Basic information

2008/2205(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Enhancing the role of European SMEs in international trade **Subject** 3.45.02 Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), craft industries 6.20 Common commercial policy in general	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
INTA International Trade	MUSCARDINI Cristiana (UEN)	05/05/2008

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
DEVE Development	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	CASPARY Daniel (PPE-DE)	25/09/2008
IMCO Internal Market and Consumer Protection	HANDZLIK Małgorzata (PPE-DE)	07/07/2008

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Trade and Economic Security	ASHTON Catherine

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
23/09/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
08/01/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
16/01/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0001/2009	
05/02/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0048/2009	Summary
05/02/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
05/02/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2008/2205(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55-p4 Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	INTA/6/66662

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE412.125	18/09/2008	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE415.323	14/11/2008	
Committee opinion	IMCO	PE414.371	03/12/2008	
Committee opinion	ITRE	PE414.984	15/12/2008	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0001/2009	16/01/2009	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0048/2009	05/02/2009	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2009)1843	18/06/2009	

Enhancing the role of European SMEs in international trade

2008/2205(INI) - 05/02/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 437 votes to 77, with 69 abstentions, a resolution on enhancing the role of European SMEs in international trade.

The European Union's SMEs, defined as enterprises with fewer than 250 employees and a turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, account for 23 million enterprises (99% of the total) and 75 million jobs (70%) in the Union. More than 96% of SMEs in the European Union have fewer than 50 employees and less than EUR 10 Million in annual turnover, which limits their ability to export goods and services outside their national borders, due to the high fixed costs linked to international trade.

In the light of this information, the main recommendations contained in the report are as follows:

The multilateral framework and the WTO: stressing the need for the WTO system to take greater account of the role of SMEs and their interests, the Parliament calls on the Commission, in the context of the WTO negotiations, to provide for specific simplified rules for SMEs within free trade areas and for special clauses relating to the requirements of SMEs. It also calls on the Commission and the Member States to review their priorities at multilateral level by promoting the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers and to foster international trade through appropriate measures to simplify and harmonise standards.

MEPs believe that the international trade system should be made less onerous for SMEs and that consideration should be given to setting up a rapid and low-cost system of international arbitration courts to enable SMEs to avoid the delays and problems which a legal dispute with customs or trade authorities would entail in certain third countries. They support, in particular, the adoption of a firm stance in the negotiations on trade facilitation

procedures, in order to lower the costs of customs procedures (which can account for up to 15% of the value of the goods traded), through transparent and simplified procedures, harmonised international standards, effective recording of the origin of goods, and updated customs controls.

Reform of trade defence instruments: MEPs welcome the Commission's decision to withdraw the proposals for reform of the trade defence instruments, taking the view that the reforms would not only have failed to enhance the external competitiveness of European industry but would have caused further serious damage to those Community industrial sectors jeopardised by foreign products illegally subsidised or unduly favoured by dumping practices.

The resolution therefore stresses that the Trade Defence Instrument (TDI) system must continue to be a quasi-judicial procedure, based on objective and factual assessments in order to provide for predictability and legal certainty. In this context, the Commission is called upon to increase the transparency, predictability and accessibility of the investigations, in particular for SMEs. MEPs recommend that the Commission and Member States introduce information and training measures for SMEs in order to encourage them to make use of TDIs and consider it necessary to improve the services offered by the SME TDI helpdesk.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) and origin markings: MEPs emphasise that SMEs need effective IPR protection as a precondition for developing new technologies, in order to enable them to undertake international activities. They recall the significant increase in recent years in infringements of IPR affecting EU SMEs, which in some cases can threaten their very existence. The Commission and the Member States are therefore called upon to: (i) prevent and combat counterfeiting by means of appropriate internal policies and international initiatives (new economic cooperation agreements with third countries); (ii) make use of instruments, such as patents, in order to secure their know-how and protect themselves against copying and counterfeiting.

Third-country market access strategy: the resolution welcomes the Commission's efforts to provide access for SMEs to third country markets. It calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve the provision of information on third-country markets and to rationalise the Market Access Database, thereby ensuring easier access for SME operators.

MEPs consider that the Market Access Teams set up by the Commission third country delegations should be strengthened and that a desk specifically responsible for monitoring SME-related issues should be set up within them. They also support the creation in the key Indian and Chinese markets of European Business Centres, which work together with national chambers of commerce and business representatives to help SMEs find partners with the relevant skills in order to be able to enter these local markets.

European Small Business Act: MEPs consider that the internationalisation of SMEs is a primary objective of trade policy and should constitute a cornerstone of the European Small Business Act. In this context, the Commission and Member States are called upon to promote the establishment of service consortia to support SMEs in the process of internationalisation.

The resolution recommends, inter alia, an increase in the provision of training programmes for entrepreneurs on the globalised business environment (such as the *Enterprise Europe Network* or "*Gateway to China*" scheme), as well as the creation of a special EU exchange programme for young entrepreneurs based on the *Erasmus/Leonardo da Vinci* programmes.

Free-trade agreements: MEPs call on the Commission to pay closer attention to assessing the impact which the new generation of free-trade agreements negotiated with third countries can have on European SMEs and to take account of this assessment at the negotiation phase. Moreover, they stress the importance of geographically closer markets for SMEs and call on the Commission to pay special attention to SMEs in trade relations with such countries.

Tenders: the Parliament believes that EU SMEs should have the same level of advantages and possibilities as regards public tenders in the main industrialised countries (including the United States, Canada and Japan) as they enjoy inside the European Union. It therefore calls on the Commission to guarantee better access to public procurement markets in third countries and fair conditions of competition in the sectors concerned by the tenders, if necessary by applying the principle of reciprocity. In this context, the Commission is called upon to submit proposals with a view to future renegotiation and strengthening of the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement.

Agricultural products and geographical indications: recalling the importance of access to agricultural markets for EU SMEs, the resolutions calls on the Commission, in the context of the future multilateral and bilateral trade negotiations, not to give up the remaining tariff safeguards enjoyed by the sector.

MEPs consider it unacceptable that the geographical designations and indications of many agri-foodstuffs are too often used to the detriment of EU SMEs and therefore urge the Commission and the Member States to take resolute action vis-à-vis countries which use such non-tariff barriers unduly to protect their own markets.

The resolution supports the establishment of an international multilateral register of geographical indications enabling SMEs to protect their own geographical indications. In this context, MEPs consider that the list of protected geographical indications should be supplemented and extended to all EU products which, by their nature or place or method of production, provide EU SMEs with a "comparative advantage" over similar products from third countries.

Supporting the internationalisation of SMEs: MEPs consider that national or regional support programmes for the internationalisation of SMEs should continue to be co-financed under the European Regional Development Fund and that more financial resources should be allocated to transnational cooperation projects developed by sectoral associations, with the aim of supporting the export and internationalisation capability of SMEs. The resolution also stresses the need to improve access to finance, and especially to micro-credit, for SMEs and calls on the Commission to mobilise resources in order to promote transnational cooperation among SMEs in the European Union.

More generally, the Commission and the Member States are called upon to fully support SMEs in the current financial crisis by ensuring that credit is continuously made available to them to enhance their development.