Recent public consultations launched by the European Commission

Dear President,
Dear Board members,
Dear ADDE members,

The European Commission ("Commission") recently opened public consultations in different domains which could be relevant for the business of dental dealers.

We have listed a summary of these initiatives and the deadlines for responding below:

- **Commission initiatives in relation to Small and Medium-Sized enterprises (‘SMEs’)**

  The Commission recently launched two initiatives with respect to SMEs where it welcomes feedback from stakeholders, namely an interim evaluation of the European program for the competitiveness of SMEs (COSME program) and an inception impact assessment of the SME definition that is currently used within the European Union.

  - **Interim evaluation of the program for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (COSME) (2014-2020)**

    This public consultation is part of an interim evaluation of the COSME Program, which is Europe’s program for the competitiveness of SMEs that started in 2014 and lasts until 2020.

    The COSME Program has four main objectives:

    - improve access to finance for SMEs;
    - help SMEs' access to markets mainly through the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), the IPR SME helpdesks and Your Europe Business portal;
    - creating better framework conditions for competitiveness by reducing administrative burden, supporting smart and SME-friendly regulation, modernizing industries and facilitating SMEs' access to public procurement;
    - encouraging entrepreneurship mainly by offering mentoring or tailored schemes to entrepreneurs.

    The Commission will write an interim report that evaluates the activities undertaken during the period from 2014 to 2016, for the EU and COSME participating countries. This evaluation report intends to assess the program at mid-term, help improve the implementation of the program, and provide an evidence-base for future activities and initiatives under the COSME Program.

    The Commission will take the feedback it receives through this consultation into account when preparing the evaluation report.

    Views are sought from the general public and all stakeholders, in particular SMEs, SME stakeholders and public authorities.

    Feedback can be given until 31 August 2017 via the online questionnaire (see https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/cosme_interim_evaluation?surveylanguage=EN) or by sending documents, such as position papers, to the following e-mail address: grow-cosme@ec.europa.eu.
More information on the public consultation can be found [here](#). More information on the COSME Program can be found [here](#). An English version of the COSME leaflet is enclosed to this e-mail. The COSME leaflet is available in other EU-languages [here](#).

**Inception Impact Assessment on the revision of the EU SME Definition**

The Commission recently opened an inception impact assessment of the SME definition that is currently used within the EU (set out in Recommendation 2003/361/EC).

The definition is the structural tool to identify those enterprises that are confronted with market failures and particular challenges due to their size, and are therefore allowed to receive preferential treatment in public support. The SME definition is widely used in EU policies (e.g. competition, structural funds, research and innovation) as well as for some European administrative exemptions and/or fee reductions.

The Commission regularly evaluates the SME definition in order to make sure that it still addresses the right enterprises to reach its objectives. As part of this periodic evaluation, the Commission will carry out an impact assessment.

The goal of the inception impact assessment is to inform stakeholders about the Commission's work in order to allow them to provide feedback on the intended impact assessment and to participate effectively in future consultation activities.

The inception impact assessment points out two main areas of concern with respect to the current SME definition. **Firstly**, the current financial thresholds, which were set in 2003, possibly need to be updated considering the significant developments in inflation and productivity in the last 14 years. **Secondly**, the Commission indicates that a number of concepts used in the SME definition could be better described and/or clarified so as to enhance the legal certainty.

The overall objective of the evaluation of the SME definition is to:

- ensure that available support and special measures to reduce administrative burden are focusing on those enterprises that are most in need of it;
- increase business predictability and legal certainty for enterprises by making the SME definition clearer and leave less room for interpretation;
- create a level playing field for EU-based SMEs within the Internal Market by fostering equal treatment for SMEs throughout the EU with regards to their access to public support and finance.

Early 2018, the Commission will launch a formal open online public consultation of 12 weeks on the issues, objectives and policy options with regard to the SME definition. This consultation will be announced on the following website: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations](https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations). You will also be informed of this consultation through an ADDE Flash.

At this moment in time, the inception impact assessment invites stakeholders to provide views on the Commission's understanding of the problem and possible solutions and to make available any relevant information that they may have, including on possible impacts of alterations to the current definition.


More information on the inception impact assessment can be found [here](#).

