

Towards a Better Environment for Enterprises: Solutions for the Start-up Phase



IN THIS NUMBER

THE ENVIRONMENT
FOR ENTERPRISES: *The
Best Start-up Practices* 1

*

AT THE COUNCIL: *SMEs
and Job Creation* 2

*

THE EP LISTENS TO
SMEs 3

*

THE CRAFT SECTOR: *A
Call for Proposals* 4

*

Helping SMEs invest in
Environmental
Protection 4

*

EUROPARTENARIAT
PORTUGAL: *In Lisbon,
24-25 November 1995* 5

*

EU/CHINA: *A Long-Term
Strategy and A Mission in
Beijing* 6

SMEs are the most important creators of employment in the European Union, yet they still must meet the challenges of growth and competitiveness in an ever increasingly complex environment. In an effort to assist SMEs the European Commission set up an 'integrated programme' in 1994.¹ The programme, operating within a framework of strengthened partnership between all parties concerned with SME development at the local, national and Community levels, is designed to promote mutual consultation and efficient coordination between the Member States. These 'concerted' actions aim to improve the environment for enterprises by simplifying (concerted action no. 1) and stimulating support measures for existing enterprises at the regional or national level (concerted action no. 2). A third concerted action aimed at encouraging a greater utilisation of services offered to enterprises is also foreseen.

Included under concerted action no. 1, the first of a series of forums that the Commission (DG XXIII — Enterprise Policy) has decided to organise, was held in Paris on 19 and 20 June 1995. The forum, which was designed to encourage Member States to share experiences and to facilitate the spread of 'best practices' throughout the EU, ran under the theme: 'Towards a Better Environment for Enterprises: Solutions for the Start-up Phase'.

The Forum which was organised jointly by the French government and the Committee for improving and simplifying the business environment, received high level political support by the presence of Mr Papoutsis, Member of the Commission; Mr Raffarin, French minister for SMEs, commerce and the craft sector; and Mr Arthuis, French minister for economic development and planning. Germany and Spain also marked the importance of the occasion by sending Mr Kild, secretary of state for economic affairs; and Mr Molto, secretary of state for industry. The forum brought together some 300 representatives from the Member States, professional organisations and the business world. After the opening session, which was dedicated to examining the necessary conditions in order for a policy of simplification to succeed, the participants studied the possibilities of simplifying the administrative procedures

¹ COM(94) 207 final

and the formalities required of entrepreneurs who are starting up a business and the steps aimed at speeding up the procedures for granting permits and licenses. Later, the measures taken by Member States to simplify the legal, fiscal and statistical obligations placed on enterprises and the dispensations of these obligations formed the subject of a long debate. Possible dispensation for small enterprises met with mixed opinions. It would be more useful to set up an adequate regulatory framework which takes the characteristics of small enterprises into consideration from the very beginning. The final plenary session examined the good practices in force in the Member States which facilitate the hiring of personnel. The debate highlighted the fact that work regulations and their associated formalities and administrative charges all too often impede the hiring of workers. Various measures were mentioned as a means to remedy this situation.

Nearly all the Member States currently have a coordination structure or mechanisms such as the impact file whose objective is to improve and to simplify the business environment. Nevertheless, a policy of simplification requires a permanent effort and very high level support, not only from the members of the governments, but also from the members of parliament.

Coordination between the different administrations is also essential, as is the establishment of a structure endowed with sufficient human and financial resources in order to successfully fulfil the role of systematic auditor of the new and existing regulations. Finally, action should be taken at the national level to install a real 'culture of simplification' within the various administrations. The emergence of the Information Society represents a formidable opportunity to facilitate communication between administrations and enterprises and is worth being followed attentively by the authorities.

With regard to the possibilities for simplifying registration procedures and the formalities required of entrepreneurs who are starting up a business, the French examples of 'a single centre' (also in place in Finland and Denmark) and of 'a single form' have been received with great interest as has a procedure established in Italy aimed at speeding up the granting of permits.

The Committee for improving and simplifying the environment for enterprises, established by the European Commission, will meet soon to decide the follow-up which should be given to the Paris Forum. These results will be contained in a report which should serve to spread the good practices currently in force as well as new ideas to all those interested in the process of simplification.

