference on the topic of universal access to very fast Internet services. Various strategies for achieving high speed Internet access for all will be presented and debated.

<http://www.ectaportal.com/highspeed2010/>

10-11 June 2010 – Study tour on environmental compliance for SMEs, Prato, Italy

The Environmental Compliance Assistance Programme for SMEs (ECAP), a European Commission body, is organizing a study tour for intermediary organizations and SMEs. The goal is to build up knowledge about how to help SMEs to become more environmentally friendly.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemshortdetail.cfm?&item_id=4268

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21 June 2010 – On-the-Job Training Session for SMEs' environmental compliance, Vienna, Austria

The Environmental Compliance Assistance Programme for SMEs (ECAP) is hosting its first on-the-job training session. The purpose of this event is to share experiences about services that aim to increase SMEs' environmental consciousness.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/sme/toolkits/training2010_en.htm