**Open public consultation for the Evaluation of the EU Agencies: EUROFOUND, CEDEFOP, ETF, EU-OSHA**

The Commission has recently launched an open public consultation regarding the four decentralized EU agencies falling under the remit of DG Employment:

- the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions (Eurofound), whose main mission is to carry out research in the area of employment, industrial relations,
living and working conditions and to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies;

- the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), who supports the promotion and development of vocational education and in-service training at EU level;
- the European Training Foundation (ETF), who helps transitioning and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labor market systems in light of the EU’s external relations policy;
- the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), whose main mission is to raise awareness and advance knowledge of occupational safety and health, for example by identifying and assessing new and emerging risks at work.

The consultation mainly focuses on Eurofound, Cedefop and EU-OSHA.

These agencies perform technical and scientific tasks that help the EU institutions implement policies and take decisions and support cooperation between the EU, national governments and social partners by pooling technical and specialist expertise.

The objective of the consultation is to collect information and opinions from the general public and stakeholders to support the ongoing evaluation of the four agencies, particularly on:

- the assessment of the agencies work regarding relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value; and
- the future of the four agencies, gathering new ideas on issues central to their future, including cross-cutting and governance issues.

Views are sought from citizens, organizations as well as public authorities.

Feedback can be given until 5 July 2017 via the online questionnaire (see https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/Evaluation_of_EMPL_agencies).

More information on the public consultation can be found in the Background Document of the public consultation. An English version of the Background Document is enclosed to this e-mail. The COSME leaflet is available in other EU-languages here.

You should not hesitate to contact us should you have any further questions or if you wish to participate in any of the consultations.

Kind regards,

Sarah & Benjamin

The ADDE Flash has been prepared for information purposes only and is not intended as legal advice
**COSME**

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of Europe’s economy, providing 85% of all new jobs. The European Commission aims to promote entrepreneurship and improve the business environment for SMEs, to allow them to realise their full potential in today’s global economy.

**ACCESS TO FINANCE**

One of COSME’s main objectives is to provide enhanced access to finance for SMEs in different phases of their lifecycle: creation, expansion or business transfer. In order to achieve this objective, the EU will mobilise loans and equity investments for SMEs.

- Through the Loan Guarantee Facility, the programme will provide guarantees and counter-guarantees to financial institutions (e.g., guarantee societies, banks, leasing companies) so they can provide more loan and lease finance to SMEs. It is expected that COSME will enable between 220,000 and 330,000 SMEs to obtain financing for a total value of between €14 and €21 billion.

- Through the Equity Facility for Growth, the programme will provide risk capital to equity funds investing in SMEs mainly in the expansion and growth-stage phases. The Facility should help between 360 and 560 firms to receive equity investment with an overall volume invested ranging from €2.6 to €4 billion.

**ACCESS TO MARKETS**

COSME provides support to European enterprises so that they can benefit from the EU’s single market and make the most of opportunities offered by markets outside the EU.

COSME funds the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) consisting of over 600 offices in more than 50 countries helping SMEs find business and technology partners, understand EU legislation and access EU financing.

COSME also funds web tools specifically designed for enterprises’ development such as Your Europe Business Portal or the SME Internationalisation Portal. The first provides practical online information for entrepreneurs who want to become active in another Member State. The latter puts the emphasis on support measures for companies which want to develop their business outside Europe.

COSME finances the ASEAN, China and MERCOSUR Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) SME Helpdesks that offer advice and support to European SMEs facing difficulties in IPR issues, standards or public procurement rules in those geographical areas.

The programme also provides financial assistance to the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation, to promote all forms of industrial, trade and investment cooperation by disseminating information on how to access the Japanese market, facilitating exchanges of experience and know-how between EU and Japanese businesses.

**CREATING BETTER FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS FOR COMPETITIVENESS**

COSME supports actions to improve the framework conditions in which enterprises operate, in particular SMEs, by reducing unnecessary administrative and regulatory burdens. Such actions may include measuring the impact of relevant Union law on SMEs, developing smart and business-friendly regulation for them and reinforcing the use of the “Think Small First” principle for policy-making at national and regional level.

