



Seminar Report

“EU SME Support to Internationalization in the Context of the EU-Japan EPA”

October 19, 2018 Tokyo

On October 19, the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation organized a meeting for briefing EU's support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to internationalization. The seminar consisted of two parts. The first part was a briefing on EU SME policy by Mr. Julien Guerrier, Director of the European Commission Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME). The second part was an exchange of views with the participants coming from EU member states trade promotional organizations and chambers of commerce and industry in Japan. Major topics were (a) How EASME supports European SMEs to internationalize their activities, and (b) How EASME's initiatives help European SMEs benefit from the newly concluded EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). A total of 10 European organizations participated in the meeting.

Mr. Guerrier started his presentation by emphasizing that supporting EU SMEs to go international is at the heart of EASME's mandate and priorities. EASME is currently managing several internationalization projects on behalf of the European Commission service for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW). According to Mr. Guerrier, EASME is particularly proud to manage one of the most renowned initiatives of DG GROW, i.e. the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN). To date, the EEN remains the world's largest business and innovation network with over 600 partner organizations within the European Union and in major international markets such as Japan, China, Brazil or Singapore.

In Japan, it is the EU-Japan Centre for representing the Enterprise Europe Network. The most popular services among EU SMEs are partnering services, i.e. the organization of trade missions and business-to-business matchmaking events during international fairs.

Also, Mr. Guerrier stressed the importance of the Market Access Database (MADB). The MADB is a highly developed IT tools offering vital information for EU SME exporters on import conditions in third country market, i.e. duties & taxes, documents required for customs clearance, (non-tariff) trade barriers, preferential agreements and rules of origin.

As for EASME's initiatives to help European SMEs to benefit from the EU-Japan EPA, Mr. Guerrier referred to the recently launched projects of the EU-Japan Centre centering around the new EU-Japan EPA/Trade Helpdesk which offers information packages and practical guides as well as a series of webinar to European SMEs.

During the discussion, the necessity to make the EPA agreement accessible for European SMEs was repeatedly mentioned. According to Mr. Guerrier, some studies carried out on the implementation of the EU-South Korea Free Trade (FTA) Agreement revealed that it took EU SMEs longer time than Korean counterparts to start using the FTA. Therefore, the participants agreed that it would be necessary to help European SMEs to understand the benefit of EU-Japan EPA and encourage them to use it readily.

Prepared by Toshiro Fukura, Manager, Policy Seminars and Analysis