DG XXIII's concerted action no. 1 will continue during the coming year and will hold a Forum around the theme: 'Toward a Better Environment for Enterprises: Solutions for the Growth Phase of an Enterprise'.

Within the area of support measures for enterprises (concerted action no. 2 of the integrated programme in Favour of SMEs and the Craft Sector), the Commission also plans to organise forums which will allow the Member States and the Commission to present and compare the best practices in the field of supporting SMEs during the three stages in the life of an enterprise: creation, growth and transferral. **The first such forum will be held in Madrid, on 16 and 17 November 1995** and will revolve around the theme of creating and supporting young enterprises. It will provide for the sharing of best practices in questions of mechanisms for supporting enterprise creation and for supporting them during the first years of their life.²

A brief summary of the debates held at the Paris Forum on 19 and 20 June 1995 is available in French, English and German.

For further information: EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG XXIII/A1 — Promoting enterprises and improving their environment
Reinhard SCHULTE-BRAUCKS
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Fax: + 32-2/295.97.84

THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL PLACES BETS ON SMEs FOR THE CREATION OF EMPLOYMENT

In its conclusions, the European Council meeting in Cannes (France) on 26 and 17 June 1995 highlighted 'the decisive role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the creation of employment and, more generally, as a factor of social stability and economic dynamism. It requests the Commission to submit to it

² see Euro-Info 81 (5-1995)

a report on the policies currently in effect in this area and on ways to improve their effectiveness especially through fiscal measures aimed at promoting their creation, at lightening the administrative burdens weighing on them and at facilitating their participation in training and research programmes'.

In a brief summary note on small and medium-sized enterprises which was distributed to the Heads of State and Governments at Cannes, the European Commission recalled that several specific actions have already been adopted with a view to assisting SMEs.

- **adoption of the Community SME initiative** endowed with a budget of a billion ECU over the period 1994-1999. This initiative especially concerns the objective 1 regions and aims to modernise SMEs;
- presentation in October 1994 of the Commission proposal, with Council support, on the creation of an **integrated programme** for SMEs and craft sector enterprises. This programme, the first established under article 130 of the Treaty, foresees a certain number of actions in favour of SMEs, in particular the strengthening of cooperation between the public, institutional and private sectors. It aims at better consolidating the existing Community contributions (structural funds, information society) and at establishing a new dialogue between the competent national or regional authorities and representatives from the 'concerted action' SMEs.

Due to their importance, the Commission considers that these measures should be strengthened even further. No matter how important is the obvious need to complete the internal market and to guarantee its balanced development throughout the European Union, the Commission considers the following four aspects to be of top priority:

- facilitate the creation and development of SMEs;
- lighten the administrative charges required of SMEs;
- contribute to improving the possibilities of financing for SMEs on the European scale;
- implement policies aimed at helping SMEs become better integrated into the internal market, at equipping them to benefit from the main Community programmes and expenditures and at encouraging international cooperation.

With a view to the European Council meeting in Madrid in December 1995, the Commission will present a detailed report on the different aspects which will facilitate the creation and harmonious development of SMEs and which will contribute to an important level of employment creation.

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT LISTENS TO SMEs

Can SMEs contribute toward eliminating unemployment in Europe? That is the question posed by Mr Karl von VOGAU (EPP-Germany), President of the European Parliament Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and Industrial Policy at the opening of the public hearing on SMEs in Brussels on 22 June 1995. Organised to give heads of SMEs and professional organisations an opportunity to voice their opinions, the hearing also provided a forum to once again bring to light the obstacles which complicate the lives of SMEs in three main areas: establishment of SMEs, the eco-audit and the difficulties SMEs experience in relation to large enterprises.

In his introductory presentation, Mr von MOLTKE, Director General of DG XXIII underscored the need to simplify the business environment in order to allow enterprises to develop their job creation potential. He also announced that the Commission will present a **communication on the follow-up** to be carried out **in relation to the second Conference on the Craft Sector and the Small Enterprise in Berlin**.

