



European Economic and Social Committee

SMES, PROFESSIONS AND CRAFTS CATEGORY 2014 ACTIVITY REPORT

Brief description of the category and its members

The SMEs, Professions and Crafts category has 34 members, from Groups III and I, who represent the relevant sectors. Its purpose is to discuss all European Union legislative initiatives or general developments that might have a major impact on the two main socio-economic sectors made up of SMEs on the one hand and crafts and professions on the other. It is a forum for participants to discuss the policies implemented in their own countries and to submit proposals to the Committee to feed into its work programme. Its spokesman is Panagiotis Gkofas, a member of Group III. The category is administered by the Group III secretariat.

Main achievements of the category in 2014

The category worked on a number of initiatives throughout 2014:

- a discussion of **crowdfunding**, with respect to the standards and practices applicable in the EU and the potential for investment and growth it offers;
- ongoing interest in progress in the trade negotiations under way between the EU and the United States (TTIP) and in their impact on SMEs, given that SMEs make up the bulk of Europe's socio-economic fabric;
- a forward-looking multidisciplinary examination of **the future of the professions in Europe**. In this context a study was conducted for the EESC by the European Centre for Liberal Professions at the University of Cologne entitled: The state of liberal professions concerning their functions and relevance to European civil society.

Overview of category meetings, outlining the main topics and speakers

- Meeting of 1 April 2014: this meeting featured a debate on **Crowdfunding in the EU – Exploring the added value of potential EU action** involving Maria Teresa Fabregas Fernandez (DG MARKT, Unit G3: Securities Markets), Daniel Cloquet, director of the Entrepreneurship and SME department of BUSINESSEUROPE, Reine-Claude Mader, EESC member (Group III) and spokesperson for the Consumers and Environment Category, and Oliver Gajda, president of the European Crowdfunding Network. Another debate took place during the same meeting about a presentation given by Deborah Dawton, director of the Design Business Association, illustrating the impact of design on innovation, competitiveness and SME development.

- Meeting of 24 June 2014 (morning): this first half-day centred on **TTIP – CETA: opportunities for growth and employment for SMEs and EU trade policies**. Martin Pilser, from DG TRADE (Market Access, Industry, Energy and Raw Materials), gave a presentation on SMEs and trade policy issues, which was followed by a debate. Jacek Krawczyk, Group I president, introduced opinion REX/390 on the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), for which he was rapporteur. This presentation was followed by a further discussion. The morning ended with a number of statements concerning opportunities and threats for SMEs within the ambit of EU trade policies, with contributions from Giuseppe Oliviero, president of the Italian National Confederation of Crafts and SMEs (CNA) and delegate for European policies, and Georges Kavathas, president of the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen and Merchants (GSEVEE).

- Meeting of 24 June 2014 (afternoon): the second half-day was dedicated to **The role and future of the liberal professions in European civil society 2020**. Arno Metzler, category member (Group III), presented own-initiative opinion INT/687 on The role and future of the liberal professions in European civil society 2020, for which he was rapporteur. He then gave the floor to Martin Henssler, director of the European Centre for Liberal Professions (EuZFB), Cologne University, for a presentation on **Facts, Figures and Perspectives on the Liberal Professions**. He presented the main findings of the study carried out under his direction and referred to above (The state of liberal professions concerning their functions and relevance to European civil society). Mr Metzler then chaired the discussion between Jürgen Tiedje, head of unit in DG Internal Market and Services (E1: Business to consumer services), Michel Benichou, vice-president of the CCBE (Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe), Peter Faross, secretary general of the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME), and Philippe de Buck, member of Group I (Employers) and former director general of BusinessEurope. Luca Jahier, Group III president, closed the meeting.

- Meeting of 26 September 2014: the main aim of the meeting was to present the European Commission consultation exercise entitled **How can we make the EU a better place for SMEs?** It was attended by Maarit Nyman, deputy head of unit in DG Enterprise and Industry (SME policy development and Small Business Act implementation). The meeting ended with a debate on a possible proposal for an own-initiative opinion on *The impact of the TTIP on SMEs*, to be drafted by category members.

The agendas and other documents relating to these meetings are available from the Group III secretariat.

Category initiatives (opinions, publications, including links) and other events at which it was represented

- The category's spokesman, Panagiotis Gkofas, regularly accepted invitations to attend meetings of the European Parliament's SME Intergroup. He also took part in a number of other events

focusing on SMEs in Brussels and in Member States organised by the European Commission and national and European SME organisations.

- Mr Metzler presented the study on the professions mentioned above at the Intergroup meeting of 2 December 2014 dedicated to the subject.
- The study, published in German and English and available on the category website, attracted wide interest and was sent out to professional organisations at European and national level.
- M. Metzler participated in working group "Bolstering the Business of Liberal Professions" established in 2013. The main aim of the group is to help overcome the challenges faced by liberal professions. During its five sessions the Working Group prepared a draft document on "Action Lines for Bolstering the Business of Liberal Professions".
- The category regularly invites representatives of those national organisations representing SMEs and the professions that have an office in Brussels to attend its meetings.

Challenges and suggestions for 2015

The members confirmed their interest in developments in the ongoing TTIP negotiations. On that note, they backed the proposal for an own-initiative opinion on the impact of the TTIP on SMEs, which is currently at the drafting stage. Two category members are closely involved: Ms Butaud Stubbs, as rapporteur, and Mr Gkofas, as co-rapporteur.

Appendix:

- Interpreting arrangements and duration of each meeting (2014)

APPENDIX

**DURATION OF AND INTERPRETING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEETINGS OF THE
SMEs, PROFESSIONS AND CRAFTS CATEGORY IN 2014**

DATE	DURATION	INTERPRETING ARRANGEMENTS
1 April 2014	½ day	EL-EN-FR / EL-EN-FR
24 June 2014	½ day	EL-EN-FR-IT / EL-EN-FR
24 June 2014	½ day	DE-EL-EN-FR-IT / DE-EN-FR
26 September 2014	½ day	DE-EL-EN-FR / EL-EN-FR
