

## *The European Commission Asks the Fifteen to Reinforce their Policies in Favour of SMEs*



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The European Commission approved on 29 November 1995 a report<sup>1</sup> on the 'Role of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: a dynamic source of employment, growth and competitiveness in the European Union'. This document, which was transmitted to the Madrid European Council of 15-16 December 1995, clearly states to heads of State and Government that it is essential for Member States and the European Union to strengthen their policies in favour of SMEs and — in the words of Mr Christos PAPOUTSIS, Commissioner responsible for enterprise policy — to become 'smart and bold with the small' while encouraging a spirit of enterprise at all levels.

For increased employment and growth, a **truly entrepreneurial culture** must be recreated and stimulated, based on values such as self-reliance, risk-taking and a sense of personal commitment. This requires action to change attitudes, starting with educational and training systems and covering the relationship between the entrepreneur and public administrations, financial institutions and large businesses.

In order to maximise the contribution of SMEs to growth, competitiveness and employment, it is essential that Member States and the European Union strengthen and coordinate their policies in favour of small and medium-sized enterprises. The European Union can play a vital and complimentary role by watching over the maximum development of SMEs while fully respecting the principle of subsidiarity.

With this in mind, the Commission proposes a series of measures in the context of a development strategy in favour of SMEs and suggests that the following priority policies and measures should be undertaken by Member States and the EU. These should also form the basis of the next multiannual programme for SMEs and the craft sector for the period 1997- 2000.

**Reduce the Red Tape which Hampers European Entrepreneurship.** Member States and the Commission should develop a bold strategy of administrative and regulatory simplification based on benchmarked cost-reduction targets and including a simpler VAT system. Access

<sup>1</sup> CSE(95) 2087

to all SME programmes must become simpler and more streamlined. In this context, the role of the Euro Info Centres should be promoted as 'first stop shops' for Community programmes.

**Ensure Better Involvement of SMEs in the Decision-Making Process.** Member States and the European Commission should improve consultation of SME organisations when preparing policies of relevance to them, and should encourage their full involvement.

**Help Finance SMEs which Create New Jobs.** Tax discrimination between debt and equity should be reduced and eventually eliminated. The Commission and the Member States should take the necessary measures to encourage the creation of capital markets for SMEs in Europe; in particular the pan-European capital market for SMEs (EASDAQ). This should be facilitated by removing all existing legal, regulatory or fiscal barriers by the end of 1996. Furthermore, the Edinburgh SME Loan Facility should be extended by ECU 2 billion, with interest subsidies for SMEs which create new jobs.

**Reduce Market Distortions and Insufficiencies.** The Commission and the Member States should ensure that competition be progressively introduced in protected markets and market distortions from State Aid minimised. In addition, public procurement opportunities for SMEs, including cross border procurement, should be expanded.

**Promote Research, Innovation and Training to Assist SMEs.** The Commission and the Member States should encourage by all appropriate means the creation of firms based on new technologies; ensure greater participation of SMEs in the Community's major research and training programmes; and implement these new technologies along with a spirit of enterprise throughout the European Union.

**Strengthen the Competitiveness and Internationalisation of SMEs.** In order to enhance the internationalisation of SMEs, the next multiannual programme in favour of SMEs will emphasise the need to support existing policies, complete the single market, improve networks, and assist exports and industrial cooperation.

**For further information:** EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DG XXIII — General Enterprise Policy  
Reinhard SCHULTE-BRAUCKS  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: + 32-2/295.17.40

## EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY FOR SMEs: Commission Comments on the Third Annual Report (1995)

In a communication<sup>2</sup> adopted 8 November 1995, the European Commission welcomes the global conclusions of the Third Annual Report (1995) of the European Observatory for SMEs which was presented to the Commission on 23 March 1995.