As for the problems concerning the setting-up of an SME, the participants expressed a desire to see 'a clear, uniform and harmonised regulation in all areas' when faced with enormous administrative difficulties and long, drawn-out procedures. During the hearing, one Swedish SME explained the long procedures needed to obtain the permits required to establish an SME in another Member State.

With regard to the enforcement of environmental regulations (norms ISO9000, eco-audit, etc), the European Union representative of the craft sector and SMEs proposed that the European institutions grant aid and assistance to micro-enterprises, organise a large information campaign and create intermediaries between the different levels (regional and national) and the Commission. Indeed, enterprises with from 8 to 9 people have neither the structures, nor the technical know-how, nor the personnel to apply regulations such as those dealing with the environment. The implementation of ecological processes have proven to be profitable in the long term due to energy savings and a more rational use of raw materials. In the opinion of the representative from DG XXIII, the 'voluntary' regulation on the eco-audit constitutes a double challenge for SMEs: first the large enterprises concerned with earning certification for their environmental management are required by the annex to the regulation to ensure that all their subcontractors also initiate this system. Furthermore the eco-audit asks SMEs to respect, as their point of departure, national and European environmental law and to commit themselves to go beyond it. Many SMEs, however, are more or less notably deficient in terms of the environment. It has also been announced that the Commission plans to launch a pilot action in the autumn of 1995 entitled 'Euromanagement-Environment.' This pilot action envisages enlisting the aid of 50

consultants to evaluate the deficiency amongst 500- 700 SMEs and to accompany 50 craft sector and small enterprises toward 'eco-audit' certification.

The debates also shed light on certain abuses on the part of large companies (automobile sector) with regard to subcontracting SMEs such as late payments, economic penalisation for not respecting delivery deadlines and the impossibility to renegotiate fixed prices. 'SMEs are increasingly looked upon as emergency buffers against market fluctuations'. In the view of the Commission representative, it is imperative that the subcontractors be helped to move on, in partnership with large industries, 'to a situation of interdependence rather than dependence in the industrial sense'.

Is legislation on late payments or on contractual relations really necessary? Participants held various opinions on this subject. Some felt that, during a recession, late payments become the general rule and legislation is necessary. Others considered that, if a genuine partnership exists, it is not absolutely necessary to regulate and that a greater respect for the existing provisions would suffice.

For further information: EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG XXIII — Interinstitutional Relations
Jocelyne GAUDIN
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Fax: + 32-2/296.62.78

THE CRAFT SECTOR:

A Call for Proposals under 'Support for Transnational Cooperation between Craft Sector Enterprises and Very Small Enterprises'

Within the framework of the Council Decision of 14 June 1993 concerning the pluriannual programme for SMEs and the Craft Sector, the Commission has decided to launch a call for proposals (no 504/94) 'Support for Transnational Cooperation between Craft Sector Enterprises and Very Small Enterprises'. As announced in the Official Journal of the European Communities (94/c 282/07 of 1 December 1994), the projects can be submitted **up to 14 November 1995**. This action is directed toward organisations with a solid experience in the field of counselling and supporting craft sector and very small enterprises. Through meetings between enterprises set up by supporting organisations, projects should facilitate contacts between potential partners within the European Union and other members of the European Economic Area. They should also promote the creation of long-term partnerships in order to allow craft sector enterprises to take advantage of the European Single Market. Each pilot project should involve supporting organisations and enterprises from at least two states from the European Economic Area. The Commission will cover as much as 50% of the total cost of each project accepted, up to a limit of 20,000 ECU.

For further information: EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG XXIII — Improvement of Enterprise Access Conditions to the Market
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Fax: + 32-2/295.21.54

'GROWTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT': Helping SMEs Invest in Environment Protection Measures

SMEs experience difficulties in finding financing at a reasonable cost. If they find it, they are not always able to provide the guarantees, securities or collateral required. Moreover, SMEs incorporate only very few ecological considerations in their strategies. In the light of this three-pronged realisation the Commission approved on 23 June 1995 the '**growth and environment**' initiative. This pilot project is designed to help SMEs (particularly small enterprises with 50 employees or less) invest in production activities (including services), environmental protection measures (such as energy conservation, the implementation of clean technologies and the bolstering of safety and hygiene measures). Implemented upon the demand of the European Parliament which had reserved 9 million ECU for this purpose in the Community Budget for 1995, this initiative provides for financing loan guarantees such as those granted by the European Investment Fund (EIF). The loans themselves will go to finance projects with beneficial effects for the environment. A call for a show of interest

was

published in the Official Journal of the European Communities³ in order to select the financial establishments eligible to request loan guarantees. In order to limit the number of proposals accepted an evaluation procedure will be employed which takes into account the experience available to the financial institutions for evaluating the ecological value of the different projects.

