

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

2005/2123(INI)

24.11.2005

OPINION

of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises
(2005/2123(INI))

Draftsman: Philip Bushill-Matthews

PA_NonLeg

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs calls on the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission's proposal that new regulations at national and Community level should be screened to assess their impact both positive and negative on small enterprises and entrepreneurs; calls accordingly on the Commission to ensure that impact studies of Community legislation are clearly and specifically extended to small enterprises; believes that this proposal should be formally extended to include existing regulations in addition to new ones and where legislation is deemed unnecessary at EU level it should be revised or repealed; calls on the Commission to draw up a clear timetable and action plan in order to deliver this objective;
2. Emphasises that the simplification of legislation generally and the exemption of small and medium-sized enterprises from certain regulatory obligations, as proposed in the Charter, are useful means of alleviating the burden of administrative expenditure and procedures for small and medium-sized enterprises;
3. Given that small enterprises are recognised as a major driver for creating and increasing employment and innovation in Europe as well as fostering social and regional development, it is vital that both the role and the needs of SMEs are generally considered when any legislative proposal is being developed, not just those specifically mentioning small enterprises;
4. Emphasises the need to improve access to the Structural Funds as well as the promotion of other initiatives to improve access to private capital flows for the benefit of small enterprises, including the creation of microfinancing facilities for flexible forms of female or family enterprises;
5. Bearing in mind the variety of technical and bureaucratic obstacles to the activities of small enterprises, urges the Commission to draw up a green paper to enable those directly concerned to be sounded out openly and comprehensively on the specific difficulties and needs of small enterprises;
6. Recognises the importance of the first point listed in the Charter, relating to 'Education and training for entrepreneurship', emphasises the need to support business innovation and worker training, to develop entrepreneurship from an early age in lessons and training courses devoted to business in secondary school, university and technological training, to encourage close cooperation with research centres, to encourage public support for young entrepreneurs and to establish links between the various sectors of public administration; considers that the formation of business clusters encompassing small enterprises could be one effective way to foster job creation;
7. Recognises the need for special assistance to SMEs in implementing environmental and social legislation;

8. The European Charter for Small Enterprises is a splendid statement of intent, but needs to be translated into binding action not only at Community level but also within Member States, where sharing of best practice should be specifically encouraged. Specifically the tenth and final principle on strengthening the representation of the interests of small enterprises states that a review will be completed of how the interests of small businesses are represented at EU and national level, including through the social dialogue. This is a key requirement, given that the current Social Partnership composition is primarily reflective of larger businesses and their employees; while noting that the Commission's current implementation Report focuses on three other key priority areas of the Charter, calls for early completion and publication of this review; in the meantime, calls on employer representatives to represent the interests of small businesses in their role as social partners without delay;
9. Believes, that all the measures laid down in the Charter to stimulate business enterprise should be equally applicable to the self-employed, especially as regards matters of interest to them, such as social security systems, prevention of occupational hazards, or unemployment insurance;
10. Maintains that the fifth point covered by the Charter, 'Improving online access', should be regarded more explicitly, specially the role of the Public Authorities to increase their electronic communication with the small business sector;
11. Believes that consideration needs to be given to the special situation of non-profit SMEs;
12. Draws attention to the particularly important role played by SMEs in the new Member States, especially in those in which significant institutional and political changes are in progress;
13. Believes that, to ensure an equal playing field for SMEs, the Commission must ensure that all legislation is implemented equally across all Member States and that in the case of non compliance, rapid infringement procedures are applied;
14. Considers that the SME Envoy performs a useful function in externally connecting small enterprises with the Community environment, and calls therefore on the Commission to promote coordination between the Envoy and bodies representing small enterprises and craft enterprises in respect of all Community issues; considers that this role could be more effectively enhanced if the Envoy could also be more vocal internally, by being invited to attend and contribute to European Parliament Committee discussions on proposed legislation so that the needs of SMEs can be more fully explored in due time;
15. Appreciates international collaboration between Chambers of Commerce as very important to help small enterprises be competitive, particularly at a time in which globalisation leads to more and more enterprises, concentrations and cartels expanding internationally;
16. Welcomes the practice adopted hitherto of holding conferences on the Charter in Dublin (2004) and Luxembourg (2005); is in favour of the practice of holding national

conferences on the Charter and recommends that the mechanism for submitting reports regarding the Charter be linked to progress reports on the entrepreneurship action plan;

17. Highlights the responsibility of the Member States and EURO-MED partner countries to more thoroughly implement the Charter and encourages them to learn from each other through the exchange of good practice in this area;
18. Points to the need to focus more attention on, and give better guarantees as regards access to, specific Community support for micro-, small-, and medium-scale entrepreneurs; maintains that it is essential to do away with the red tape in the procedures for granting Community funds;
19. We have just learned that there will be no more annual Charter reports in future, as Charter reporting will from now on be absorbed into Lisbon reporting; this is certainly a backward step as far as future focus on SMEs is concerned; a further regret is that the process of Charter reporting, which involved annual bilateral discussions with representatives of business organisations, will now lapse without such future direct input from SMEs; this decision should be revisited.

PROCEDURE

Title	on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises
Procedure number	(2005/2123(INI))
Committee responsible	ITRE
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	EMPL 4.7.2005
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary	
Draftsman Date appointed	Philip Bushill-Matthews 15.3.2005
Previous drafts(wo)man	
Discussed in committee	15.09.2005 05.10.2005 22.11.2005
Date adopted	23.11.2005
Result of final vote	+: 24 -: 0 0: 3
Members present for the final vote	Jan Andersson, Jean-Luc Bennahmias, Emine Bozkurt, Iles Braghetto, Alejandro Cercas, Ole Christensen, Derek Roland Clark, Jean Louis Cottigny, Harald Ettl, Richard Falbr, Carlo Fatuzzo, Ilda Figueiredo, Joel Hasse Ferreira, Stephen Hughes, Ona Juknevičienė, Sepp Kusstatscher, Jean Lambert, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Ana Mato Adrover, Maria Matsouka, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, Csaba Öry, Kathy Sinnott, Gabriele Zimmer
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Patrizia Toia, Anja Weisgerber
Observateur	Alexandru Athanasiu
Comments (available in one language only)	