In 1992 the Directorate-General XXIII of the European Commission (Enterprise Policy, Commerce, Tourism and Social Economy) decided to support the creation of a 'European Observatory for SMEs'. Its mission was to provide the Commission with structured information aimed at aiding and developing policies in favour of SMEs and the craft sector by means of preparing an independent Annual Report giving a structured overview of SMEs and the craft sector in Europe which is both quantitative and qualitative. Each Annual Report assesses the present situation and new prospects, and presents a study on a topic of particular importance. The study in the first report (1993) examined the internationalisation of SMEs, while the second report (1994) looked at the craft sector. In its Third Annual Report (1995), the Observatory for SMEs presents a study on 'administrative burdens' and another on 'secondary producer services'. The Third Annual Report of the European Observatory for SMEs (available in English, French and German) was produced by the European Network for SME Research (ENSR). ENSR is a network covering the entire European Union plus Norway, and regroups organisations specialised in SME research. Coordination is provided by EIM Small Business Research and Consultancy in the Netherlands.

**For further information:** EIM Small Business Research and Consultancy — PO Box 7001 — 2701 AA ZOETERMEER — The Netherlands — Tel: + 31.79.413.634 — Fax: + 31.79.425.786

<sup>2</sup> COM(95) 526 final

In its 1995 report, the Observatory clearly shows that over the past six years the business environment in which SMEs operate has improved and that the completion of the single market seems to have had a favourable influence on the results of SMEs. However, it also leads to the conclusion that SMEs are not yet fully benefiting from the current economic recovery. Compared to the 1988-93 period, in which SMEs more than compensated for job losses in larger enterprises, the SME job creating machine is now stagnating. The report points out the continuing need to encourage consultation and coordination in order to achieve an exchange of good practices between the Member States. According to the Commission, the Observatory's report 'rightly' refers to the fundamental changes in the context in which SMEs are operating in the European Union. It refers particularly to the globalisation of markets, at both European and world level, and the development of the information society. These fundamental changes call for accompanying measures to assist SMEs to face up to these new challenges. In particular, the Commission considers that this Report underlines a number of useful elements, namely as regards:

- the need to consider further and develop differentiated policy approaches and instruments, tailored to the specific needs of different types of enterprises, according to their size and place in the economic fabric;
- the importance of improving and simplifying the business environment with a view to reducing burdens on businesses and unlocking their potential to create jobs, by providing adequate information and counselling as well as training for newly created enterprises;
- the importance of encouraging changes in work organisation and working time, reducing non-wage labour costs, especially at the lower end of the wage and productivity scale, and improving the effectiveness of labour market policies and measures designed to fight against social exclusion;
- the disproportionate incidence on SMEs of costs related to compulsory administrative procedures that enterprises are obliged to carry out and the opportunity for engaging a Community effort aimed at reducing administrative burdens.

**For further information:** EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DG XXIII — European Observatory for SMEs  
Carlos TENREIRO  
rue de la Loi, 200 — B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Tel: +32-2/295.64.33  
Fax: +32-2/295.55.40

## **BC-Net and BRE: Examination of the Composition of the Cooperation Networks**

In the context of bolstering the policy on quality the Central Units of BC-Net (Business Cooperation Network) and of BRE (Business Cooperation Centre) have undertaken their annual examination of the composition of their cooperation networks for 1996.

**BC-Net** — network of consultants and intermediaries who help SMEs in their search for partners at the regional, national, Community or international levels — has taken its place as a 'human network' in which the commitment and quality of its consultants play a vital role in the process of developing and improving the network. The Central Unit of BC-Net has analysed the importance of its members' activities on the basis of a standardised evaluation grid composed of the different events and activities of the network. The agreements signed with the Commission by some 70 members of BC-Net were rescinded as of 31 December 1995. On 1 January 1996 BC-Net saw the number of its member consultants rise to 307. In the context of the expansion of the BC-Net network to the new Member States (Austria, Finland and Sweden), a call for candidates was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities<sup>3</sup>. A call for candidates from the other Member States will be published during 1996.

