

Prompt implementation of SBA is necessary!

The European Commission supports SMEs and promotes the “think small first” principle. SMEs should greatly benefit from the latest proposal – Small Business Act for Europe. But how can a non-binding document with a set of 10 guidelines boost European SMEs if the main work to be done lies on the voluntary measures implemented by the Member States? That was the core of the Policy Café debate between MEPs and representatives of European business community on the day before the vote in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy of the European Parliament (ITRE).

High level business representatives, members of the European Parliament and representative of the Czech Presidency gathered in the European Parliament on 11th February 2009 to share their view about the implementation and possible impact of the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA). SBA was adopted by the European Commission in June 2008. Heads of governments and states endorsed SBA in December 2008 and called for implementation of its principles. Parliament shall deliver its opinion at the March plenary session.



Reporter of SBA, **Edit HERCZOG MEP** (PES), Member of ITRE, stressed the added value the Parliament may bring to the SBA though high political recognition taking into account seven EP Committees deal with the dossier counting up to more than 25% of the membership of the EP. “*Maximum implementation of SBA principles is of up-most importance in the new Member States as their share on the employment is much larger than in the EU15,*” Mrs. HERCZOG said. As SBA is a binding document, its success or failure lies in the competence of Member States, stressed **Jan BŘEZINA MEP** (EPP-ED), Member of ITRE. “*Shall implementation (of SBA) be successful it is of up-most importance to have clear commitment of the finance ministers,*” added Mr. BREZINA. Czech Presidency was represented by **Petr DOLEJŠÍ** from Czech Permanent Representation, chair of the Council Competitiveness working group, who ensured the participants SBA is very high among Czech priorities. Competitiveness Council will recommend in its Key Issues Paper the spring European Council to highlight concrete implementation actions of SBA such as focus on liberalization of the internal market, enhanced access of SMEs to finance and stress on the impact assessment (SME test).

Representatives of European business associations fully supported the effort and recognition given to the SBA by the European Parliament. “*In the times of economic down-turn few basic principles of SBA have to be implemented immediately,*” said **Andrea BENASSI**, Secretary General of UEAPME. Acknowledging immediate actions to help European SMEs, **Erik SONNTAG**, BUSINESSEUROPE’s Advisor for Entrepreneurship & SMEs, added: “*... even in the wake of the crisis we mustn’t forget medium and long term measures, be it stress on innovations or improvement of regulatory environment.*” **Ben BUTTERS**, Director of EU Affairs of EUROCHAMBRES, thanked the Parliament for its great effort and stressed the need of the to-be-elected members to continue in the work on SME policy. “*When reducing existing administrative burden, legislators have to be very careful not to impose new un-necessary obligations with newly introduced measures,*” said BUTTERS. “*A few of the more than 200 amendments to the SBA have to be rejected since they introduce new red tape for businesses*”, explained in detail **Patrick VOLLER**, Secretary General of SME UNION of the EPP, and concluded: “*We were very happy to see the SME test will be effective, as evaluation will be done externally,*”

The Policy Café was hosted by Mrs. Edit HERCZOG MEP and Mr. Jan BREZINA MEP and organized by CEBRE in cooperation with Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and SME UNION of the EPP on 11th February 2009 in the European Parliament.

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