For further information: EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG XXIII/B3 — Improvement of Enterprise Access Conditions to the Market
'Growth and Environment'
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Fax: +32-2/295.21.54

DG II — Economic and Financial Affairs
Unite II-E-1 (Office BU5-2/183)
rue de la Loi, 200 — B-1049 BRUSSELS
Fax: +32-2/296.4312

EUROPARTENARIAT PORTUGAL 1995:

At Lisbon on 24 — 25 November 1995

EUROPARTENARIAT is designed to contribute to the development of a region or a group of regions which are less developed or in industrial decline by promoting cooperation between SMEs from these regions and SMEs of the European Union and the European Economic Area, Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean basin. Europartenariat operates along rather simple lines: pre-arranged meetings allow heads of enterprises from the host region to establish direct contact with visiting businessmen from throughout Europe. Meetings between entrepreneurs will take place at Lisbon on 24 and 25 November 1995 at the *Feira Internacional de Lisboa*. A catalogue containing the profiles and offers and requests for cooperation of the 406 Portuguese enterprises selected to participate has been widely distributed throughout Europe by a network of specialised national consultants (see list below) with the support of such Community networks as the BC-NET, EURO-INFO- CENTRES and the European Centres for Enterprise and Innovation.

The 406 Portuguese enterprises listed in the catalogue are active in the following sectors: textile/clothing (19%); services and trade (15%); chemical and plastic products industry (12%); metallurgy (12%); wood (11%); machines and equipment (10%); ceramics and mineral products (6%). An average of 30 to 40% of the enterprises participating in the Europartenariat actually establish a cooperation agreement. The seminars organised during the EUROPARTENARIAT provide immediate information on the economic, social and fiscal situation of Portugal while describing the types of financial aid available. Next year EUROPARTENARIAT NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA will be held in Lulea (Sweden) on 13 and 14 June 1996.

To obtain the EUROPARTENARIAT Portugal catalogue or for information on how to formalise your project, the following national consultants contact:

AUSTRIA:

Mr Heinz Hundertpfund / Mr Heinz Kaufmann — Austrian Federal Economic Chamber — Wiedner Hauptstrasse, 63 — A-1045 WIEN — Tel: +43-1-50105.4308/4305 — Fax: +43-1-50206.255

BELGIUM

Mr Jos Helsen / Mr Ivo Peeters — GOM Vlaams-Brabant — Toekomststraat 36-38 — B-1800 VILVOORDE — Tel: +32-2/251.51.71 — Fax: +32-2/252.45.94

Mis Corinne De Rycker — SOCRAN — Parc Scientifique du Sart-Tilman — Avenue Pré-Aily — B-4031 Angleur — Tel: +32-41/67.83.33 — Fax: +32/41/67.83.00

DENMARK:

Mr Per Sondergaard — Danish Chamber of Commerce — Borsen — DK-1217 KOBENHAVN — Tel: +45-33/95.05.00 — Fax: +45-33/32.52.16

FRANCE:

Miss Anne Sibille — ACFCI — Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerces et d'Industrie — 45, Avenue d'Iéna — F-75116 PARIS — Tel: +33-1/40.69.37.96 — Fax: +33- 1/40.69.38.08

³ OJ of the CE no. C 177 of 12.07.95

GERMANY:

Miss Elke Kornberger / Herr Yiannis Neophytou — IHK-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Aussenwirtschaft und der Unternehmensführung GmbH — Schedestrasse 11 — D-53113 BONN — Tel: +49-228/104.236 — +49-228/104.165 — Fax: +49-228/104.238

Miss Katrin Ruh — IHK-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Aussenwirtschaft und der Unternehmensführung GmbH — Schönholzer Strasse 10-11 — D-13187 BERLIN — Tel: +49- 30/488.06130 — +49-30/488.06103