The **BRE** (Bureau de Rapprochement des entreprises) is another instrument implemented with a view to assisting SMEs in search of partners in other countries. It functions on the local level through a network of correspondents set up throughout the EU and in a number of third countries. Based on an evaluation aimed at determining the number of 'cooperation profile' forms sent in, the number of cooperation opportunities distributed and the promotion they received, the Commission sent 82 letters of encouragement to those correspondents whose activities needed beefing up, and 110 warning letters to correspondents whose agreements with the Commission were to be rescinded at the end of december 1995 unless a significant upsurge in their activities occurred before that date. On 1 November 1995 the BRE network had 522 correspondents established in 70 countries. 10 new countries were welcomed into the network in 1995. These are Egypt, Jordan, El Salvador, Georgia, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Russia, Bielorussia, Azerbaidjan and Moldavia.

<sup>3</sup> Official Journal of the European Communities — C 325 or S 233 of 6 December 1995

**The expansion of the BRE** in third countries continues. Several candidates from the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Honduras, South Africa and Syria are being considered.

**For further information:** EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DG XXIII — BC-Net Secretariat  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: + 32-2/296.25.72

DG XXIII — BRE Secretariat  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: + 32-2/296.60.48

## **EUROPARTENARIAT: After Lisbon, Luleå**

For the first time in four years since the one held in Oporto in 1991, Portugal hosted a EUROPARTENARIAT event on 24 and 25 November 1995 in Lisbon. During this thirteenth EUROPARTENARIAT event, 406 Portuguese SMEs, selected on the basis of their results and dynamism, met with representatives of some 2,100 enterprises from throughout the European Union, the Mediterranean Basin, countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the CIS and Latin America in order to discuss cooperation projects and to conclude agreements. Approximately 10,500 prearranged meetings gave heads of Portuguese enterprises the opportunity to establish productive contacts with their foreign counterparts in a favourable business climate.

The next EUROPARTENARIAT will be held in Luleå, Sweden on 13-14 June 1996. EUROPARTENARIAT NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA will allow 400 dynamic small and medium-sized enterprises from the north of Sweden, Finland and Norway to meet firms from the European Union as well as from third countries (Baltic States, Central and Eastern Europe, Mediterranean countries) with the aim of entering into interregional and transnational cooperation agreements. A catalogue containing the Scandinavian SMEs' profiles and their offers and requests for cooperation will be distributed throughout Europe as of February 1996 by means of a network of specialised consultants.

Europartenariat, launched by the Commission in 1987, is a joint initiative of Direction XXIII — Enterprise Policy — and DG XVI — Regional Policy and Cohesion Funds. Its purpose is to encourage economic cooperation amongst SMEs and to strengthen the competitiveness of the European economy as a whole as well as to stimulate the development of less favoured regions by establishing permanent relations between enterprises from the host region and their counterparts in the other regions of the Community. Based on existing data, some 60% of the meetings have led to partnerships, while 40% give rise to signed cooperation agreements.

**For further information:** EUROPARTENARIAT NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA 1996  
Varvsgatan 41  
S-97232 LULEÅ — Sweden  
Tel: +46-920/23.15.55  
Fax: +46-920/23.15.60

DG XXIII/B2 — EUROPARTENARIAT  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: + 32-2/295.17.40

## **COMMUNITY INITIATIVE FOR SMEs: Adoption of Regional Programmes**

During its meeting of 15 June 1994, the European Commission decided to implement a Community initiative aimed at adapting small and medium-sized enterprises to the single market.<sup>4</sup> With a budget of ECU 1 billion for the period 1994-1999 — of which ECU 800 million are earmarked for Objective 1 regions — the Community SME initiative forms part of the combined actions implemented under the Integrated Programme in

<sup>4</sup> Official Journal of the European Communities — C 180 of 1 July 1994

Favour of SMEs and the Craft Sector. Its object is to help SMEs in the industrial or service sectors, especially those in regions of slow development, to adapt to the single market and aims to allow them to acquire a solid level of competitiveness on the international level. To this effect, seven priorities have been established: improvement of the systems of production and organisation of SMEs; consideration for the environment and a rational use of energy; strengthening of cooperation between research centres and SMEs; improvement of access to new markets; development of cooperation and networks; enhancement of professional qualifications; improvement of SME access to financing and credit.

