



HEADLINES

Over 100 MEPs and industry leaders back the European Small Business Alliance in a call to relieve working time rules for self-employed lorry drivers

In June the European Parliament voted by a small majority in favour of the inclusion of self-employed lorry drivers within the scope of a Directive rigorously limiting their working time. In a letter, published both in national and Brussels press, the European Small Business Alliance, backed by an impressive number of MEPs and industry leaders, calls on the Commission to stand firm on its position to exclude self-employed drivers from this Directive.

Directive 2002/15/EC serves as social protection for employees against abuse by their employers. One of the main reasons why the Commission proposed to exclude self-employed drivers from this directive is that these drivers neither want nor need this type of protection, as they are not employees. Moreover, being able to organize one's own working time is a vital part of being self-employed and crucial to keep a business alive, especially in the current economic situation. Not only has the European Parliament administered a serious blow to the appeal of becoming self-employed in a transport sector that is already struggling to cope with diminishing numbers of drivers, by voting against the Commission proposal, the Parliament has opened the doors to regulating working hours for self-employed in other sectors as well.

Encouraged by the overwhelming level of support, the European Small Business Alliance will now proceed to write to Commissioner Kallas, urging him to re-evaluate the situation and to bring the matter back to the European Parliament in a form that will be likely to obtain the support of the European Parliament.

To see the letter, please click [here](#).

IN BRIEF

EU/Invoicing: Council sets new e-invoicing rules

On 13 July, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council adopted a directive reforming the EU's rules on VAT invoicing. The directive aims to guarantee that paper and electronic VAT invoices are treated equally and to eliminate barriers to using e-invoicing. The European Commission estimates that EU businesses could save up to EUR 18 billion if problems relating to the use of e-invoicing are minimized. The directive seeks to offer assistance to national authorities in dealing with tax fraud by, for example, introducing time limits for issuing invoices. Member States will have until the end of 2012 to implement this directive.

To read the adopted Council Directive, please click [here](#).

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

EU/Financial Services: Commission aims to improve protection of consumers and investors

On 12 July, the European Commission issued two proposals designed to reform rules that provide a safety-net for holders of a bank account and investors. The Deposit Guarantee Scheme grants

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financial compensation to depositors in case of bank failure. The Commission is proposing to extend the benefits provided by this scheme by ensuring that account holders are reimbursed within a week and by compensating larger amounts of money (with a maximum of EUR 100,000). The Investor Compensation Scheme protects investors using the services of an investment company from fraud and professional misconduct. If an investor's assets are not returned for these reasons, the Commission proposes to increase the maximum compensation from EUR 20,000 to 50,000, among other measures. The proposals will now be forwarded to the European Parliament and the Council.

To read the Commission proposal on Deposit Guarantee Schemes, please click [here](#).

To read the Commission proposal on Investor Compensation Schemes, please click [here](#).

EU/Timber: Parliament votes to forbid the sale of illegally harvested timber

On 7 July, the European Parliament voted, by a margin of 644 to 25, in favour of a regulation prohibiting the sale of illegally harvested timber in the EU. The regulation would require businesses who sell timber or products made with timber to declare where they bought their timber from, in order to enable the tracing of its origins. However, Member States will be able to decide for themselves how to penalize companies who do not follow these rules. Having already reached an informal agreement with the European Parliament and the Commission, the Council is expected to officially approve the proposal after the summer recess. It will most likely come into effect at the end of 2012.

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

EU/Patents: Commission aims to reform patent translation system

On 1 July, the European Commission released a proposal aimed at transforming the system of EU patent translation. Currently, in order to be considered valid in a Member State, patents granted by the European Patent Office (EPO) must be translated into the country's official language. Under this system, legitimating a patent in 13 EU states requires approximately EUR 20,000 and most of this amount is due to translation costs. In order to make the system less expensive, the Commission is proposing to have EPO inspect and approve all patents in either French, English or German. A patent granted in one of these languages would be valid in all Member States. If the proposal is approved, the Commission expects the costs of a patent valid in all EU Member States to fall to EUR 6,200.

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

PUBLICATIONS

European Commission: "Internationalisation of European SMEs"

The European Commission has published a study that assesses the extent to which European SMEs operate internationally and analyzes some of the potential benefits of internationalisation. The study found that a quarter of SMEs in the EU have exported in the past three years and that international activity is likely to spur job creation, innovation and company growth.

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

European Commission: "Short term working arrangements as responses to cyclical fluctuations"

The European Commission has released a report evaluating the usefulness of government-run short term work arrangements in tackling the effects of the economic crisis. The report concludes that these types of arrangements can help companies to stay profitable during economic downturns and can contribute to preventing large-scale lay-offs.

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

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European Commission: “Labour Market and Wage Developments in 2009”

The European Commission has published a report analyzing the effects of the economic crisis on the labour market and on wages. The report finds that around 4 million jobs were lost in Europe as a result of the crisis and that wage growth severely declined in 2008 and 2009. Nevertheless, governments were able to adopt short-term measures to counteract the impact of the crisis on employment and wages.

