



HEADLINES

EU/Digital Agenda: European Commission reveals ‘Digital Agenda’ plans

On 19 May, the European Commission released its communication on “A Digital Agenda for Europe,” which sets out plans for maximizing the economic and social benefits of improvements in Information and Communications Technologies (ICT). Substantial progress has been made in this sector over the past two decades, and 50% of Europe’s recent productivity growth has been driven by ICT. However, for a variety of reasons, EU citizens, businesses and public bodies still cannot fully take advantage of this digital revolution.

The Commission’s Digital Agenda aims to improve this situation. It outlines seven areas in which the EU needs to take action and plans around 100 policy initiatives, including 31 legislative proposals. The main goals of the Digital Agenda are to eliminate barriers to the functioning of the digital single market, improve the capacity of various ICT products and systems to work together (interoperability), bolster digital security, facilitate universal access to fast internet, increase investments in R&D, boost e-skills, and develop methods of using ICT to address major environmental, medical and social challenges. The Digital Agenda is a flagship initiative of the Europe2020 Strategy and forms a vital component of the EU’s policies for rejuvenating the European economy.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes the publication of the European Commission communication on “A Digital Agenda for Europe.” This document outlines several ambitious policy goals which are likely to have a major impact on small businesses. The completion of the digital single market has the potential to open up countless new business opportunities, while improvements in digital security and interoperability, especially for e-invoices and e-signatures, could boost consumers’ as well as SMEs’ confidence in using the internet as a business platform. The Commission’s much needed plan to enable all EU citizens to connect to the internet has the potential to benefit SMEs in rural and mountainous areas. Finally, targeted investments in R&D could increase SMEs’ ability to engage in the EU digital economy.

However, as the document makes little specific mention of SMEs, the European Small Business Alliance urges the Commission to fully incorporate the ‘Think Small First’ principle in the development of all policy initiatives arising from the Digital Agenda for Europe. The existing digital infrastructure is far from sufficient for all European SMEs to incorporate ICT developments into their businesses, skills are lacking, access to finance remains a major obstacle and a clear distinction between micro-, small and larger businesses must be made. Only if the European Commission enables SMEs to fully reap the benefits of a digital economy, can the Digital Agenda for Europe become a real success. ESBA’s publication, “Digital Agenda for Europe: A Small Business Perspective,” released on 5 May, gives an outline of key obstacles for Small Businesses to this end and serves as an introduction to a full report, including recommendations, to be published this summer.

To read ESBA’s “Digital Agenda for Europe: A Small Business Perspective,” please click [here](#).

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To read the full European Commission communication on “A Digital Agenda for Europe,” please click [here](#).

To view the website set up specifically for the Digital Agenda, please click [here](#).

IN BRIEF

EU/Digital Agenda: EU Telecoms Ministers back the Digital Agenda

On 31 May, the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council officially endorsed the European Commission’s communication on “A Digital Agenda for Europe.” With a view to improving the EU’s competitiveness vis-à-vis the US, telecoms ministers unanimously approved the main policy goals of the digital agenda, which include the creation of a fully-fledged digital Single Market, investment in digital literacy, the provision of broadband access for all, and increased investment in ICT research and development. The ministers also reached an agreement on the creation of a code of online rights, which would summarize the rights of the EU’s internet users.

To read the Council’s conclusions on the digital agenda, please click [here](#).

EU/Administrative Burdens: Commission proposes streamlining of EU funding rules

On 28 May, the European Commission proposed a series of changes to procedures for acquiring EU funding. The Commission wants to remove the obligation to pay interest on pre-financing. It also plans to make administrative procedures simpler for grants under EUR 50,000 and plans to allow the re-use of previously submitted forms. The obligation to open a separate bank account will also be waived. The goal of these changes is to cut red tape and make it easier for small businesses and individuals to obtain and use EU funds, thus paving the way for more public-private partnerships. The European Parliament and the Council will have to approve the Commission’s proposals before they can be put into effect, a process which is expected to last until the end of 2011.

To read the results of the public consultation, on which this proposal is based, please click [here](#).

EU/Competitiveness: Competitiveness Council endorses changes to rules on the marketing of construction products

On 25 May, the Competitiveness Council debated a European Commission proposal on the marketing of construction products. The Council agreed to streamline the current rules for promoting products in this sector, specifically for the purpose of reducing costs for SMEs and microbusinesses. Clarification of the rules for CE Marking and the development of stricter criteria for the setting up of institutions that evaluate construction products were also addressed. The proposal will now be forwarded to the European Parliament for a second reading.

To read the Council’s conclusions on rules for the marketing of construction products, please click [here](#).

