



HEADLINES

EU / Enterprise: Public consultation on the Small Business Act for Europe begins

On 6 February, the European Commission organised a public hearing on the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA) in Brussels. The high-level event was addressed and attended by European Commission President Barroso, Vice-President Verheugen, representatives from European Business Organisations, the Slovenian Presidency and the European Parliament.

Speaking at the hearing, Günter Verheugen, Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, outlined the Commission's proposals and emphasised the importance of the SBA as a means to fully unlock the growth and jobs potential of small businesses and to put them at the forefront of decision-making in the EU. It is envisaged that the SBA will combine a mix of general principles and concrete measures to be taken both by the Member States and by the European Commission to improve the business environment for European SMEs.

In addition to a focus on Better Regulation for SMEs, the SBA will seek to put SMEs at the forefront of society, facilitate SMEs access to markets, finance, skills and innovation, turn the environmental challenge into opportunities for SMEs and enhance the implementation of EU SME policy principles. Envisaged actions range from reinforced application of the "think small first principle" in the development of new legislation, to improvement of SMEs' participation in EU programmes, standardisation and public procurement, to the establishment a European Company Statute, to help small businesses engage in cross-border activities.

On 31 January, the Commission launched a public consultation on the SBA. The online questionnaire seeks to stimulate discussions with all stakeholders in order to identify and remove all remaining barriers to SMEs' well being. The SBA was foreseen in the Commission's package for the new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy adopted in December 2007. The proposal will be in the form of a Communication and is scheduled to be published in June, with formally adoption expected under the French Presidency in December 2008

ESBA OPINION

ESBA supports the Commission's proposal for a SBA for Europe. Despite improving recognition of the importance of small businesses to the EU economy and a corresponding increase in the number of policy initiatives focused on their needs, many challenges lie ahead for SMEs. In order to fulfil its potential, ESBA urges the Commission to ensure the scope of the SBA remains wide reaching. Rigorous application of the 'Think Small First' Principle - in Brussels and at national level - will help entrepreneurs feel the tangible benefits of the EU's SME policy and for progress to be made on the objectives reached so far. ESBA looks forward to submitting a detailed response to the consultation and to continued participation in the SBA's development.

To read more about the Small Business Act, please click [here](#)

ESBA Bulletin of 15 February 2008 – Volume 10 – Number 1

EU / Enterprise: New Enterprise Europe Network for Europe's SMEs is launched

On 7 February, European Commission Vice President Verheugen launched the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), a new integrated support service for Europe's enterprises – in particular SMEs. Operating under a 'no wrong door' policy, the network will offer a one-stop shop for businesses. Janez Potočnik, Commissioner for Science and Research, the Slovenian Presidency, Committee of Regions and the EESC, attended the launch event.

The new EEN will merge the existing "Euro Info Centres" and "Innovation Relay Centre" networks. With 500 contact points for entrepreneurs throughout the EU and beyond, the EEN will become the largest support-service network in Europe. As its slogan - 'Business Support on Your Doorstep', - suggests, the EICs and IRCs integration is intended to maximise the strengths of each organisation and provide a full range of local services for SMEs.

Amongst other facilities, the EEN will assist companies in going international by helping them to get involved in cross-border trade and investment and building technology partnerships; it will provide information on technical issues and encourage SMEs to become more innovative by sharing R&D; it will provide assistance for companies to access EU projects and funding by improving knowledge regarding different sources of EU funding; and it will be used as a method of providing feedback to the Commission. The EEN forms part of the Commission's integrated policy for promoting entrepreneurship and growth of enterprises in Europe.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA supports all initiatives which promote entrepreneurship in Europe and considers that the new, integrated EEN will provide an effective support service for SMEs. A large majority of businesses serve markets in their area, but the ability to tap into a Europe wide network, locally, should enhance small businesses understanding of and engagement with the EU. In order to achieve the goal of further opening up the Internal Market, of which SMEs form an integral part, ESBA urges the European Commission to work closely with business organisations to promote and give input to the EEN.

