



HEADLINES

ESBA News: ESBA's redeveloped website has gone live

ESBA has recently redeveloped its website. Whilst the Homepage has been significantly updated to be more campaign and user-oriented, the introduction of the first in a series of innovative new features, including registration for selected e-services, comments forums and an EU Q&A Service, will serve as a tool to aid ESBA in enhancing the activities it undertakes on behalf of its member and SMEs.

ESBA will also soon be implementing the first in a series of regular Podcasts on EU SME-related issues. In addition, the content of the Website has been fully revamped to reflect ESBA's current activities and the business plan for growth 2006-2010. It contains news, event announcements and coverage, the current ESBA Bulletin, news from Brussels, press releases and coverage, amongst others features. The new homepage is also multi-lingual with a German and French version already available and a Flemish version coming soon.

This bulletin will keep you updated on new information and services on our website as and when they are developed. In addition, you can visit our website regularly to obtain the ESBA point of view on key current issues.

Please visit the site to get involved: www.esba-europe.org

IN BRIEF

EU / intellectual property: Verheugen expresses hopes for Community Patent

Speaking at a European Patent Office (EPO) forum in Munich on 19 April, Research and Industry Commissioner Guenter Verheugen asserted that the European Union would introduce a common patent by 2012. Although the Community Patent has been debated since the 1970s, discussions have never led to any concrete action. Deliberations between Member States ceased in 2004, when ministers disagreed on a range of issues, with the translation requirements being a particularly difficult issue. Commissioner Verheugen's new-found optimism comes from the fact that Alain Pompidou, president of the EPO, has said that France would ratify the London Agreement of 2000, which restricts the amount of languages to be used.

To see the Commission's Community Patent website, please go to:
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/indprop/patent/index_en.htm

EU / intellectual property: Parliament endorses Directive to punish counterfeiters

On 25 April, Parliament adopted a historic Directive in plenary. The Directive on 'criminal measures aimed at the enforcement of intellectual property rights' is the first EU directive aimed at harmonising national criminal law. The Parliament version excludes patent rights and therefore also piracy for personal use from criminal sanctions. However, deliberate infringements for commercial advantage would be covered. The report will now go to Council for first reading.

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To see the Parliament's press release, please go to:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/057-5723-113-04-17-909-20070420IPR05539-23-04-2007-2007-false/default_en.htm

To see the amended proposal, please go to:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0168:FIN:EN:HTML>

EU / Trade: EU toughens market access strategy

The European Commission has adopted the Communication *Global Europe: A Stronger Partnership to deliver Market Access for European exporters*, which aims to help European companies gain access to foreign markets such as India, China and Russia. EU trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson set out the key changes to the strategy which include a decentralized partnership between the Commission, Member States and business in third countries, and "market access teams" which will identify political barriers to trade in key foreign markets, such as "behind the border" regulatory restrictions.

To see the Commission's market access strategy webpage, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/sectoral/mk_access/cs101106_en.htm

To see the EU's market access database, please go to:

<http://mkaccdb.eu.int/mkaccdb2/indexPubli.htm>

EU / Lisbon Agenda: think tanks calls for legislation to stimulate Lisbon Agenda

A report published by the Stockholm Network, a pan-European network of think tanks, calls for the introduction of EU legislation specifically designed to assess progress on the Lisbon Agenda and to put down clear goals and timelines. It suggests that a Lisbon Directive should focus clearly on those areas of the Lisbon Agenda which are both strategically important and politically feasible. Key aims would be the establishment of a European Research Area and a European patent system.

To see the publication, please go to:

http://www.stockholm-network.org/downloads/publications/d41d8cd9-SN_MIDTERM.pdf

To see the Commission's Lisbon Strategy website, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/index_en.htm

EU / telecommunications: German Presidency lenient on excessive cell phone charges

On 24 April, the German Presidency met with representatives from Member States, Parliament and the Commission on the issues of mobile roaming charges. At the end of 2006, the Commission released a draft regulation seeking to cap roaming charges, the excessive charges mobile phone operators place on customers using their phones abroad. The Presidency is calling for a cap of € 0.60 for outgoing calls and € 0.30 for incoming calls. This is substantially lower than the figures sought by MEPs - € 0.40 and € 0.15, respectively – the Commission, and even other EU ministers, who previously recommended charges of € 0.50 and € 0.25. The proposal will be voted on in Parliament on 9 May 2007.