GREECE:

Mr Babis Filadarlis — Exporters' Association of Northern Greece — 1, Morihovou Square — GR-54625 THESSALONIKI — Tel: +30-31/54.61.03 — 30-31/54.54.57 — Fax: +30-31/54.61.03

IRELAND:

Mr Brendan Flood — The Irish Trade Board (An Bord Trachtala) Merrion Hall, Strand Road, Sandymount — PO Box 203 — IRL-DUBLIN 4 — Tel: +353-1/269.50.11 — Fax: +353- 1/269.58.20

ITALY:

Mr Flavio Burlizzi — Mondimpresa — Via di Porta Pinciana, 36 — I-00187 ROMA — Tel: +39- 6/488.40.55 — Fax: +39.6/474.60.92

LUXEMBOURG:

Mr A.J. Brands — EMDA Institute — 117, Route de Stavelot — L-9991 WEISWAMPACH — Tel: +352/ 97.91.17 — Fax: +352/97.90.99

THE NETHERLANDS:

Ms Henriette D. van de Polder / Mr Ruud M.C. Geene — NCH, Netherlands' Council for Trade promotion — Bezuidenhoutseweg 181 — PO Box 10 — NL — 2501 CA DEN HAAG — Tel: +31-70/344.15.44 — Fax: +31-70/385.35.31

SPAIN:

Miss Elena Moreno — IMPI, Instituto de la Pequeña y Meidana Empresas Industria — Paseo de la Castellana, 141 — E-28046 MADRID — Tel: +34-91/582.93.46 — +34-91/582.93.95 — Fax: +34-91/582.94.00

UNITED KINGDOM:

England and Wales:

Mr Steven Baker — The Association of British Chambers of Commerce — 4 Westwood House, Westwood Business Park — GB-COVENTRY CV4 8HS — Tel: +44-1203/694.484 — Fax: +44-1203/694.690

Northern Ireland:

Mr Arthur Bell — Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry — 22 Great Victoria Street — GB-BELFAST BT2 7BJ — Tel: +44-1232/24.41.13 — Fax: +44-1232/24.70.24

Scotland

Ms Agnes Barclay — Scottish Innovation — Unit A!, Building 1, Templeton Business Centre — 62 Templeton Street — GB- Glasgow G40 1DA — Tel: +44-141/554.59.95 — Fax: +44- 141/556.63.20

FINLAND:

Mr Timo Karisto — The Finnish Foreign Trade Association — Arkadiankatu 2 — PO Box 908 — SF-00101 HELSINKI — Tel: +358-0/695.93.88 — Fax: +358-0/685.15.73

SWEDEN:

Ms Brigitta Svensson — NUTEK, Swedish National Board for Industrial & Technological Development — S-11786 STOCKHOLM — Tel: +46-8/681.94.66 — Fax: +46-8/744.40.45

For further information: EUROPARTENARIAT PORTUGAL 1995

Secretariado
rua Rodrigo da Fonseca, 73
P-1297 LISBOA (Portugal)
Tel: +351-1/386.02.29
Fax: +351-1/386.20.22

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG XXIII — EUROPARTENARIAT
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Fax: +32-2/295.17.40

EU/CHINA: Towards a Long Strategy

The European Commission has decided the time has come to redefine a long term China strategy with regard to China in terms of political relations (integrate China into the international community, ensure respect for human rights, etc) as well as economic relations (acceptance of the market economy) and commercial

relations (promote China's joining the WTO, improve bilateral trade dialogue). The Commission also seeks to promote cooperation in a wide range of areas: support for the development of human resources, training actions, cooperation between enterprises, and the establishment of information centres for enterprises. In a communication⁴ adopted on 5 July 1995 the Commission considers that the economic reform in China is by now irreversible. The size of the Chinese economy is now estimated to be similar to that of Japan's. Since the beginning of reforms the volume of commercial traffic between the European Union and China has multiplied fourteen times, and reached 35 billion ECU in 1994. The EU has gone from a trade surplus in 1980 to a trade deficit of more than 10 billion ECU over the course of the last four years. The European Union's share of total direct foreign investments is still desperately low when compared to the EU's share in other emerging markets. In addition, both in China and in Europe, European enterprises are judged to be less dynamic than their American or Japanese competitors. Obviously it is up to enterprises themselves to establish plans for expanding into China, but the European Union can help them take their investment decisions intelligently by improving the flow of information and by stimulating contacts between enterprises while remaining aware of the fact that large enterprises and SMEs have different needs. China is currently the fourth largest market and the fourth most important supplier of goods to the EU. The Chinese market could become the most important market in the world in many high tech sectors such as telecommunications, aeronautics, computers or even energy.

