



HEADLINES

EU / Better Regulation: New high level group to advise Commission on better regulation

The Commission has established a group composed of national regulatory experts to help the Commission in its drive for simplified legislation. The group will act as an interface between the Commission and key governmental authorities and national level. It consists of high-level national experts, proposed by Member States and appointed by the Commission.

Commissioner for enterprise and industry policy, Günter Verheugen, views the initiative as fundamental to cutting red tape at both EU and members state level. This is a central part of the Commission's 'partnership for growth and jobs'.

The development is connected to high level group (HGL) on energy, environment and competitiveness, which the Commission launched on 24 February 2006. The group was set up in order to establish closer coordination between policy and legislative initiatives and to enable a more stable regulatory framework.

For more information, please go to:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/regulation/better_regulation/simplification.htm

EU / SME policy : Françoise Le Bail new SME Envoy

Further to the publication of a communication on the new SME policy, DG Enterprise and Industry has upgraded the SME Envoy function to the deputy Director General level. Françoise Le Bail, who was appointed deputy Director General in November 2005, is the new SME Envoy, assisted by a deputy SME Envoy, Mrs Maive Rute.

At a meeting with SME representatives on 28 February, Mrs Le Bail outlined her vision for her new task, stressing both internal and external aspects of the SME Envoy function. She insisted that SME concerns should be taken into account first when drafting new legislative proposals. She expressed the intention to be as much as possible in contact with small businesses. Also, Mrs le Bail would like to improve the knowledge of small businesses within the European institutions, and improve the image of SMEs in the society through awareness campaigns.

To see Mrs Le Bail's CV :

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/enterprise/pdf/cv_le_bail_en.pdf

EU / Growth and Jobs: Competitiveness Council prepares Spring Summit

The Partnership for Growth and Jobs, the new SME policy and the preparation of the spring European council were at the core of the ministers' discussion at the Competitiveness Council of 14 March 2006. Indeed, the spring summit is expected to discuss strategic issues relevant for SMEs and deliver a strong message in support of SMEs initiatives.

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Ministers adopted the contribution of the Competitiveness Council to the spring European Council. Commissioner Verheugen welcomed the national reform programmes presented by member states but stressed that more had to be done in certain areas, for example in increasing funding for research or competition in services and energy markets.

The Council also held a debate on the new SME policy. Ministers underlined the need to integrate the 'Think Small First' principle into national and Community policies; organised regular and comprehensive dialogue with stakeholders, and improve SMEs' access to Internal Market.

Finally, the Council discussed the Competitiveness and Innovation programme. Commissioner Verheugen asked member states to reach political agreement on the CIP at the next Competitiveness Council meeting of 29 - 30 May, stressing that it was vital for SMEs.

To see the Council conclusions, please go to:

http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/intm/88778.pdf

IN BRIEF

EU / Business : New proposals to ease business transfer

In the context of the new strategy to promote SMEs, the European Commission presented an initiative aimed at facilitating the transfer of business to avoid that economically sound businesses disappear due to the difficulties during the process of transfer. The Communication asks Member States to provide adequate financial conditions; create awareness for the need of timely transfer; organise transparent markets for business transfers; and ensure that tax systems are transfer-friendly.

It has been estimated that up to 690,000 businesses providing 2.8 million jobs are concerned each year with business transfer difficulties. Many of the viable and transferable businesses do not find a successor.

To access the communication and the press release from the Commission, please see:

[http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/307&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

[reference=IP/06/307&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/307&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

EU / Business: Eurostat publishes latest business facts and figures

Eurostat has released the 2005 edition of 'European business – facts and figures', based on data from 1995-2004. The study describes productivity and profitability, work-force characteristics, country specialisation, the importance of SMEs, etc. for each area of business activity.

The study identifies a correlation between the average size of enterprises, and factors such as the age of the enterprise and the activity in which it operates. Due to minimum efficient scales of production in certain activity areas, SMEs tend to be less prominent in industrial and energy-related sectors. By contrast, SMEs are particularly important in the distributive trades and hotels and restaurants. Here, they accounted for 69.5% and 75.4% of total added value and 73.4% and 80.6% of total employment, respectively.

Generally, the productivity of companies increased with size. However, micro enterprises (1-9 employees) were relatively productive in mining, quarrying and electricity, and gas and water supply, while medium-sized (50-249 employees), had higher productivity for distributive trades.

To see the 2005 edition of 'European business – facts and figures' in full, please go to:

http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-BW-05-001/EN/KS-BW-05-001-EN.PDF

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EU / SME policy: Verheugen insists on entrepreneurship education at school

In a Brussels conference with business organisations on 28 February 2006, Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, Günter Verheugen, asserted the necessity of spreading good practice regarding SME-related policies. He praised Lithuania, for its drive to use model examples of successful enterprises to raise awareness of entrepreneurship. He also praised the UK, for its drive to ensure that all schoolchildren between 14 and 16 take courses on entrepreneurial activities. In addition, he welcomed Spain's intention to emphasise the value of entrepreneurship at school.