To see the relevant Commission website, please go to:

http://www.ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/roaming/index_en.htm

EU / education: Commission's plan for EIT criticized by UN report

A UN independent expert group has heavily criticized the Commission's proposal for a European Institute of technology (EIT). The Commission favours a decentralized institute, which the report believes will not be sustainable financially and will not improve the research output. Instead, the report supports a 'cluster approach', whereby existing local and regional research centres and universities would create institutes which would together make up the EIT.

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To see the report, please go to:

http://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/docs/200704_EIT.pdf

PUBLICATIONS

Venture capital: removing cross-border obstacles

Enterprise Europe has published a new report which examines the problems the venture capital sector faces by not enjoying the full benefits of a single market. With markets fragmented along national lines, cross-border investments are unnecessarily complicated for venture capital funds looking to invest outside their home country. This prevents them from reaching economies of scale and specialisation and hinders innovative SMEs.

To download the report, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/financing/publications.htm#cross_border_investment_2007

European Innovation scoreboard

This is the sixth edition of the *European Innovation Scoreboard* (EIS). The EIS is the instrument developed by the European Commission, under the Lisbon Strategy, to evaluate and compare the innovation performance of the EU Member States.

To access this publication, please go to:

<http://www.proinno-europe.eu/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.display&topicid=5&parentid=51>

CONSULTATIONS

Towards a European Strategic Energy Technology Plan

Europe has entered a new energy era. Global demand for energy is increasing within a framework of high and unstable energy prices. Emissions of greenhouse gases are rising. Reserves of oil and gas are concentrated in a few supplier countries. Against this backdrop, it is clear that the European Union and the rest of the world have not reacted quickly enough to increase the use of low-carbon energy technologies or to improve energy efficiency. As a consequence, climate change has become a real threat and security of energy supply is worsening.

You will find more information at the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/consultation/setplan_en.htm

Closes 13 May 2007

VAT - Possible introduction of a mechanism for eliminating double taxation in individual cases

The European Commission has launched an online consultation to ascertain the views of the public and businesses on the possible introduction of a mechanism for eliminating double taxation in individual cases.

You will find more information at the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/common/consultations/tax/article_3316_en.htm

Closes 31 May 2007

The Green Paper on Urban Transport

The Green Paper on Urban Transport will be published in the second half of 2007. This internet consultation will support the preparation of the Green Paper, and is intended to collect views from

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interested parties on how best the EU may contribute to improving transport and mobility in urban areas.

You will find more information at the following link:

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/clean/green_paper_urban_transport/public_consultation_en.htm

Closes 30 April 2007

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important Dates

30 April-3 May 2007 Committees

7-10 May 2007 Committees, groups, mini-plenary (Brussels)

14-6 May 2007 Group week

21-24 May 2007 Plenary (Strasbourg)

28-31 May 2007 Yellow week

SME related Events

2 May 2007 'Creating a business friendly EU', dinner with Commissioner Verheugen; organised by the British Chamber of Commerce; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/>

3 May 2007 4th Speed Networking Event & Members Cocktails; organised by the British Chamber of Commerce; Brussels; for more information, please contact Helmi Soosaar, helmi@britcham.be

15 May 2007 Dinner with Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Meglena Kuneva; Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/>

12 June 2007 EU breakfast briefing with Simon Fraser, Head of Cabinet to Peter Mandelson (DG Trade), 'European trade policy and competitiveness', organised by the British Chamber of Commerce, taking place in Brussels. For more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/>

26 June 2007 Energy Europe: Changing Our Energy Culture; organised by Friends of Europe; Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.friendsofeurope.org/>

10 July 2007 'Driven by innovation' CEO luncheon series with Nabil Sakkab, Vice President, Corporate R&D, Proctor & Gamble Cincinnati; organised by the American Chamber of Commerce; for more information, please go to: <http://www.amcham.be/cgi-bin/events.cgi?Action=register&id=>

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