



HEADLINES

Test your candidate MEP! ESBA QUIZ for the 2009 European Elections

Today, the European Small Business Alliance has officially launched its 2009 European Elections Campaign. In the run up to the elections, ESBA offers voters a practical tool to test candidate MEPs' knowledge of the difficulties faced by the European business economy. The ESBA QUIZ "*Who Wants to be a Member of the European Parliament*" is available [in all EU languages](#) and allows voters to test the knowledge of potential Members of the European Parliament on a range of small business issues, ranging from how many firms there are in Europe, to some of the largest barriers faced by small firms throughout Europe.

There are more than 23 million small and medium-sized businesses in the EU and they represent 99.8 per cent of all enterprise in Europe, forming the backbone of the economy. ESBA's focus on raising awareness about the importance of small business and the key issues faced by the sector is a call to policy makers to 'Think Small First' in all EU legislation and programmes.

ESBA urges all small businesses and other voters to use the quiz to really test their MEP candidates. We want to make sure that the people we are voting for are knowledgeable about small businesses and will be fit to represent them. Only well-informed policy-makers will be equipped to take decisions in the name of small firms which will set the EU on track towards a prosperous European economy.

To download the ESBA Quiz in **all EU languages**, please go to: www.esba-europe.org

To read more about ESBA's 2009 European elections campaign, please go to: www.esba-europe.org

EU / Late Payments: New Commission proposal to fight late payments

On 8 April, EU Enterprise Commissioner Günter Verheugen unveiled a draft legislation to amend Directive 2000/35/EC on payment deadlines. Based on a commitment in the Small Business Act for Europe, the legislation introduces a maximum deadline of thirty days for payments made by public bodies in Europe. In case of late payment, public authorities will have to pay compensation for recovery cost and a flat-rate compensation of 5% of the amount due, starting from day one of the delay. The proposal envisages an extension of the payment period in 'duly justified' cases.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes the European Commission's proposal containing new measures to combat late payment in commercial transactions. ESBA has been urging the European Institutions to pay their suppliers on time to ensure their survival during the current economic downturn. The European Institutions need to see it as their duty to lead by example by consistently making timely payments to SMEs. For these reasons, ESBA has backed the latest inquiry by the European Ombudsman into the European Commission's payment practices.

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Failure by European Institutions to pay in a timely fashion can cause considerable damages to small businesses. Due to the ongoing shortage of lending to small businesses by the banks, outstanding invoices represent working capital that needs to be made available according to the agreed payment terms. Small firms cannot and must not be used as convenient lending facilities. The Commission proposal in which institutions are bound by stricter rules is a step in the right direction. However, providing SMEs only with an 'option' to pursue late payment will not suffice in practice. It is well established that SMEs are hesitant to pursue payment, fearing deterioration or loss of customer relationships.

To read more about the Commission's proposal containing new measures to fight late payment in commercial transactions, please click [here](#)

IN BRIEF

EU/ Working Time: Still no agreement on opt-out clause

On 2 April, representatives from Member States and the European Parliament could again not reach agreement on the revision of the Working Time Directive. The five-year-old proposal came to a standstill when European Parliament voted against the existing opt-out clause with regards to the 48 hours working week. Since January 2009, the Czech Presidency has organised a series of discussions and has offered the European Parliament a number of concessions which could have led to a compromise solution. Although the Czech Presidency stressed the importance of coming to a balanced Directive, with regards to all issues, European Parliament sees the abolition of the opt-outs as the key issue. So far, agreement between Council and European Parliament has not been reached. During the last meeting, the European Commission has put forward a possible proposal for a compromise on the opt-out clause. On the basis of this proposal both negotiating parties have to assess whether there is scope for a final formal session to reach agreement. Otherwise, the new Directive will not be adopted.

ESBA OPINION

In the past, ESBA has repeatedly expressed serious concern about the European Parliament's decision to prevent people from working the hours they choose and describes the Directive as a further restriction on how businesses run. Particularly in light of the current economic crisis, ESBA believes it is important for the labour market to retain its flexibility.

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

EU / Better Regulation: Jury announces candidates for Red Tape Reduction Award

On 1 April, a jury, jointly co-chaired by European Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen and the Chairman of the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens Edmund Stoiber, presented three shortlisted candidates for the 'Best Idea for Red Tape Reduction Award'. The shortlisted candidates were selected out of a pool of 500 contributions submitted to the Commission and the HLG based on criteria such as originality, feasibility and overall potential to reduce burdens.