In 1995, in the context of the Community's SME initiative, the European Commission gave its approval to a series of development programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises in **the Netherlands** (Flevoland, Groeningen, Drenthe, Twente, Arnhem- Nijmegen, Zuidoost, Brabant and Zuid Limburg), in **the United Kingdom** (Wales, Lowlands and Highlands & Islands in Scotland, and Northern Ireland), in **Germany**, (Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, North Rhein-Westphalia, Mecklenbourg-Vorpommern, Bremen, Berlin), in **Ireland**, in **Greece**, and in **Belgium** (Wallonia).

For information on specific actions for which a Community competition is planned and to apply for financing, please contact:

- **for the Netherlands:** Ministerie voor Economische Zaken — Regionaal Politiek: POB 20101 — NL-2500 CE DEN HAAG — Tel.: +31-70.379.61.75 — Fax: +31-70.379.60.95
- **for the United Kingdom:**
  - Wales:** Welsh Office — Alan LANDSDOWN — Cathays Park — CARDIFF CF1 3NQ — Fax: +44-12.22.82-39.00
  - Scotland:**
    - LOWLAND SCOTLAND — Scottish Office Development Department — Jim MILLARD — Victoria Quay — EH6 6QQ EDINBURG — SCOTLAND — Tel.: +44-131.244.06.92 — Fax: +44-131-244.07.38
    - HIGHLAND and ISLANDS: Highland and Islands Enterprises — M. GASKELL — Bridge House 20 — INVERNESS — Tel.: +44-14.63.23.41.71 — Fax: +44-14.63-244.969
  - Northern Ireland:** Local Enterprise Development Unit (L.E.D.U.) — Ledu House — Upper Galwally — BT8 4TB BELFAST — Tel.: +44-1232-49.10.31 — Fax: +44-1232-69.14.32
- **for Germany:**
  - Mecklenburg-Vorpommern:** Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Angelegenheiten der Europäischen Union des Landes Mecklenburg-Vorpommern — J. Stellingstrasse, 14 — D-19053 SCHWERIN — Tel.: +49-385-588.57.01
  - Saxe-Anhalt:** Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Technologie des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt — Herr TIEMANN — Wilhelm-Höpfner-Ring 4 — D-39116 MAGDEBURG — Tel.: +49-39-567-4407 — Fax: +49-0391/567-4450
  - Berlin:** Senatsverwaltung für Wirtschaft und Technologie des Landes Berlin — Referat II C — Christiane STERNBERG — Martin-Luther-Strasse 105 — D-10825 BERLIN — Tel.: +49-30-7876.3887 — Fax: +49-30-7876.3490
  - Bremen:** Senator für Wirtschaft, Mittelstand und Technologie der Freien Hansestadt Bremen-Zweite Schlachtpforte, 3 — D-28195 BREMEN — Tel.: +49-421/361-8604 — Fax: +49-421/361-8810
  - Saxony:** Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit — Referat 26 — Budapester strasse 5 — D-01069 DRESDEN — Tel.: +49-351-5648270
  - North Rhein-Westfalia:** Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Mittelstand und Technologie des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen — D-40190 DÜSSELDORF — Tel.: +49-211/837-2504
- **for Ireland:** Dep. of Enterprise & Employment — Small Businesses & Services Division — Davitt House — Adelaide Road — IRL-DUBLIN 2 — M. Eugène STUART — Tel.: +353-1/661.44.44 — Fax: +353-1/676.90.47
- **for Greece:** Ministry of Industry, Energy and Technology — Michala Kopoulou, 80 — GR-10192 ATHENS — Tel.: +30-1-775.29.04 — Fax: +30-1-770.48.98
- **for Belgium:** Ministère de la Région Wallonne — Direction générale de l'économie et de l'emploi — Daniel COLLET — 1, place de la Wallonie — B-5100 JAMBES — Tel.: +32-81-33.39.19 — Fax: +32-81-33.37.44