COSME supports the emergence of competitive industries with market potential, by helping SMEs to take-up new business models and integrate into new value chains. The programme complements the actions of Member States in areas with high growth potential such as the tourism sector.

COSME promotes the development of worldclass clusters in the EU, fostering cluster excellence and internationalisation with an emphasis on cross-sectoral cooperation, notably in support of emerging industries. The programme also aims at accelerating the digitalisation of the business community and promoting e-skills and e-leadership.

**ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

COSME backs the implementation of the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan through a wide range of activities. These include mobility exchanges, research, best practices diffusion and pilot projects in areas such as entrepreneurship education, mentoring or the development of guidance and support services for new and potential entrepreneurs, including young, women and senior entrepreneurs.

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs is for instance a cross-border exchange scheme which aims to help new and aspiring entrepreneurs acquire relevant skills to run and grow a business by working with an experienced entrepreneur in another country for one to six months. It increases their know-how and fosters cross-border transfer of knowledge and experience between entrepreneurs.

COSME especially focuses on digital entrepreneurship to help European businesses drive their digital transformation and fully benefit from the unprecedented new opportunities created in the digital era, which are crucial for their competitiveness and growth.

COSME is the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs, running from 2014 to 2020, with a budget of €2.3 billion. COSME will support SMEs in the following areas:

- Facilitating access to finance
- Supporting internationalisation and access to markets
- Creating an environment favourable to competitiveness
- Encouraging an entrepreneurial culture

COSME is a programme implementing the Small Business Act (SBA) which reflects the Commission’s political will to recognise the central role of SMEs in the EU economy.
Open public consultation on the evaluation of the four EU agencies falling under the remit of DG Employment (Eurofound, Cedefop, ETF and EU-OSHA)

Purpose of this public consultation.

This consultation seeks feedback from the citizens and stakeholders of the four decentralized EU agencies falling under the remit of DG Employment: the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions (Eurofound); the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop); the European Training Foundation (ETF); and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). An open public consultation to support the external evaluation of the ETF has already been conducted, from April to June 2016. Therefore, this consultation mostly focuses on Eurofound, Cedefop, and EU-OSHA. Nevertheless, the questions on the cross-cutting and prospective assessment include as well the ETF.

Decentralised agencies have been set up by the EU to perform technical and scientific tasks that help the EU institutions implement policies and take decisions. They are located in many Member States and work on issues and problems affecting the everyday lives of the 500m people living in the EU. They have a major impact in areas as diverse as the food we eat, our medicines, the chemicals we come into contact with, our education, the quality of our working lives & environment, justice, transport, safety, security and our fundamental rights. In particular, these are the main missions of the four agencies under the remit of DG Employment and Social Inclusion:

- **Eurofound**'s main mission is to carry out research in the area of employment, industrial relations, living and working conditions, to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies. Eurofound is located in Dublin, Ireland. The Agency has around 110 staff, and an annual budget of 21 million euro.

- **Cedefop**'s main mission is to assist the European Commission in encouraging the promotion and development of vocational education and training (VET) and in-service training at EU level. The Agency also aims to contribute to the implementation of a common vocational training policy at national level. Cedefop is located in Thessaloniki, Greece. It has around 122 staff, and an annual budget of 18 million euro.

- **EU-OSHA**’s main mission is to raise awareness and advance knowledge of occupational safety and health (OSH). The Agency develops, gathers and provides reliable and relevant information, analysis and tools to facilitate the exchange of information and good practice, serving the needs of those involved in OSH at EU and national levels. EU-OSHA is located in Bilbao, Spain. It has around 66 staff and an annual budget of 16.7 million euro.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=333&langId=en&consultId=23&visib=0&furtherConsult=yes
ETF aims to contribute to the improvement of lifelong learning and the development of individuals' skills and competences. This is achieved through the development of VET systems in EU partner countries within the Southern and Eastern European Neighbourhood; the Enlargement region covered by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance; and a number of countries in Central Asia. ETF is located in Turin, Italy. It has around 130 staff and an annual budget of 20 million euro.