Supported by the SCM Network and Bertelsmann Stiftung, the "Best Idea for Red Tape Reduction Award" invited entrepreneurs and citizens to submit original and innovative solutions to the fight against red tape. The winner of the Award will be announced on the occasion of the European Enterprise Awards ceremony in Prague on 13 May 2009.

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ESBA OPINION

ESBA supports all initiatives which support the reduction of administrative burdens in Europe. In the past, ESBA has engaged in a number of activities in support of the Commission's admin burden reduction goal. ESBA urges Member States to follow the HLG recommendations on red tape reduction, and stresses the need for a swift adoption and implementation of the proposed measures at Member State level. Further delays in the adoption process will have a negative impact on the economic performance of SMEs - the backbone of the European economy - especially in light of the current credit crisis. Now, it is time to act!

To read more about the "Best Idea for Red Tape Reduction Award", please click [here](#)

To read about ESBA's activities targeted at the reduction of red tape in Europe, please click [here](#)

Publications:

EC: "Expert group report on 'Think small first principle'"

The report "Think Small First – Considering SMEs interest in policy-making", published by the European Commission, provides a definition of the 'Think Small First Principle' and offers a number of good practices at national and EU level on how to apply the principle in order to implement the 'Small Business Act for Europe'. The document explains the importance of SMEs in the EU economy, sheds light on the impact regulations can have on SMEs and discusses the 'Think Small First' principle in the framework of the 'Small Business Act for Europe'.

To download the expert group report on the 'Think Small First Principle', please click [here](#)

OECD: "OECD Economic Outlook 2009, interim report"

The interim "OECD Economic Outlook" assesses the current economic and financial crisis and examines the economic policies needed to foster a sustained recovery in member countries. In a special chapter entitled "The Effectiveness and Scope of Fiscal Stimulus", the publication addresses the questions how governments in OECD countries have changed the stance of fiscal policy in response to the crisis and what is the scope for additional fiscal stimulus in OECD countries to cushion the recession and help the recovery.

To read more about the OECD publication, please click [here](#)

CEPS: "Keep it simple: policy responses to the financial crisis"

The publication "Keep it simple: policy responses to the financial crisis", published by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), proposes new rules for the macroeconomic and exchange rate policies of the main players with the aim of restoring a strong global framework for economic governance. The study sends warning signals against the risk of a massive wave of new regulation and calls instead for a simplification and better enforcement of existing rules.

To download the CEPS study "Keep it simple: Policy Responses to the Financial Crisis", please click [here](#)

CONSULTATIONS

ONGOING:

Online consultation on Administrative Burdens Reduction

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

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important dates

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| 21-24 April 2009 | European Parliament Plenary Session, taking place in Strasbourg |
| 22 April 2009 | 8 th meeting of the Labour Market Observatory of the Specialized Section for “Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship” (SOC) with a Hearing on New Skills for new jobs, evaluating new jobs and tools for anticipating future labour market trends, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, taking place in Brussels. For more information, please go to: http://eesc.europa.eu/ |

Other SME related events

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| 20-21 April 2009 | In the context of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation 2009, the Committee of the Regions and the European Commission will organise a two-day forum on “Europe’s Creative Regions and Cities”, taking place in Brussels. For more information, please go to: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2021&tpa_id=201&lang=en |
| 27 April 2009 | European Commission conference on “Making IPR work for SMEs”; taking place in Brussels. For more information, please go to: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/industry/ipr_conference.htm |
| 6-14 May 2009 | First European SME Week to promote entrepreneurship across Europe and to inform entrepreneurs about support available for them at European, national and local level. For more information, please go to: http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/entrepreneurship/sme-week/index_en.htm |
| 7-8 May 2009 | “Research conference to forge links between science and industry”, organised by the European Commission; taking place in Prague. For more information, please go to: |

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http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/itemlongdetail.cfm?item_id=2918&tpa_id=201&lang=en

14 May 2009

Conference on “The Small Business Act for Europe: Business Without Barriers” & “European Enterprise Awards Ceremony 2009”, organised by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions; taking place in Prague; for more information, please go to: <http://www.sme-conference-prague.eu/>

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