To read more about the launch of the Enterprise Europe Network, please click [here](#)

EU / Better Regulation: Reports on Admin Burdens published and new HLG meets

On 30 January, the European Commission launched its Second Progress Report on the Strategy for Simplifying the Regulatory Environment in the EU. The report presented the results achieved by its Simplification Rolling Programme, which includes the removal of 5000 pages of legislation. The Commission highlighted the Single Payments Area and the new Electronic Customs Code as good examples of simplification initiatives, which together will save European businesses up to € 30.5 billion per year, boosting international trade.

The Commission also issued its first Annual Report on its ambitious Action Programme, which aims to cut administrative burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012. It is estimated that businesses saved approximately €500 million as a result of five fast track actions to reduce red tape in 2007. These included actions in the fields of SME merger and division reporting. In addition, the Commission expects €800 million savings to follow in the short term. The report provides a basis for future reduction proposals, on which the Commission will receive advice from its 'flagship' High Level Group (HLG) on Reducing Admin Burdens. Convened by President Barroso, Vice-President Verheugen and chaired by Edmund Stoiber, former Prime Minister of Bavaria, the HLG held its first meeting on 17 January. Gabriel Goucha, ESBA Secretary and Vice-President of member organisation PME Portugal is one of 15 experts who attended the first meeting, which addressed procedural aspects of its work. In its next meeting on 26 February it will focus on the list of 2008 Fast Track Actions.

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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The Commission also reported on the improving performance of its Impact Assessment System - 284 impact assessments have been completed since 2003. The Commission praised in particular the positive impact of the Impact Assessment Board, which is composed of high level Commission official and provides advice and control on methodology and quality.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA backs the ambitious 25% reduction target and welcomes the results achieved. Research carried out by the UK FSB for its 2007 short film campaign shows that SMEs spend on average over 7 hours each week filling in forms - cutting red tape could boost the EU's economy by €150 billion. ESBA's recent experience has however revealed that implementation of incontrovertible impact assessments across the Institutions is still lacking. The emphasis in the Action Programme on stakeholder involvement is important. ESBA therefore urges small businesses to take part in the Commission's consultation, which invites entrepreneurs to identify unnecessary red tape (see below), and looks forward to supporting the HLG in its work.

To read more about the Reports and the HLG, please click [here](#)

PUBLICATIONS

European Economic and Social Committee: "Renewed Lisbon Strategy 2008-2010: The role of organised civil society"

This summary report expresses the views of the social partners and other civil society organisations at European and national levels on the current and future prospects of the Lisbon Strategy. As a contribution to the forthcoming 2008 Spring Summit, it puts forward proposals for improving the role of organised civil society in the process of implementing the Lisbon Agenda. By carefully gathering and analysing different European experiences and making concrete policy proposals, the EESC's objective is to raise the voice of organized civil society for a more successful implementation of the Lisbon Strategy.

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

Robert Schuman Foundation: "Renewing Energy Production in Europe: an environmental, industrial and political challenge"

This new "Note" by Antoine Pellion responds to the publication, in January 2008, by the European Commission of its far-reaching "Energy and Climate Package". The Package's aim is to deliver the European Council's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% and increase the share of renewable energies in energy consumption to 20% by 2020. The "Note" discusses the role Member States have to play in order to guarantee the security of supply, to overcome environmental challenges and to stimulate competition. It is available on-line in French (paper or PDF) and in English (PDF) and costs 10€.

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

World Bank and IFC Report "Doing Business 2008 "

This report assesses the ease of doing business in a wide range of countries based on a set of specified indicators affecting 10 areas of everyday business: starting up, dealing with licenses, employing workers, registering property, getting credit, protecting investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts, and closing a business. The 10 indicators are updated, and the countries ranked according to the analysis of economic outcomes. "Doing Business 2008" focuses on how complex business regulations dampen investment, growth and job creation in all businesses, but especially for women entrepreneurs.

