



20 January 2012

BUSINESSEUROPE CONTRIBUTION ON THE REDESIGN OF THE ENTERPRISE EUROPE NETWORK (EEN)

1. General comments

In this position, BUSINESSEUROPE would like to submit views on the future design of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and on the possibility of putting in place improved governance, not only in EEN II (expected in 2014) but already under EEN I. The EEN governance is currently receiving particular attention in the policy debate, because the Commission itself has put this issue on the table, in its communication "Small business, big world- A new partnership to help SMEs seize global opportunities" (doc COM 2011-702 final).

Reflecting on EEN governance can only be a meaningful exercise if it is carried out in parallel with a broader assessment of the activities and results of EEN to date.

In this regard, BUSINESSEUROPE draws the Commission's attention to the evaluation elements it presented on 12 July 2011 as its input to the Commission's consultation on SME internationalisation. In particular, this input underlined the need, in certain countries, to improve:

- Visibility of EEN;
- Quality of services offered;
- Integration and coordination of EEN services with existing national or regional initiatives.

Where these problems arise, solutions must be sought in the context of an assessment by the Commission of the EEN's functioning and of the services provided by the local contact points, in order to improve the effectiveness and consistency of their activities and services.

The assessment should be based not only on broad quantitative (statistical) parameters, but also on more refined qualitative elements, helping to assess to what extent the services provided contributed to solving the specific problems encountered by SMEs. In this context, BUSINESSEUROPE underlines that the services offered by EEN need to evolve. Too generic an information approach, as now it is the case, should be avoided while services should be more oriented to companies' needs.

Ways should be found so that the EEN operates closer to private national business associations.



The examination of EEN's future governance must also take into account the new or expanded services which the network could offer, e.g. for SME internationalisation or information on sources of finance. Regarding these two areas, the Commission has presented ideas for developing EEN's services in the following two documents:

- Communication "Small business, big world- A new partnership to help SMEs seize global opportunities";
- Proposed action plan to improve access to finance for SMEs (Doc. COM 2011-870).

BUSINESSEUROPE encourages the Commission to explore creatively what new services EEN could offer in these two areas, avoiding duplication with existing services.

Regarding SME internationalisation, BUSINESSEUROPE approves the Commission's stated intention of carrying out an assessment and optimisation exercise on the current EU portfolio of business support instruments before it presents proposals for strengthening EEN's services.

As a more general rule, any possible new services offered by the EEN, whether it is for the internationalisation of SMEs or for other areas, should in BUSINESSEUROPE's view meet the following criteria:

- Avoid new services duplicating existing activities at regional, national or European level;
- Optimise synergies between the existing services and the new services, in a given thematic area.

These criteria should ensure that the existing core activities of EEN (partner search, information on European business programs and funding) are strengthened and not diluted by the development of new services.

As a final point, BUSINESSEUROPE insists that the development and the use of the EEN takes place in full respect of the important role of representative business organisations and, where appropriate, the social partners, in particular in the frame of the Social Dialogue. In particular, the Commission must not use the EEN to circumvent consultations of representative business organisations on its legislative proposals.

2. Ways for adjusting EEN governance

The main EEN management structures are the following:

- The EEN Steering and Advisory Group (SAG), which is co-chaired by DG ENTR and the Executive Agency for Competitiveness and Innovation. Members of this Group are essentially the 27 Member States, the EFTA countries and some third countries. This Group is made of EEN representatives at operational level (one representative per country), meeting 3 times a year.

Ad hoc systems (not always very efficient) are organised by countries to ensure that this delegate reflects the expectations of numerous "families" of EEN partners (business associations, chambers of craft, local and regional authorities, technology centres, public research and innovation agencies, financial



organisations, regional development agencies, universities). SAG formulates recommendations on operational issues.

- Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme Committee (EIPC). This Committee comprises delegates from the 27 Member States. Its mission, among others, is to discuss and approve, each year, a guidance note (addressed to EEN partners) clarifying priority activities to be developed in the framework of EEN, and the associated budget. DG ENTR each year prepares the draft guidance note to be discussed and approved by EIPC. The preparation of the draft guidance note involves a degree of Inter-Services Consultation, which should be enhanced.

Experience has shown that the design and functioning of these structures does not result in close and effective involvement of EEN partners, and in particular business associations, in the definition of EEN's priorities. This is a problem that must be corrected through an adaptation of its decision-making structures. Ways need therefore to be found for involving EEN partners – and in particular business associations – much more closely in the strategic direction of the network and in identification of its priorities.

Several options can be considered for adapting EEN's governance system to that end.

A first option would be to create a new structure to enable closer involvement of service providers, and also of business stakeholders. BUSINESSEUROPE supports the Commission's intention (shown in the "Small business, big world" communication) of seeking to involve stakeholders better in EEN governance. SME representative organisations like BUSINESSEUROPE are key stakeholders in the context of EEN.

Another course of action would be to strengthen the existing Steering and Advisory Group with the participation of EU-level business organisations. Furthermore, national advisory groups could be formed with the participation of national business organisations and representatives from the relevant national and regional authorities.

Whatever the approach, the EEN governance should be strengthened through the involvement of the Commission SME Envoy and a stronger implication of relevant DGs other than DG ENTR, notably DG Research & Innovation, DG Internal market and DG Trade.