In order to know more about the mandates, objectives and activities of each Agency you are invited to consult the following Agencies' webpages:

EUROFOUND: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/
CEDEFOP: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/
ETF: http://www.etf.europa.eu/
EU-OSHA: https://osha.europa.eu/

The evaluation of Eurofound, Cedefop, ETF and EU-OSHA

The purpose of this external evaluation of Eurofound, Cedefop, ETF and EU-OSHA is to assess their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and added value, both individually and from a cross-cutting perspective, identifying potential synergies and overlaps in their mandates, objectives and activities. The scope of the evaluation covers:

- The operation of Eurofound, Cedefop, ETF and EU-OSHA, and similar tasks performed by the European Commission, by other EU decentralised agencies (such as FRA and EIGE), and by other relevant EU instruments and networks (such as Eurydice);
- An evaluation of the changes that occurred during the period 2011-2016, based on a comparison of the situation before 2011 and at the end of 2016;
- A retrospective analysis (an assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value of the agencies' performance) and a prospective analysis (of potential relevant changes that would help the agencies to better achieve their objectives, or which could deliver efficiency gains or other potential changes including rationalisation).

The Common Approach on EU decentralised agencies, published in 2012, aims to improve the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and transparency of the EU decentralised agencies. In line with the Common Approach, on 23 August 2016, the European Commission published three proposals for the revision of the Founding Regulations of Eurofound, Cedefop

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2 Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Russia, Syria, Tunisia, Ukraine.
3 Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland (until 2015), Kosovo (*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence), Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey.
4 Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.
These revisions offer each of the three agencies the opportunity to update its respective objectives, tasks and activities in order to better reflect recent societal, institutional and economic developments, and respond to new needs. The evaluation of the four agencies will provide new evidence and specific recommendations on other changes to their structure and operation. The evaluation will also help to assess whether further revisions are required to the agencies’ Founding Regulations.

Scope of the open public consultation

This public consultation constitutes a key part of the overall consultation activities carried out in the context of the evaluation of the four agencies under the remit of DG EMPL. It complements other targeted consultation activities, including interviews, surveys, case studies and workshops.

All citizens, public and private organisations are welcomed to contribute to this consultation, to ensure that the process remains inclusive, transparent, effective and coherent. Contributions are sought in particular from stakeholders of Eurofound, Cedefop and EU-OSHA during the period 2011-2016.

The consultation process aims to collect information and opinions from the general public and stakeholders on the work of the Agencies, particularly 1) on the future of the agencies, gathering new ideas on issues central to their future, including governance issues, and comparing alternative policy options, and 2) on assessing how useful the agencies have been with regard to the following evaluation criteria:

- **Relevance**: assessing the extent to which the work of Eurofound, Cedefop and EU-OSHA is relevant, with respect to the EU’s current needs and to the emerging challenges it faces. Respondents are asked to provide their views on the extent to which the agencies properly address the issues faced in the policy areas that are relevant to their work.

- **Effectiveness**: assessing the extent to which the actions and activities of the four agencies have achieved their objectives, and whether they have had an impact on their specific sectors, and on society at large.

- **Efficiency**: determining whether the intended outputs and results of the four agencies have been efficiently achieved. The public consultation aims to gather opinions and views on the costs and benefits of the simplification and harmonisation of the agencies’ work.

- **Coherence**: gathering opinions on the perceived coherence of the four agencies’ mandates and activities between themselves, as well as with respect to other bodies that have similar objectives. The consultation also aims to identify potential synergies and complementarities between the activities of the four agencies, and to highlight the risk of duplication between their work and the work of other agencies and actors.

- **EU added value**: gathering opinions on the perceived additional value provided by the activities of the four agencies, compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels. Questions also focus on the perceived consequences of the termination of the agencies.

- **Cross-cutting issues**: the public consultation includes questions relating to relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and added value, with a particular focus on synergies and overlaps between agencies. This aims to provide the best outline for the future,
having analysed different scenarios, including the scenario that the agencies do not continue to exist as separate EU agencies.

**Results of this consultation:**
Once the online public consultation has ended, the contributions made by stakeholders and general public will be published in the languages in which they were submitted. In parallel, a consultation report will be published on DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion website, summarising the key issues and results raised in the consultation. The results of the consultation will also be used to support the Staff Working Document presenting the final results of this evaluation, thereby better informing policy making.