



Plenary sitting

B9-0348/2023

10.7.2023

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on the state of the SME Union
(2023/2750(RSP))

Alex Agius Saliba, Dan Nica
on behalf of the S&D Group

**European Parliament resolution on the State of the SME Union
(2023/2750(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union, which refers to the internal market, sustainable development and the social market economy,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 10 March 2020 entitled ‘An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe’ (COM(2020)0103),
 - having regard to Directive 2011/7/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 2011 on combating late payment in commercial transactions¹ (Late Payment Directive),
 - having regard to the 2022 State of the Union address by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the European Parliament plenary of 14 September 2022,
 - having regard to the Commission’s annual report on European SMEs 2022/2023 of 27 June 2023,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have faced significant challenges and hardships because of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, both of which have led to disruptions of global value chains and persistent inflation;
- B. whereas micro-enterprises represent an appreciable share of European SMEs and very often have difficulties in accessing finance and in gaining a complete knowledge of available opportunities at European and at national level; whereas this category of enterprises was also hit very hard by the COVID-19 crisis and, without prejudice to the current definition of SME, it deserves to receive more assistance and be better promoted;
- C. whereas the annual report on European SMEs 2022/2023 highlighted the fact that the inflation rates provoked rises in interest rates, which in turn have reduced access to public and private finance; whereas the same report recommended that measures to mitigate the negative impacts of inflation should focus on enhanced access to finance for SMEs; whereas the report underlined the lack of skilled workers as an obstacle for SMEs across the EU;
- D. whereas during her 2022 State of the Union address, the Commission President announced that the Commission would propose an SME relief package; whereas she also announced that the Late Payment Directive would be revised because it was not

¹ OJ L 48, 23.2.2011, p. 1.

fair that one in four bankruptcies in the EU were due to invoices not being paid on time;

- E. whereas the European Parliament, representing the interests of European citizens, acknowledges the crucial role of SMEs in fostering economic growth, job creation and social cohesion;
1. Calls for the urgent adoption of a revised Late Payments Directive, providing SMEs with a robust and predictable legal framework to address payment delays in both business-to-business and business-to-government relations, while ensuring a balanced approach that preserves the freedom of contracts;
 2. Supports the establishment of an observatory on late payments, as announced in the SME Strategy; urges the Commission to support the widespread use of digital tools such as e-invoicing and automated payment processes in order to increase transparency, security and efficiency;
 3. Welcomes the publication of the Listing Act package; acknowledges its potential to facilitate capital access for SMEs and enable their scalability; recognises the opportunity to deepen the Capital Markets Union (CMU) in order to increase investments in SMEs across the EU and emphasises the need to prioritise equity funding for SMEs within the CMU project;
 4. Takes notes of the adoption by the Commission of the retail investment package, which may facilitate SMEs' access to finance from retail investors;
 5. Urges the Member States to ensure that the implementation of the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework fully encompasses SMEs; calls on the Commission to ensure fair competition for SMEs and prevent distortions in the single market caused by temporarily relaxed State aid rules; asks the Commission to assess a possible revision of the State aid rules in order to evaluate how the interests of SMEs are safeguarded;
 6. Highlights the need to facilitate SMEs' access to venture capital; regrets that there is no proposal to strengthen the InvestEU SME window in the multiannual financial framework review;
 7. Stresses the importance of engaging SMEs in dedicated programmes and resources within the Green Deal Industrial Plan, particularly in developing net-zero technologies;
 8. Calls for further incentives to encourage SME participation in the Horizon Europe funding calls, ensuring that the sub pillar on SMEs within the European Innovation Council has the flexibility to mobilise funds quickly and increase its budget when necessary;
 9. Encourages the Commission to earmark a portion of the proposed Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform specifically for SMEs;
 10. Reiterates the importance of channelling investments towards SMEs in order to contribute to reducing social inequalities;
 11. Calls for work on a European strategy on export credits for SMEs to be accelerated in

order to provide a consistent and effective supply of export credit guarantees across the EU;