To see Mr Verheugen's speech (only available in German), please go to :

[http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?
reference=SPEECH/06/136&format=HTML&aged=0&language=DE&guiLanguage=en](http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/136&format=HTML&aged=0&language=DE&guiLanguage=en)

EU / Economy: growth slows in fourth quarter but outlook remains positive

Economic activity in both the eurozone and the EU-25 economies slowed from 0.7% in the third quarter to 0.3% in the fourth quarter. However, compared with the fourth quarter of 2004, GDP rose by 1.7% in the euro-zone and 1.8% in the EU-25. A slight increase on year-on-year growth of 1.6% (eurozone) and 1.8% (EU-25) in the 3rd quarter. The Commission predicts that slower growth in the fourth quarter is temporary, with 1st, 2nd and 3rd quarter growth expected to be 0.4-0.9%. This prediction is based on evidence that consumer demand is improving.

To see the Eurostat press release, please go to:

[http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_
CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006_MONTH_03/2-
03032006-EN-AP.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2006_MONTH_03/2-03032006-EN-AP.PDF)

EU / Lisbon Strategy: Former EU Commissioner calls for increased university funding

On 28 February, in a speech at the Academie des Technologies in Paris, the former EU Commissioner for foreign relations, Chris Patten, identified increased investment in higher education as central to meeting the Lisbon goals. Lord Patten, who is chancellor of Oxford and Newcastle universities, suggested that increased agricultural spending in the EU budget was undermining the Commission's efforts to increase spending on competitiveness and growth. He welcomed the launch of the European Research Centre (ERC), although he questioned the wisdom of establishing a European Institute of Technology, which he felt may draw funding away from the ERC and existing universities.

To read Lord Patten's speech in full, please go to:

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/po/news/2005-06/feb/Pattenspeech.pdf>

To see the EU's 'investing in European research' website, please go to:

http://europa.eu.int/invest-in-research/index_en.htm#

CONSULTATIONS

Future patent policy

The Commission has launched a consultation designed to identify ways in which an EU-wide system of protection through patent policy can be devised to take account of stakeholders' needs. Although the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 envisaged a Community Patent to be available by the end of 2001, the proposal has been blocked consistently. The main obstacle has been concern that the costs of enforcing patents and translating them into several EU languages would be too high. The consultation is open to all interested stakeholders, whether representing industry or individuals.

Closes 31 March 2006

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The online form can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/indprop/patent/consultation_en.htm

Company law and corporate governance

The Commission has launched a public consultation in order to assess future priorities for the Action Plan on 'Modernising Company Law and Enhancing Corporate Governance in the EU'. All interested parties are asked to reply. The consultation will be followed by a report summarizing the answers received.

The online reply form can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/company/consultation/index_en.htm

Closes 31 March 2006

COMING UP

EU Institutions: Important Dates

13-16 March 06	European Parliament Plenary Session (Strasbourg)
13 March	Competitiveness Council of Ministers
14 March 06	ECOFIN Council of Ministers
23-24 March	European Spring Summit, Brussels
3-6 April 06	European Parliament Plenary Session (Strasbourg)
15-18 May 06	European Parliament Plenary Session (Strasbourg)
29-30 May 06	Competitiveness Council
12-15 June 06	European Parliament Plenary Session (Strasbourg)
1 July 06	Finland takes over EU Presidency

SME related Events

15 March 2006 'Mobility Without Borders'; organized by FSF/ITPS/NUTEK; Brussels; for more info, please contact helena.ericsson@fsf.se

16-17 March 2006 4th European Business Summit – Building a Europe of Excellence – Turning knowledge into growth, Brussels. More info: www.ebsummit.org

20 March 2006 Conference on the further development of Impact Assessment in the European Union – Brussels – Centre Albert Borschette, rue Froissart 36, meeting room OD, Brussels – More info: robertus.scharrenborg@cec.eu.int

21 March 2006 Brussels - "MAP Project 2.7/2004 - Stigma of failure and early warning tools" - Venue: Charlemagne Building - Conference organised by the Enterprise and Industry Directorate-General. More information: <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/events/events.htm>

23 March 2006 Training course on funding opportunities for research, innovation and competitiveness; venue: Rue Wiertz 50, Brussels; organized by InterfacEurope. More information: <http://www.interfaceurope.net/news.php?p=news&lang=fr>

23-25 March 2006 Federation of Small Businesses, UK - Annual Conference – More info: www.fsb.org.uk/conference2006.

28 March 2006 Conference on insolvency and a fresh start; venue: Charlemagne Conference Centre; organized by DG Enterprise and Industry, European Commission; more info and registration:

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http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/entrepreneurship/support_measures/failure_bankruptcy/conference.htm

2-3 May 2006 ESBA Annual Event, Brussels – More information to come soon on www.esba-europe.org

3-4 May 2006 ‘European inventor of the year’ conference and gala; venue: Parc du Cinquantenaire 11, Brussels; organized by DG Enterprise; more info: <http://www.european-inventor.org/>

11-13 May 2006 14th Nordic Conference on Small Business Research; Stockholm, Sweden; for more info, please contact helena.ericsson@fsf.se

18 May 2006 ‘Integrating Innovation and Entrepreneurship Policy – how to do it!'; for more info please contact helena.ericsson@fsf.se

30-31 May 2006 Workshop on Venture Capital Policy; Lund, Sweden; for more info, please contact helena.ericsson@fsf.se or

13-14 June 2006 Vienna - “Conference on the European Charter for Small Enterprises” Conference organised by the Enterprise and Industry DG - More information will be soon available DG Enterprise webpage.

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