



IP (91) 1069

**PRESSE-MEDDELELSE • MITTEILUNG AN DIE PRESSE • PRESS-RELEASE • INFORMATION A LA PRESSE
ΑΝΑΚΟΙΝΩΣΗ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΤΥΠΟ • INFORMAZIONE ALLA STAMPA • MEDEDELING AAN DE PERS**

Brussels, 2 December 1991

**MR. MILLAN INAUGURATES THE
EUROPEAN BUSINESS AND INNOVATION CENTRES CONFERENCE**

LEIPZIG, 2 DECEMBER 1991

The Conference of European Business and Innovation Centres (BICs) will take place in Leipzig on December 2 and 3. The Conference, which has the theme "BICs in Europe: An Instrument for Regional Policies and Cooperation between East and West", aims at assisting the exchange of experience between BIC managers within the Community and the staff of future BICs in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In particular, godfather relationships between existing BICs and East European BICs will be formally completed during the Conference.

The BICs are structures founded on a partnership (local, public or private) which offer entrepreneurs as well as existing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) a range of services (assistance in developing business plans, assistance with innovation, obtaining finance and a network of expert consultants), to promote the development of innovative projects.

In the course of his Inaugural speech to the Conference Mr. Bruce Millan, Member of the European Commission responsible for Regional Policies, stated:

"I am especially happy to inaugurate this Conference today as it represents the first joint meeting of the representatives of the Community BICs and those of the emerging centres in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary developed with the aid of the PHARE programme.

We are also contributing, through technical assistance actions and the transfer of know-how directly to businesses, to the support of these countries in the course of their transition towards a market economy. The valuable knowledge we have acquired through the Structural Funds tells us that this process of adaptation can be painful at times.

061-3

443.013

441-2(3)

We are about to initiate, in cooperation with the Member States, a process of evaluation of the implementation of the Structural Funds. It is just three years since their launch but already some conclusions can be drawn. The Commission will shortly present an evaluation report at the mid-point of the Community Structural Action which will also serve as the basis for the development the next phase. At the beginning of next year the "Delors II" package will indicate particularly the necessary financial resources required for the 1994-1998 period to support economic and social cohesion. For my own part, I have emphasised many times the necessity for a substantial increase in the resources allocated to structural policy which is indispensable for the reinforcement of Community convergence.

The evaluation work which is currently underway shows that the principles introduced through the 1989 reform were correct and have, in general, been well applied.

Local development plays a key role and these measures aimed at its support are specifically provided for in the regulations. The European Business and Innovation Centres and the network through which they are associated (EBN) were launched in 1984 in order to generate the growth potential of SMEs, to support their development and evaluate local opportunities. This was aimed at providing the regions concerned with a competitive advantage. This objective, I believe, is particularly important for the new Lander, faced with the task of the achievement of the Single Market at the end of next year.

Immediately after German reunification the Commission adopted a specific measure to provide 3 billion ECU (6 billion DM) of Structural Funds to assist the integration of the new Lander into the Community. These programmes are being implemented efficiently at the moment and it is likely that the same priorities will be pursued over the coming years.

The Structural Funds are contributing, largely through Community Support Frameworks, to assisting the new Lander with the productive development of their investments and infrastructures. The activity of the BICs, reinforced by their exchange of experience during this Conference, will provide an even greater force for the achievement of regional development objectives."