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

CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Consultation on more efficient and fairer retail services in Europe

Closes: 10 September 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation, seeking to gather stakeholders' views on a report titled, “Towards more efficient and fairer retail services in the internal market for 2020.” The report assesses the various factors causing problems in the modern retail market, including unfair commercial practices, unavailability of e-commerce, and low levels of transparency.

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

To read the report, “Towards more efficient and fairer retail services in the internal market for 2020,” please click [here](#).

Consultation on VAT collection procedures in customs clearance

Closes: 31 October 2010

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on VAT levies in customs procedures. The “centralized clearance” system allows authorized importers to pay customs duties in the Member State in which they are registered, even if they are importing and taking their goods to another EU country. However, this system does not apply to VAT and the Commission is seeking the views of businesses on how to simplify VAT collection in line with the “customs clearance” system.

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

Consultation on the Future of Pensions

Closes: 15 November 2010

The European Commission has issued a public consultation on possible options for the reform of pension systems in the EU. According to the Commission, the economic and financial crisis has further undermined the sustainability of current pension systems, which were already burdened by an ageing population. Hence, all stakeholders are invited to suggest ideas for changing pension systems.

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

Consultation on Insurance Guarantee Schemes

Closes: 30 November 2010

The European Commission has issued a consultation on its White Paper on Insurance Guarantee Schemes, which provide a safety net to citizens whose insurance companies are unable to pay them. The paper argues in favour of EU action to insure that Insurance Guarantee Schemes exist in every Member State and that they meet certain minimum standards. The Commission asks stakeholders to submit their views on this idea and to suggest other policy options.

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

To read the White Paper on Insurance Guarantee Schemes, please click [here](#).

ONGOING:

Consultation on the Market Abuse Directive

Closes: 23 July 2010

The European Commission has issued a consultation on the Market Abuse Directive. This directive was adopted in 2003, with the aim of comprehensively addressing various methods of market manipulation. However, the Commission is interested in revising the directive in order to reduce costs, eliminate unnecessary burdens on SMEs, improve implementation and address the lack of transparency in financial markets.

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.

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

Consultation on State aid rules for services of general interest

Closes: 10 September 2010

The European Commission has launched a consultation on how its rules for delivering state aid for so-called "services of general economic interest" (SGEI) work. This includes services such as telecoms, public transportation and logistics. The consultation asks stakeholders to give their views on the provision of state aid for these types of services.

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

Consultation on the Implementation of the Services Directive

Closes: 13 September 2010

The European Commission has launched a consultation on the implementation of the Services Directive. The deadline for aligning all national legislation with the directive was December 2009. Since then, Member States have engaged in the so-called "mutual evaluation process," jointly analyzing each others' progress in transposing the Services Directive. In this consultation paper, the Commission asks interested stakeholders to comment on the legislation that has been discussed in the "mutual evaluation process."

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

Consultation on cross-border inheritance tax obstacles in the EU

Closes: 22 September 2010

The European Commission has issued a consultation, asking stakeholders to suggest possible approaches for dealing with cross-border inheritance tax problems. Member State legislation regarding cross-border inheritance may prevent individuals and businesses from fully realizing their

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right to freedom of movement within the EU. Transfer of ownership of small businesses could be especially hindered by national taxation of cross-border inheritance.

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

Consultation on Net Neutrality

Closes: 30 September 2010

The European Commission has issued a consultation on “net neutrality.” The Commission’s stated goal is to ensure that Internet users have a wide range of choices regarding the content they can see and the products they can buy. The Commission is therefore asking stakeholders to assess whether internet providers should be allowed to favour certain types of Internet content over others. It also asks them to evaluate whether there is a sufficient amount of competition among various Internet providers.

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

20 July 2010 – Weekly Meeting of the College of Commissioners

22 July 2010 – Meeting of the Governing Council of the European Central Bank (ECB)

26 July 2010 – General Affairs Council

26 July 2010 – Foreign Affairs Council

29 July 2010 – Economic & Financial Affairs Council

Other SME related events

**29-31 July – “International Conference on IT-enabled Innovation in Enterprise,”
Athens, Greece**

This conference is organized by the Interdisciplinary Institute for Collaboration and Research on Enterprise Systems and Technology (IICREST) and hosted by the University of Piraeus. The conference will discuss the potential impact that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on the ability of businesses to innovate.

<http://www.icitie.innov.org/>

12-14 August – “Top Ten Tips for Doing Business on the Web,” Nottingham, United Kingdom

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This event, organized by the Ashfield Entrepreneurs' Forum, features a presentation discussing the costs and benefits of developing an online business presence. It will also provide practical advice to entrepreneurs on the most common problems related to doing business online.

<http://online.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/eventDescription?site=140&r.lc=en&type=EVENTS&itemId=5001515212>

13-17 September – “3rd Summer School on Network & Information Security: Privacy & Security in the Future Internet,” Crete, Greece

This four-day summer school is organized by the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) and the Institute of Computer Science of the Foundation for Research and Technology, Hellas. It will address how privacy and security can be maintained in the context of the fast evolution of new internet technologies.

<http://www.nis-summer-school.eu/>