



HEADLINES

EU/ Competitiveness: EU Competitiveness Ministers' meeting takes place

On 20-21 July, an Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Competitiveness took place under the Portuguese Presidency in Lisbon. The Informal Meeting aimed at discussing SME and Industrial policy, in the context of the Lisbon Agenda. It was also attended by European Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, Vice-president Günter Verheugen.

Whilst the Commission's future interim review of EU SME Policy provided a broad framework, the discussion on SME Policy which took place on 20 July and was based primarily on a Presidency Discussion Paper. It was also addressed by 4 entrepreneurs, who presented their experience and suggestions. As a result, the national Ministers for Competitiveness identified Innovation of Financing, Internationalisation and Better Regulation as the key-issues for SMEs' competitiveness. They also agreed that support instruments must be further developed and implemented to help SMEs fully exploit innovation, growth and internationalization potential in the world markets and to adapt themselves to growing energy and environmental demands.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes Informal Competitiveness Ministers' Meeting's focus on SME Policy and agrees on the relevance of its findings to the Commission's preparation of the interim review of EU SME Policy. Innovation of Financing, Internationalisation and Better Regulation are indeed key-issues for SMEs. ESBA however also backs Vice-President Verheugen's call at the meeting for the Competitiveness Council to evaluate the effects of other policies on SMEs' competitiveness and encourages the Presidency to continue consulting with the SME community to ensure that the 'think small first' principle is seen in all legislative initiatives.

To download the Presidency Discussion Paper on SME and Industrial Policy, please go to:

http://www.eu2007.pt/NR/ronlyres/1D28B6BB-14BF-414C-8EA8-D94C1B11733D/0/PPUE_CCompetitividade_Doc_PME_Final_2007.pdf

To read the Conclusions of the Informal Competitiveness Ministers Meeting, please go to:

http://www.eu2007.pt/NR/ronlyres/242617DD-ECC4-4B20-A0CC-24BB95B793F0/0/Conclusoes_competitividade_EN.pdf

IN BRIEF

EU/ Better Regulation: EP adopts a Directive on public limited liability companies

On 11 July, the European Parliament accepted a Commission proposal for removing unnecessary burdens on small businesses. The proposal is a part of the package of ten "fast track actions" presented by the Commission with the sole aim to cut red tape. It will apply to more than 600.000 public limited liability companies across Europe and means that they will no longer have to order costly expert reports in cases of mergers and divisions, unless there is a demand for such reports among shareholders. Adopted just months after the package's publication, it is hoped that the proposal will set a new precedent for removing red tape at high speed in the EU – in line with the goal of reducing burdens by 25% in 2012. It now awaits agreement by Member States.

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ESBA OPINION

ESBA welcomes the adoption of this initiative, which could save the smallest public limited liability companies approximately 3.500 euros. In addition to the 10 “fast track actions,” ESBA supports the Commission’s efforts to identify other onerous requirements for SMEs and calls for the rapid adoption of other proposals to remove them.

To read more about the Better Regulation initiatives, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/regulation/better_regulation/index_en.htm

To download the Commission proposal for a Directive on mergers and divisions of public limited liability companies, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/regulation/better_regulation/docs/docs_admin_b/com_2007_0091_en_acte.pdf

To read the European Parliament first reading position, please go to:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0329+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

EU/ Energy: MEPs support the Commission on renewable energy policy

The European Parliament has supported the Commission’s approach to facilitate the generation of 20% of all energy from renewable sources by 2020. The Industry, Research and Energy Committee adopted on 10 July an own-initiative report by Danish MEP Britta Thomsen (PES). In addition to proposals on the Internal Market and the Grid Infrastructure and Transport and Biofuels, it calls for the strong monitoring by the Commission of the National Renewable Energy Action Plans (NAPs), in which each Member State will set county-specific sectoral targets. Although non-binding, the draft report indicates a possible EP position regarding the Commission’s legislative package on renewables, which is expected in September 2007. It will be voted on after the summer recess.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA has taken an active stance in the current EU energy debate. It strongly supports the unbundling of the energy networks and the goal of promoting increased use of renewable energy. At the same time ESBA, calls on all EU Institutions to improve consultation with the SMEs community in this field, as it is one of the biggest consumers of energy in the EU and a potentially significant producer of renewables.

