



SME Round Table: “What future for EU SME policy?”

Organised by the Employers’ Group of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee)

**Comments by Marta Marti Carrera, Chair of
BUSINESSEUROPE’s “Entrepreneurship and SMEs” Committee**

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For BUSINESSEUROPE, the EU SME policy should have two aims:

- first, developing an effective and visible EU pro-SME action agenda
- and second, energizing the national SME policies.

Let me elaborate on these two issues.

Today, the EU pro-SME action agenda consists very much in integrating SME elements in key EU policies. We fully support this policy line, as long as the EU smart regulation principles for SMEs are respected.

Let me take the example of the single market policy to illustrate what integration of SME needs should deliver.

Understanding and complying with regulatory requirements across the single market is the number 1 issue for those SMEs that have a pan-European ambition.

The Services Directive requested each Member State to establish an on-line information portal – a so-called Point of Single Contact - to give foreign SMEs the information they need to provide services inside the country.

But today many of these national portals do not have an acceptable quality level. SME experience serious problems with the accessibility, the accuracy or the speed of the information given on national rules. There is also a quality deficit regarding the on-line assistance provided to SMEs for completing the national administrative procedures.

This problem must be solved in the context of the new “single digital gateway” that the Commission is preparing to facilitate trade in services and goods on the Single Market.

The building blocks of the single digital gateway will be existing Commission portals (like the “Your Europe” portal) and various member states’ portals, like the “Points of Single Contact” for services and the so-called “Product Contact Points”.



It is therefore essential that the future single digital gateway includes high and mandatory quality standards for the national information portals concerned. The quality of these portals should be monitored through clear reporting procedures involving users' feedback.

But mainstreaming SMEs in individual EU policies alone will not deliver a sufficiently robust EU pro-SME action agenda. We also need a horizontal EU SME policy, taking a "bird's eye view" of all the issues to be managed for improving the competitiveness of SMEs.

Today, the basis for this EU horizontal SME policy is the Small Business Act – the SBA. The SBA has triggered interesting policy thinking regarding the creation and development of SMEs. But its potential for enhancing the *competitiveness* of SMEs has been underexploited in our opinion. We therefore call for a revival of the SBA, which should open the way to creative EU action in new areas such as training and digitalisation in particular.

The second aim of the EU SME policy should be to energize the national SME policies. A revival of the SBA is also vital from that point of view. Such a revival should intensify exchanges of best practices between Member States, and joint definition of innovative policy approaches. The discussions between the Commission and the Network of SME Envoys should lead to more and better national pro-SME initiatives, pursuing convergent objectives in areas such as access to finance, better regulation, training and digitalisation.

To conclude, BUSINESSEUROPE calls for a coherent EU pro-SME action agenda combined with enhanced national SME policies. We see this as the way forward for unleashing the growth and job creation potential of SMEs.
