Interconnection of business registers

2010/2055(INI) - 07/09/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the interconnection of business registers, in response to the Commission’s Green Paper on the same subject.

Noting that there is increasing demand for access to information about companies in a cross-border context, Members consider that the fact that business registers are not yet interconnected causes economic losses and problems for all stakeholders – not only companies but also their employees, consumers and the public.

Parliament points out that the High Level Group of Independent Stakeholders on Administrative Burdens (Stoiber Group) has shown that facilitating cross-border electronic access to business information could generate annual savings of more than EUR 160 million.

In this context, Parliament welcomes the Commission Green Paper on the interconnection of business registers. It believes that it is essential for the proper functioning of the internal market to make official and reliable information about companies trading in the EU available to the public.

Members note that greater transparency in the internal market could lead to increased cross-border investment. They are also convinced that better and easier access to information is necessary in order to assist small and medium-sized enterprises, as it helps to lighten the administrative burdens of such enterprises. They stress that easy access to reliable data concerning mergers, seat transfers or other cross-border procedures is indispensable for European companies.

Parliament believes that the project's usefulness for the further integration of the European economic area can be exploited only if all Member States take part. It takes the view that the European Business Register (EBR) initiative and the Business Register Interoperability Throughout Europe (BRITE) project should be pursued first, and considers that participation should be made compulsory. It also insists on the importance of the Internal Market Information System (IMI) for enhanced implementation of internal market legislation.

The resolution points out that register data are not comparable with data of a purely economic nature. Furthermore, the significance of the data held in different business registers can vary and that this can in turn have legal consequences, not only for companies but also for their workers and for consumers, that may vary from Member State to Member State.

Members believe, for this reason, that public access to reliable, up-to-date information should be provided via an official single access point which will improve transparency, efficiency and legal certainty, to the benefit of companies and their workers, consumers and the system as a whole. The Commission is called upon to work towards integrating all the Member States into this future single information access point by providing expertise and additional resources and to examine the advantages and disadvantages of mandatory membership of this new single information access point for all Member States.

Members call for effective ways of publicising the existence of this single access point to be guaranteed so that all stakeholders can use it to obtain clear and reliable information on European companies. They point out, however, that the steps taken should not impose additional administrative burdens on companies, particularly SMEs.

The resolution stresses the importance of further merging of BRITE, IMI and EBR data and systems in order to put in place a single information access point for internal market stakeholders and consumers. It supports the establishment, in the meantime, of compulsory mechanisms for cooperation between registries, in particular in connection with regularly updating the data required to be disclosed in respect of foreign branches.

Members insist that any European solution must guarantee members of the public and companies adequate protection for personal and commercial data. They stress that any integrated European solution must in particular take account of the extent to which national registers or existing European registers covering some sectors of the economy could be closed down, adapted or merged in order to prevent duplication of work, in keeping with the objective of cutting red tape.

Lastly, Parliament looks forward to the launch of the e-Justice portal, which must be accessible to individuals, businesses, legal practitioners and the judiciary and must be user-friendly.