



## a newssheet for journalists

Weekly N° 14/95

1 - 8 May 1995

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Mailed from Brussels X

newsletters

**INTERNAL MARKET: 140 MILLION ECU over 5 years for "CUSTOMS 2000"**

A programme aimed at improving controls at the EU's external frontiers.

The European Commission is proposing an ambitious modernization programme for the European Union's customs authorities, in order to strengthen controls at the EU's external frontiers and ensure the full implementation of Community legislation within these frontiers. Mario Monti, European Commissioner responsible for the internal market and customs, had the following to say about it: "The confidence of economic operators and citizens in the operation of the internal market implies effective management of the external frontiers. We must adapt the customs authorities to their new tasks so as to ensure, on the one hand, a uniformly high level of protection against fraud and, on the other, the free flow of trade with third countries". The "CUSTOMS 2000" programme will help EU countries to modernize their customs authorities, so that the internal market can operate at maximum efficiency, with goods as well as people moving freely and in complete security. The Commission envisages allocating 140 million ECU\* to the programme for the period 1996-2000.

The computerization of the various customs authorities is one of the key objectives of this programme. Last year alone more than 18 million transit documents were handed over to customs officials in the Member States. It is clearly impossible to manage such a large-scale flow of goods efficiently without the aid of computers. The programme will help EU countries set up compatible computer networks and to focus controls on sectors at risk. This will allow them to uncover fraud without hampering the normal flow of trade. "CUSTOMS 2000" will also encourage customs authorities to exchange experiences, with a view to finding the "best practices" and an opportunity to adopt similar working methods. A common monitoring system will be set up in order to analyze the effectiveness of customs checks in the field and make recommendations from time to time.

The effectiveness of the controls in force also depends largely on the training which customs officers receive. It is not enough to provide them with computers; they must be taught how to use them. Similarly, faced with people who use international networks and the most sophisticated techniques to perpetrate fraud, customs officers must be specially trained to avoid the traps set for them and to uncover pirated goods. Finally, it is necessary that customs officers be very familiar with the latest EU legislation. "CUSTOMS 2000" will help strengthen action already envisaged within the framework of the MATTHAEUS programme. This programme made it possible for some 400 customs officers to exchange places with their colleagues in other EU countries, to organize seminars in which another 600 customs officers took part and to launch training programmes on Community law. It also provides for closer relations between customs authorities, on the one hand, and, on the other, economic (particularly small and medium-sized enterprises), legal and scientific circles as well as consumer organizations so that both sides have a better knowledge of each others needs. Any moves in this direction can only help the two sides understand each other better and work more effectively.

Finally, the programme will strengthen cooperation between the customs authorities of the Member States and of third countries; this, too, is necessary if the movement of goods and people at the EU's external frontiers is to be managed as effectively as possible.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.82 or IRE£0.82.

**FILMS: Nearly 1.7 million ECU in financial aid for the cinema centenary**

The European Union backs 75 film festivals and 18 other events.

The European Commission has decided to support 75 festivals and the organization of the Europa prize in order to promote European films and encourage their diffusion in the various European Union countries. These events offer film-goers a unique opportunity to see films made in the EU but never screened outside their country of origin (only 20% of European films cross their national frontiers). It will also enable them to discover fresh talent through the short films made by young producers and to watch the kind of films seldom screened in commercial cinemas - experimental and other kinds of films, including the first works of European producers. In all, the 770,000 ECU\* which will be spent by the EU to help organize these film festivals will make it possible to screen some 9,000 works, for an audience of 1.8 million people.

In order to celebrate the cinema's centenary, the European Commission has also decided to support 18 complementary events this year, with aid amounting to 925,000 ECU. These events will give the public an opportunity to learn more about both the European cinema's rich heritage and future developments, through the exhibitions and other events programmed for 1995 in all EU countries. Such well-known producers as Bertrand Tavernier and Wim Wenders will bring to life the great occasions of European cinema. The "European studios night", on June 30, will give the public the opportunity to visit the studios of Cinecittà and Babelsberg, while the exhibition in Spain, entitled "Los próximos cien años del cine", will allow them to look into the future, with its virtual reality and other amazing possibilities of the new image and sound technologies.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.82 or IR£0.82.

SMEs: Europe's "anti-unemployment" machines run out of steam ...

... but keep hoping for more from the single European market.

Europe's small and medium-sized enterprises were considered a major weapon in the fight against unemployment. But these SMEs are no longer recruiting workers like they used to. While taking advantage of the main benefits of the single European market, they are still handicapped by several problems: the lack of harmonization of technical norms, the cost of administrative formalities and the absence of a single currency. These are the conclusions of two recent surveys and a report on Europe's SMEs.

According to the third annual report of the European "Observatory for SMEs", these firms have less momentum than in the period 1988-1993. Firstly, because the economic recovery, turned essentially towards exports, benefitted larger companies more than it did SMEs; secondly, the rise in productivity of SMEs did not go hand in hand with an equivalent increase in employment.

The sixteen national research institutes which helped prepare the report for the European Commission point out that SMEs often find it difficult to recruit qualified personnel. Therefore, they often adopt strategies which have little or no job-creation impact or they create temporary or part-time jobs.

The report underlines just how much SMEs are handicapped by administrative procedures which, calculated on the basis of the number of people employed, cost them much more than larger firms.

Since last year, the creation of new firms has slowed down in the European Union, while the number of company closures has increased. According to the SME Observatory, nine out of ten new firms last for at least one year, two thirds survive for three years and about half last for more than five years.

However, SMEs have felt the benefits of the single European market, according to a survey of more than 140 firms carried out by 12 European information centres

for SMEs - or Euro-Info-Centres - one per EU country. (Please note: there are now 15 EU countries).