12. Highlights the need to support companies, in particular SMEs, in financial difficulties by offering adequate financial and non-financial support to avoid bankruptcy; calls on the Member States to implement the Preventive Restructuring Directive²;
13. Expresses concern over the inconsistent application of the SME test during impact assessments conducted by the Commission; stresses that impact assessments should be carried out before and after the drafting of all draft legislation; calls for the test to be updated throughout the whole legislative process; recommends a comprehensive review of the SME test introducing the use of appropriate tools to facilitate SMEs' input, the regular revision of impact assessments and differentiation between different SME size categories;
14. Calls for the consistent application of the 'Think Small First' principle in internal deliberations and for strengthening SME input mechanisms, with explanations of the rationale for disregarding their input if duly justified; recognises the importance of the SME panel consultations and regrets the lack of resources that restricts their use;
15. Calls for a single contact point to be designated within the Commission to provide clear guidance and support for SMEs; urges the establishment of a single digital gateway serving as a one-stop shop consolidating all relevant financial and non-financial support, forms and information for SMEs;
16. Encourages the Member States to share best practices and develop complementary procedures at national level, in particular to benefit micro and small companies;
17. Supports the introduction of measures to increase SMEs' participation in public procurement, including simplified tendering processes and increased utilisation of digital tools for cross-border procurement;
18. Urges the Commission to pursue an ambitious approach to simplification and apply the 'one in, one out' principle in legislation; encourages the Commission and the Member States to streamline procedures and implement the 'once only' and 'digital by default' principles, thereby facilitating administrative processes for SMEs;
19. Calls for the urgent removal of barriers to cross-border business operations and intra-EU investments in order to establish a fully-fledged single market for all economic activities;
20. Stresses the importance of introducing simplified requirements and buffer periods for SMEs in legislative proposals in order to facilitate compliance; calls for systematic engagement between the Commission and Parliament in drafting secondary legislation, which would ensure responsiveness to SMEs' needs;

² Directive (EU) 2019/1023 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on preventive restructuring frameworks, on discharge of debt and disqualifications, and on measures to increase the efficiency of procedures concerning restructuring, insolvency and discharge of debt, and amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 (Directive on restructuring and insolvency) (OJ L 172, 26.6.2019, p. 18).

21. Highlights the need to include the SME perspective in the VAT (value added tax) in the Digital Age package; calls for the development of guidelines tailored to SMEs to support their modest access to the benefits of the single market;
22. Urges the Commission to publish an SME-dedicated toolbox outlining measures and instruments available for Member States to support SMEs during the energy crisis; encourages the Member States to share best practices, particularly regarding fiscal policies that mitigate the impact of inflation and disruptions in value chains on SMEs;
23. Emphasises the importance of skilling, upskilling and reskilling employees of SMEs, particularly during the 2023 Year of Skills; urges the implementation of fiscal incentives and tax deductions to enable SMEs to maintain a skilled workforce; underlines that initiatives such as the Pact for Skills, digital crash courses, the network of sustainability advisors and digital innovation hubs should prioritise technical assistance for SMEs and training their employees; calls for the European Social Fund Plus, the Just Transition Fund and the European Skills Agenda to adequately address the specific needs of SMEs; is of the opinion that digital literacy, public procurement literacy and financial education and chain management skills are essential for increasing SMEs' competitiveness;
24. Recalls the importance of promoting social dialogue when designing and implementing SME policies, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights;
25. Regrets the fact that a gender gap still persists in entrepreneurship and access to finance for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises led by women; welcomes the gender-smart financing initiative; calls on the Commission to assess the barriers that still prevent women from fully unleashing their entrepreneurial potential and to enhance the exchange of best practices when it comes to boosting women's skills and self-confidence in this area;
26. Highlights the need to reduce administrative burdens and simplify the recruitment of skilled non-EU nationals for SMEs, including exploring the possibility of enabling industry or business associations to act as certified employers on behalf of their SME members;
27. Deplores the fact that the effective tax rate for multinational enterprises (MNEs) is usually much lower than that for SMEs³; believes that Council Directive (EU) 2022/2523 of 14 December 2022 on ensuring a global minimum level of taxation for multinational enterprise groups and large-scale domestic groups in the Union⁴ will help to reduce the current gap; calls on the Commission to issue a proposal that defines and limits the recourse to aggressive tax planning used to reduce the lack of a level playing field between MNEs and SMEs regarding tax obligations;
28. Highlights the reliance of SMEs on large digital platforms to access customers; notes that these large digital platforms are regularly exposed for having a low effective tax

³ Laurent Bach, Antoine Bozio and Clément Malgouyres, [‘L’hétérogénéité des taux d’imposition implicites des profits en France: constats et facteurs explicatifs’](#), Rapport de l’IPP n° 21, 2019.

⁴ OJ L 328, 22.12.2022, p. 1.

rate⁵; emphasises that bricks-and-mortar SMEs are operating on playing field in e-commerce that is not level, in particular due to higher costs and a large difference in their range of opening hours; calls on the Commission to investigate how to promote fairer taxation of e-commerce that would allow for fairer competition for SMEs;

29. Urgently calls for the undertaking of a thorough assessment of the implementation of the Directive on restructuring and insolvency; encourages the inclusion of business transfer promotion measures in the SME relief package, such as the facilitation of a European-wide business transfer barometer;
30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

⁵ Impact assessment accompanying the document entitled 'Proposal for a Council Directive laying down rules relating to the corporate taxation of a significant digital presence' (COM/2018/0147).