

UEAPME Newsflash

Energy: UEAPME tackles SME issues at EESC hearing

The European Economic and Social Committee organised on 7 May a hearing on “The impact of ongoing development of energy markets on industrial value chains in Europe”. Economic and Fiscal Policy Director Gerhard Huemer spoke at the event. Crafts and SMEs have a huge unexploited potential for increasing energy efficiency, he stressed, but they will invest in energy saving technologies only if such expenses pay off. Awareness raising and counseling services coupled with financial support are therefore needed. Most craft and SMEs, moreover, tend to have a relatively low energy intensity, which places related investments quite low in their priorities list. Considering the positive external effects of investing in increasing energy efficiency, public support is more than justified, said Mr Huemer. Finally, crafts and SMEs play an important role as service providers to increase energy efficiency, especially as far as buildings are concerned. Counseling opportunities in this area must be open to all providers, and not left only to energy operators that might use them to satisfy their vested interest to sell more energy. However, none of the above will be of use for SMEs unless competition in the energy sector is strengthened through the creation of a real energy internal market, he concluded.

➤ [Read more](#) or [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Legal issues in e-business: web tool available for SMEs

A workshop on “legal issues for e-business” took place in Brussels on 7 May. Organised by the EC-funded LEKTOR project in collaboration with UEAPME and PIN-SME, the event aimed at showcasing [Lexelerator](#), an interactive web resource to support SMEs, SME clusters and “digital ecosystems” to get acquainted with legal issues affecting e-business. Communication and Media Director Dieter Grohmann spoke at the event. Despite their creativity and flexibility, he said, crafts and SMEs do not usually have the in-house capacity to deal with technical matters such as ICT and legal issues, and rely heavily on external advice. Therefore, they can greatly benefit from resources such as Lexelerator, which aims to raise awareness of legal issues in e-business and allow exchange on legal experiences. Although it cannot substitute for legal advice, Lexelerator can definitely allow SMEs to be better prepared and make the most out of their innovative potential, which is often stifled by legal barriers and complex procedures.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Dieter Grohmann](#)

Late payments remain a key concern for SMEs

Enterprise Policy Director Luc Hendrickx spoke on 6 May at a working breakfast on “Late payments: Kiss of death for SMEs” organised by the SME Union. Commenting on the EU Late Payments Directive (LPD), Mr Hendrickx stressed that while its guiding principles are fine, its implementation remains uneven across Member States, and the LPD is still relatively unknown to SMEs. Awareness raising activities are therefore needed. Moreover, SMEs should adapt their general contract clauses to the LPD, and put in place an efficient credit management system. Contracts with the public sector are another key concern, since public authorities turn out to be “bad payers” in some occasions. As far as the upcoming review of the LPD is concerned, the scope of the directive should be extended to cover business to consumer (B2C) relationships. The new LPD should also include an obligation to establish rapid and effective procedures for the recovery of unchallenged claims, as well as a mandatory debtor fee to counteract creditors’ reluctance to charge interests on their clients for fear of ruining business relations.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Luc Hendrickx](#)

ECOFIS Committee calls for improvements on GBER

The UEAPME Economic and Fiscal Affairs Committee (ECOFIS) met in Brussels on 28 April. One of the key issues on the agenda was the European Commission’s latest draft “General Block Exemption Regulation” (GBER), which specifies the forms of aid that must not be notified to the EC. Ahead of an important meeting on the GBER between the EC and Member States on the same day, UEAPME reinstated its demands for improvements to the text to bring it more in line with SMEs’ needs. First of all, UEAPME called on Member States to support the inclusion of State aid in form of guarantees, aid for innovation support services and aid for the hiring of highly qualified personnel in the scope of the GBER. Secondly, it insisted on the need to extend the coverage for State aid for business transfers. Finally, it stressed the necessity to simplify aid requirements for energy saving investments. The final version of the GBER is expected to be approved before the summer on the same day of the “Small Business Act”.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Gerhard Huemer](#)

UEAPME reacts on Commission’s food labelling plans

The UEAPME Working Group on Foodstuffs published this week its reaction on the European Commission’s proposal for a regulation on the provision of food information to consumers. UEAPME welcomed the EC’s intentions to simplify and rationalise food labelling, but was disappointed by the lack of consideration for its arguments in the text, which cannot be regarded seriously as a contribution to simplification. In fact, the 96-page document is far too complex to be workable in practice, and the consequences for the vast majority of all European food manufacturers and caterers remain completely unconsidered. Without fundamental changes, SMEs would be put out of business for packaged foods, warned the Working Group. If the regulation were to come into force in this form, owners of a small and medium-sized enterprise would not be able to understand the rules themselves and would have to operate with the help of external experts. This would be an unbearable financial burden, concluded UEAPME experts.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Ludger Fischer](#)

Expert nominated for Statistical Advisory Committee

UEAPME nominated this week Dr Ulrike Oschischnig as its representative in the European Statistical Advisory Committee (ESAC), which was recently set up to assist the European institutions in ensuring that user requirements and costs borne by information providers and producers are taken into account while coordinating the Community's statistical information policy. Dr Oschischnig holds a Master degree in Economics at the University of Vienna and has a consistent track record in statistics both at national level, having served as member of the Board of the Austrian Statistical Society and Chairperson of its Subcommittee on Economic Statistics and National Accounts, and at international level as Austrian delegate to the European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres (CEIES). Dr Oschischnig will work at ESAC with experts from the EU institutions, other business organisations and trade unions. She will therefore have a chance to push for simplification and better regulation in the statistics area, a key concern for European crafts and SMEs.

➤ [Read more](#) on ESAC or contact [Gerhard Huemer](#)

Social Partners assess restructuring in Spain and UK

Two seminars on restructuring were organised in the last weeks by the European Social Partners UEAPME, BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and ETUC as part of their 2006-2008 work programme. The first took place in Madrid, Spain, on 28-29 April, while the second took place this week in London, UK. Both are part of a series of ten seminars to be closed by a final conference in June 2008. In both cases, national social partners discussed the macroeconomic situation of their country as well as the role of social partners in restructuring, based on reports and case study presentations.

➤ [Read more](#) or contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#) (Spain) or [Helen Hoffmann](#) (UK)

FORWARD PLANNING

KEY EVENTS AHEAD:

- High Level Conference on Counterfeiting (Brussels, 13/05, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- European Social Partners seminar on restructuring in Sweden (14/05, contact [Liliane Volozinskis](#))
- [Brussels Economic Forum 2008: "Economic and Monetary Union in Europe: 10 Years On"](#) (Brussels, 15-16/05, contact [Gerhard Huemer](#))
- [Conference on the European Charter for Small Enterprises](#) (Bled, Slovenia, 03-04/06, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))
- "Super Market Access Committee" (Brussels, 04/06, contact [Rosa Solanes](#))
- "Cutting red tape for Europe" conference (Brussels, 20/06, contact [Luc Hendrickx](#))

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