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CONSULTATIONS

NEW:

Public consultation on the Small Business Act for Europe

Closes 31 March 2008

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the Small Business Act for Europe. The aim of this consultation is to stimulate an open debate with SMEs and SMEs' stakeholders in order to ensure that all remaining obstacles to EU SMEs' prosperity, and solutions to tackle them, are identified. In addition to a public hearing, which took place on 6 February 2008 in Brussels, the results of the consultation will provide a major contribution to the Commission's reflections on the SBA, which is scheduled to be adopted in June 2008.

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

Online Consultation on Combating Late Payments

Closes 30 April 2008

Risk & Policy Analysts Ltd (RPA) – with the support of the European Commission – has launched an online consultation on combating late payments in commercial transactions. It seeks to examine the costs and benefits of 16 proposals to support the objectives of EU Directive 2000/35/EC. The questionnaire, which is now available in English, French and Spanish, aims to gather views from small businesses on the effectiveness of the different proposed options and highlight any other measures that might be beneficial.

To access the online consultation, please select:

ENGLISH VERSION - [here](#)

FRENCH VERSION - [here](#)

SPANISH VERSION - [here](#)

ONGOING:

Online consultation on Administrative Burdens Reduction

Closes 21 September 2008

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 administrative burdens on businesses in the EU by 25% in 2012.

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

COMING UP

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EU Institutions: Important dates

25-26 February 2008 Competitiveness Council
28 February 2008 Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council
29 February 2008 Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

Other SME related events

- 20 February 2008** Seminar on “The Global Climate Threat as a Challenge to the EU”; organised by FSF, ITPS and Nutek; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to:
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fmi/scic/SPE08/Start.php#>
- 20 February 2008** Meeting on “Fostering Research and Development by SMEs: Can the Eurostars Joint Programme deliver?”; organised by the SME Intergroup; taking place in Strasbourg; for more information, please go to: www.othmarkaras.at/files/themen/sme-intergroup/2008-02-20_Einladung.pdf
- 21-22 February 2008** 6th European Business Summit “Greening the Economy. New Energy for Business”; organised by BUSINESSEUROPE and the FEB; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to:
<http://www.ebsummit.eu/>
- 26 February 2008** Congress on “The Future of European Telecommunications: Convergence – Competition – Growth”; organised by SME UNION; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to:
<http://www.sme-union.org/event/index.php?LAN=en&ID=76>
- 26-27 February 2008** 4th Annual Brussels Climate Change Conference 2008 “EU Climate Change Policy after Bali”; organised by CEPS; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to:
<http://guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Summary.aspx?e=cfd208ee-edfd-4763-abe5-f28dd0de99d4>
- 4 March 2008** Conference on “The impact of globalisation on structural change and employment”; organised by Eurofound; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to:
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/events/2008/epbrussels/index.htm>
- 8 March 2008** Conference on “Entrepreneurial Diversity in a Unified Europe – Migrant Entrepreneurship/Migrant Entrepreneurship”; organised by the European Commission; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to:
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/support_measures/migrant/conf2008.htm
- 10 March 2008** Conference on “European Private Company”; organised by the European Commission; taking place in Brussels; for registration and more information, please go to:
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fmi/scic/SPE08/Start.php#>
- 14-15 April 2008** 8th World Conference – “Business Angel Investing: Entrepreneurial Capital for the 21st century”; organised by The European Association of Business Angel

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Networks; taking place in Arnhem, the Netherlands; for more information, please go to:

<http://www.ebancongress2008.com/>

22-25 June 2008

53rd World Conference; organised by the International Council for Small Business; taking place in Halifax, Nova Scotia; Canada; for more information, please go to:

<http://www.icsb2008.org/welcome.html>

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