For Subcontractors in the electronics industry:

A MISSION TO CHINA FROM 11 TO 19 NOVEMBER

Organised with the support of the European Commission and the Chinese Ministry of Electronics Industry, a mission composed of European manufacturers and subcontractors of electronics material will travel to Beijing from 11 to 19 November 1995. The mission will allow participants not only to receive a higher degree of precise information concerning the conditions and opportunities offered by the Chinese market in the electronics industry, but also to meet (under prearranged appointments) more than 100 Chinese subcontractors with a view toward establishing profitable partnership relations.

For further information: EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DG XXIII — Community Actions in Favour of Subcontracting

Theodoros KALLIANOS

rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)

B-1049 BRUSSELS

Tel: +32-2/295.85.91

Fax: +32-2/296.60.48

Organiser:

International Cooperation Europe Limited (ICEL)

Ms Jacqueline GRIMES

Wilton Park House

Wilton Place — Dublin 2 — Ireland

Tel: +353-1/668.75.55

Fax: +353-1/660.17.33

⁴ COM(95) 279 — A Long Term Policy for Relations between China and Europe

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

A New Publication: 'TRADE AND COMPETITION'

Following upon its study on the 'Measures Concerning Trade in the European Union', DG XXIII — Trade and Distribution Unit — has recently published **volume 2: 'Trade and Competitiveness'**, number 25 of the studies already published in the trade and distribution series.

This study, carried out under the auspices of the European Commission, describes the competition rules in force in the European Union, as well as those already in existence in the various Member States (with the exception of the new members which have not been included). The trade and distribution sector is undergoing continual and rapid evolution, and is particularly aware of and concerned by the current regulatory framework for competition. The study should allow entrepreneurs to understand the principles, to appreciate the restrictions and the stakes in order to protect their interests even better.

This study of 96 pages is available, free of charge, in German, English and French.

Volume 1: 'Construction and location of commercial premises, published in 1994 in three languages, is still available.

For further information: EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG XXIII/A2 — Trade and Distribution
Olivier ZABOROWSKI
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)
B-1049 BRUSSELS
Tel: +32-2/295.38.67 — 295.12.46
Fax: +32-2/295.89.84

EURO-CONTRACT 1995, on 5 and 6 October 1995 at Brussels

EURO-CONTRACT '95: The Inverted Trade-Show Approach where the principles and their buyers welcome subcontractors. EURO-CONTRACT organises prearranged meetings according to the precise request of the buyers and the specific capacities of the subcontractors to respond to them and to propose sites to the principles from the different industrial regions in Europe. Alcatel (B), Cockerill Sambre (B), GEC Alsthom (B), HuwillWerke GmbH (D), MATRA (F), Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NL), SNCF (F), Volkswagen (B), Senior Thermal engineering Ltd (UK) have all confirmed the participation of their buyers and more than 300 precise business proposals have been drafted. Sectors concerned are: electrotechnical and electronics, plastics manufacturing, metallic manufacturing and mechanics, chemical, industrial equipment.

To obtain a registration form and the list of business offers: contact EURO- CONTRACT '95 — c/o Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Bruxelles — Théo VAN DEN BOECK or Bernard BOTTE — 500 avenue Louise — B-150 Bruxelles — Tel: +32-2/64850.02 — Fax: +32-2/640.93.28

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For further information or suggestions, write to:

Directorate General XXIII Enterprise Policy, Trade, Tourism and Cooperatives

Anne-Marie DE JONGHE, Euro-Info — Rue de la Loi 200 (AN 80), B — 1049 BRUSSELS — Fax: +32-2/295.21.54

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