Many SMEs said that the single market had allowed them to sell goods for the first time in other European countries, to have a larger choice between suppliers or to offer new services to their clients - deliveries in a neighbouring country for instance.

For almost half of the firms surveyed, the single market helps them to save money: it reduces administrative costs and speeds up work. European SMEs are also pleased about the reduction in transport costs and speedier deliveries - except Greek firms which have been hit by the war in ex-Yugoslavia.

The companies did voice some criticism: they are unhappy about high costs and the excessive delays in payments from one country to another; they believe that the public procurement sector does not reflect the European dimension.

About a quarter of SMEs said that the existence of European standards had helped them to improve the quality of their products. But they also pointed out that member states of the European Union do not respect the principle of mutual recognition of technical standards in the areas where there are no European norms: they therefore want a reinforcement of European standards.

These complaints are also covered by the conclusions of another report drawn up by the European Commission which deals specifically with the problems of standardization facing SMEs. A study of 840 SMEs by ANFOR, the French agency for standardization, highlights the lack of information on the subject among SMEs.

The report recommends the participation of SMEs in the elaboration of European technical norms, as well as information actions, awareness campaigns, training and advice not only concerning standards but also the security of workers and the quality of products.

TELECOMS: What kind of liberalization for the information society?

Evaluation after four years of a European directive.

Long-distance education, tele-working, home-banking, ultra-rapid data transmission for firms: Europeans have access to a range of services provided by the "information society". But this is conditional on the liberalization of telecommunication services which began in 1991 when a European directive on the subject came into force. According to a report presented by the European Commission, this European "legislation" is still not applied as completely as it should be. A great deal still has to be done before all of us can speed up and down the information highway.

The directive, adopted in 1990 and implemented one year later, aims at allowing telecom companies to provide services without regard to national frontiers. The idea is that free competition in the sector will lead to lower prices. Not long ago, state monopolies dominated the sector. In its report, the Commission points out that in four countries of the Union - Germany, Spain, Greece and Italy - the authorities have not taken the steps needed to apply the directive; as a result, the Commission has launched infraction procedures.

While the directive did not deal with traditional "vocal" telephone systems - which will only be liberalized in 1998 - national administrations gave the sector such a wide definition that they put the brakes on liberalization.

But, more importantly, the liberalization of telecom services has not been wide-ranging enough to allow for the full development of the information society because the services have not been able to get access to the basic infrastructure - such as the famous "information highways". This is why the Commission has already taken the initiative of suggesting the utilization of teledistribution cable networks and the Council has set 1998 as the date for the liberalization of telecom infrastructure networks.

**UNEMPLOYMENT: Levels unchanged in the 15-member EU**  
11% unemployment in the European Union in February.

The EU's enlargement to include Austria, Finland and Sweden has had no impact on the unemployment rate: it stood at 11% in February, unchanged from the level reached last November when the EU counted only 12 members. This was communicated by Eurostat, the European statistical office, which has just published the latest figures for the enlarged EU.

Spain tops the list in the 15-member EU, just as it did before in the 12-member Union with an unemployment rate of 23.5%. But now it is Finland (17.9%) and no longer Ireland (14.8%) which stands in second place. With 9.1%, Sweden has a lower rate of unemployment than the overall European average and is closer to the 9.3% mark reached by Denmark. As for Austria, there are no comparable figures, but its unemployment level is widely believed to be among the lowest in the Union.

**COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: Bringing citizens closer to the institutions ...**  
... and helping them to participate in the construction of Europe.

The Committee of the Regions, set up in March 1994, is composed of 222 members who represent the regions and localities of all the member states of the European Union. Its role: to give the opinion of Europe's regions and localities on Community legislation-in-preparation. After a year of collaboration, the European Commission has decided to reinforce its relations with the Committee in order to reflect the concerns of the regions in the conception and implementation of Community policies.

The Commission intends to upgrade its collaboration with the Committee in three ways: the Commission will inform the Committee at the start of the year of the issues on which it intends to consult the regions; this will give the Committee time to prepare its opinion on legislative proposals as early as possible. The Commission will help the Committee to streamline its work procedures and it will regularly publish a report showing to what extent the opinions of the Committee have been taken into account in the texts adopted by the Commission.



CULTURE: The European Commission proposes a new heritage programme

With 67 million ECU\* over five years, the RAPHAEL programme will support 300 projects aimed at enhancing Europe's cultural heritage.

The European Commission is proposing to launch a new programme to enhance Europe's cultural heritage. The 67 million ECU it envisages for the RAPHAEL programme would provide financial support for some 300 innovative projects aimed at turning the spotlight on the EU's cultural heritage. One of the key objectives of the new programme would be to ensure that everyone has access to this heritage and to bring it to the attention of an even wider public. The programme could, for example, fund the introduction of multilingual commentaries in museums, as well as projects designed to bring European cultural heritage to the attention of specific groups - the creation of workshops for children, for example. The programme would also promote cooperation between those working in the cultural heritage field and authorities at local, regional, national and European levels. This in turn will foster European initiatives aimed at improving the public's access to its cultural heritage. Projects which make use of multimedia techniques would be viewed very favourably.

The RAPHAEL programme takes into account the fact that the preservation of Europe's cultural heritage can also make a significant contribution to research, training and technological innovation, by helping create jobs and fostering regional development. Projects designed to promote greater innovation and the training and mobility of those working in this field would be supported by the EU. Projects would need to have a European dimension and provide genuine added value from both the cultural and socio-economic viewpoint. An important aspect of the new programme would be its provisions for cultural cooperation with third countries and the relevant international bodies, the Council of Europe in particular.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.82 or IR£0.82.