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

EU/Innovation: Competitiveness Council tackles innovation policy

On 25 May, the Competitiveness Council reached conclusions on a variety of issues related to innovation policy. It endorsed a series of reforms to the EU’s support mechanisms for research and development which would simplify procedures and reduce costs for businesses. Furthermore, the Council adopted conclusions on general policies for creating a more innovative Europe, emphasizing the need for initiatives to facilitate access to finance, completing the Single Market, and improving the governance of R&D policy. The Council also held a policy debate on the consumer rights directive, discussed the implementation of the services directive, and hosted an exchange of views on the relaunch of the Single Market.

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To read the Council's conclusions on simplified and more efficient research and innovation programmes, please click [here](#).

To read the Council's conclusions on creating an innovative Europe, please click [here](#).

To read a provisional summary of all of the 25-26 May Competitiveness Council's activities, please click [here](#).

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: The Single European Electronic Communications Market

The European Commission has published its yearly report on the status of the single European electronic communications market. The report highlights the barriers that hinder the completion of the single market in this sector and urges Member States to implement EU telecoms rules in a timely and consistent fashion. While the competitiveness of most national electronic communications markets has improved, the EU market remains fragmented along national lines.

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

European Commission: "Further steps towards the consolidation of the internal market for electronic communications"

The European Commission has released a report analyzing the effects of the EU's guidance mechanism for regulation of national telecoms markets, otherwise known as the 'Article 7 procedure'. Under Article 7 of Directive 2002/21/EC, Member States are obliged to notify the Commission if they aim to introduce any new regulation of telecoms. This procedure has made EU markets for electronic communications services more competitive, but there are still many barriers to the completion of a single EU-wide telecoms market.

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

To find out more about the enforcement of EU telecoms rules, please click [here](#).

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation: European Commission Initiative on Public Concession Contracts

Closes: 9 July 2010

The European Commission has issued a consultation on public concessions, or contracts between governments and private organizations for the provision of infrastructure or services to the public. The Commission is considering new initiatives in this area and it would like to gather the opinions of citizens, companies, NGOs and other stakeholders on the current EU rules for public concessions.

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

Consultation: Revision of the General Product Safety Directive

Closes: 30 July 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on its General Product Safety Directive (2001/95/EC), which offers a framework for ensuring the safety of consumer goods in the EU. Nevertheless, product safety problems continue to arise, and the Commission is seeking the opinions of citizens, businesses and public authorities on how the EU's initiatives on product safety could be improved.

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

ONGOING:

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](#).

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

7 June 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

7-8 June 2010 – Employment and Social Affairs Council

8 June 2010 – Economic and Financial Affairs Council

9 June 2010 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

10 June 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

11 June 2010 – Environment Council

15 June 2010 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

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14-17 June 2010 – European Parliament Plenary Sessions

14-17 June 2010 – European Parliament Committee Meetings

17-18 June 2010 – European Council

Other SME-related events

10-11 June, Conference: International Commercial Transactions, Trier, Germany

The Academy of European Law is organizing a conference that will examine the United Nations legal framework for cross-border trade. The conference will mainly focus on the international sale of goods.

http://www.era.int/cgi-bin/cms?_SID=6bee48106443d4a56f096ca12b054a33a84b6fbe00052535749150&_sprache=a_z&_bereich=artikel&_aktion=detail&idartikel=121006

10-11 June, MOBIP 2010: Partnership and Investment for Mobile Services Valencia, Spain

The Mobile Services Innovation Platform (MOBIP) is organizing two-day conference for the purpose of bringing together SMEs in the Mobile Services sector and venture capitalists interested in funding innovative companies. The conference gives businesses an opportunity to present their ideas and their technologies to potential investors.

http://www.e-unlimited.com/events/view.aspx?events_pages_id=492

14-16 June, Summer Course on European Company Law, Trier, Germany

The Academy of European Law is hosting a three-day course, providing a general introduction to the topic of European company law. Specific issues that will be addressed include capital requirements, mobility, and different options for management structures.

http://www.era.int/cgi-bin/cms?_SID=43f8068a83581b71592b0646f9ca1e556891006400055876649556&_sprache=a_z&_bereich=artikel&_aktion=detail&idartikel=120956

17-18 June, 2nd International Workshop on Entrepreneurship, Culture, Finance and Economic Development, Cartagena, Spain

This event, organized by the Catedra Bancaja Young Entrepreneurs, brings together academics, businesspeople and policymakers to discuss papers and reports on the topic of entrepreneurship. Special workshops will also be organized on the economic crisis, education, innovation, finance and human resources.

<http://www.iientrepreneurshipworkshop.upct.es/>

22 June, Re-invent and Re-vitalize, Brussels, Belgium

The Central Denmark EU Office and the European Policy Center are organizing a seminar on how businesses can use the unique experiences their products offer as marketing tools. This seminar is part of European SME Week.

<http://www.centraldenmark.eu/4833/Events>