To see the draft report on A Roadmap for Renewable Energy for Europe, please go to:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/pr/666/666711/666711en.pdf

EU/ Labour Market: Commission Communication aims to bridge the gender pay gap

According to the Commission, women across the EU continue to earn an average of 15% less than men per hour. In a Communication entitled “Tackling the pay gap between women and men,” released on 18 July, the Commission identifies four fields of actions which aim to reduce the gender pay gap: ensuring better application of existing policies, fighting the pay gap as existing part of national employment policies, promoting equal pay among employers and supporting exchange of good practices across the EU. The report seeks to analyse the many causes for the ongoing pay gap and stresses that discrimination and inequality in the Labour Market can only be resolved with the involvement of all stakeholders. Possible changes to the Community legal framework are foreseen.

ESBA OPINION

ESBA supports the Communication’s aim of tackling the gender pay gap in the EU According to the Commission report the most affected sectors are industry and the business services and financial sectors and companies of 500 and more employees. ESBA nevertheless agrees with the need to involve all stakeholders - including SMEs - to help the EU achieve this important goal.

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To read the Commission Communication, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2007/jul/genderpaygap_en.pdf

To read more about the EU's gender equality policy, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/index_en.html

PUBLICATIONS

Eurostat EU Labour Force Survey- Annual Results 2006

This Eurostat publication presents the main annual results of the EU Labour Force Survey for the EU - 27, for all Member States, EFTA and Candidate Countries. Indicators presented in this publication are: employment rates, part-time employment as share of total employment, average usual hours worked for full-time and part-time job, share of employees with temporary contracts, employed people by economic activity and by occupation, youth unemployment ratio.

To download the report, please go to:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1073,46587259&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&p_product_code=KS-QA-07-010

European Charter for SMEs 2007 Good Practice Selection

The aim of the publication is to disseminate good practice and encourage an exchange of experiences in Europe. The 40 good practice cases presented in this brochure provide a sample of the different successful ways in which public administrations support Europe's small enterprises. These cases were selected as part of the exchange of good practice in the context of the European Charter for Small Enterprises. The publication is one of the reporting tools on the renewed Lisbon Strategy.

To download the publication, please go to:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/charter/2007_charter_docs/gp2007en.pdf

CONSULTATIONS

Public consultation on possible European Private Company Statute

On 19 July the Commission launched a public consultation on the obstacles being faced in particular by SMEs when conducting cross-border business in the EU and on the content of a possible European Private Company Statute. The responses will be taken into account in a forthcoming impact assessment and in a possible legislative proposal.

You will find more information and access to the questionnaire at:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/company/epc/index_en.htm

Closes 31 October 2007

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important Dates

23 July-23 August No activities in the Parliament

SME related Events

10 Sept 2007 "Driven by Innovation" CEO Luncheon Series with Ajit Shetty, CEO of Janssen Pharmaceutical, organised by the American Chamber of Commerce, taking place in Brussels, for more

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information and to register, please go to: <http://www.amcham.be/cgi-bin/events.cgi?Action=register&id=>

10 Sept 2007 Business Dinner with Ms. Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Information Society & Media; organised by the British Chamber of Commerce; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/events/registration.asp?Eventid=660>

11 Sept 2007 Breakfast Briefing with Peter Mandelson, EU Commissioner for External Trade; organised by British Chamber of Commerce; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/events/registration.asp?Eventid=676>

13 Sept 2007 EU Committee Breakfast Briefing with Petra Erler, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Gunter Verheugen, Enterprise and Industry; organised by the British Chamber of Commerce; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/events/registration.asp?Eventid=653>

24 Sept 2007 Business Lunch on “The New Approach for Standardisation and Normalisation: A Key Dossier for Companies” with Jacques McMillan, Head of Unit of Regulatory Policy, DG Enterprise; organised by the European Training Institute; taking place in Brussels; for more information please go to: http://www.e-t-i.be/download/lunches_190307.pdf

18 Oct 2007 EU Committee Breakfast with Jorgen Holmquist, Director General, Internal Market and Services Directorate-General; organised by the British Chamber of Commerce; taking place in Brussels; for more information, please go to: <http://www.britcham.be/events/registration.asp?Eventid=654>

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