



European Economic and Social Committee

PRESS

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It is time to move up a gear for SMEs

On Tuesday 28 June 2011, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a public hearing on the "Review of the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA, Europe's policy framework for SMEs)" in Brussels. Participants welcomed the progress achieved in implementing the SBA and called for new measures to respond to the challenges resulting from the economic crisis. Other EU Institutions and major stakeholders were present and had the chance to meet with Members of the EESC.

The new measures called for included cutting red tape, strengthening governance instruments and drawing up a genuine road map for progress. According to the stakeholders present at the public hearing, this should also include developing indicators for monitoring, designed to bring genuine added value to entrepreneurs in Europe, where SMEs play an essential role. The EU's 23 million SMEs account for 99% of all businesses and contribute up to 80% of employment in some industrial sectors, such as textiles.

Mr Ronny LANNOO (Various Interests' Group, Belgium), rapporteur for the EESC opinion on the "**Review of the Small Business Act for Europe**", highlighted the fact that the Communication was far more realistic and closer to SMEs' needs, although many areas of doubt remained and some measures seemed far removed from real life, or only relevant to very few businesses. The rapporteur regretted that the slogan "*Think small first*" was always reflected in terms of "*Think SMEs first*". "The vast majority of businesses are small or micro enterprises, operating in a highly diverse range of markets, but for them it is harder to apply Community policies and legislative measures. SBA efforts should therefore focus primarily and essentially on them", Mr Lannoo said.

In the context of efforts to ensure better implementation of SME policies, **stakeholder representatives** added that the approach taken towards SMEs was still too general and that intermediary organisations should be given top priority in future measures. The rapporteur noted that stakeholders' involvement would be strengthened, but expressed his concerns about the "*clear role*" to be given to them, as the communication did not define it.

In the various debates that took place, **participants (including UEAPME and EUROCHAMBRES)** put forward and discussed **practical measures** for supporting the start-up and development of small and medium-sized enterprises, including better access to finance, simplification of administrative rules and coordinated implementation of SME policies. A number of speakers regretted that issues such as skills, education and professional training were absent from the review.



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BACKGROUND

On 23 February 2011, the European Commission adopted the "**Review of the Small Business Act for Europe**", Europe's policy framework for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The review presents an overview of the progress made in implementing the SBA launched by the Commission in 2008 and proposes ways to improve its uptake. It maintains the ten guiding principles and insists on the full implementation of the existing measures set out in the [SBA](#), in particular the "*Think Small First*" principle. New measures are proposed to take into account the latest economic developments and ensure a close link with the priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy.

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