## **INTERPRISE:**

### **Encouraging Partnerships between Industries and/or Services in Europe**

The INTERPRISE programme is designed to support local, regional and national actions aimed at stimulating direct contacts (ie personalised meetings) between heads of enterprises with a view towards establishing co-operation agreements between small and medium-sized enterprises. The projects must include at least three regions from three European Union countries and may, in certain instances, also be extended to regions from non-member countries. A specific action — MED-INTERPRISE — has been set up within the framework of MED-INVEST for third countries from the Mediterranean basin.

Each project originates from a local initiative sponsored by such organisations as chambers of commerce and industry, local, regional or national development agencies, European Business and Innovation Centres (EBIC), Euro-Info Centres, BC-Net/BRE, research centres, or private consultants. Each project must be submitted to the Commission at least nine months before the date of the event and must involve at least 15 to 20 enterprises from each region. The European Commission can provide as much as 50% of the event's total budget, up to a maximum of 50,000 ECU.

The following INTERPRISE events will take place during the next few months:

#### **INTERPRISE 'EUROPEIA'**

*Meetings:* 26 to 28 February 1996 at PARIS (France)

*Countries involved:* France, United Kingdom, Italy

*Sectors:* agriculture and agro-industry: animal sector

*Organisation:* ACTIM — Alain ROCCA — 14, avenue d'Eylau — F-75116 PARIS — Tel.: +33-1-44.34.50.00 — Fax: +33-1-44.34.50.01

#### **INTERPRISE 'TRANSPORT ET LOGISTIQUE'**

*Meetings:* 1 to 2 March 1996 at MACON (France)

*Countries involved:* France, Spain, United Kingdom

*Sectors:* transport and logistics

*Organisation:* MACON DEVELOPPEMENT — MAIRIE DE MACON — M.J.-F. BARON — Hôtel de Ville — Quai Lamartine — F-72018 MACON — France — Tel.: +33-85.39.71.00 — Fax: +33-85.39.71.29

#### **INTERPRISE EUROPHARMATECH '96**

*Meetings:* 4 and 5 March 1996 at VENICE (Italy)

*Countries involved:* Italy, Denmark, France

*Sectors:* medical equipment, biomedical engineering, pharmacy

*Organisation:* EUROSERVIZI — M<sup>me</sup> H. SADAUNE — Via Cipro 18A — I-30126 LIDO VENEZIA — Tel.: +39-41.526.75.85 — Fax: +39-41.526.92.59

#### **EURO FORUM 96 VENETO**

*Meetings:* 14 and 15 March 1996 at PADOVA (Italy)

*Countries involved:* Italy, Czech and Slovak Republics, Germany, Spain, Hungary, Slovenia

*Sectors:* light mechanics

*Organisation:* CNA — ASSOCIAZIONE PROVINCIALE DI PADOVA — M. F. CONZATO — Via Croce Rossa, 56 — I-35129 PADOVA — Italy — Tel.: +39-49.80.75.088 — Fax: +39-49.80.75.099

#### **INTERPRISE AMEUBLEMENT**

*Meetings:* 28 and 29 March 1996 at UDINE (Italy)

*Countries involved:* France, Spain, Greece, Italy

*Sectors:* furniture

*Organisation:* Chambre régionale des Métiers Midi-Pyrénées — M. B. RETON — rue de Metz, 28 — F-31000 TOULOUSE — France — Tel.: +33-61.53.17.74 — Fax: +33-61.25.38.96

#### **JOINT VENTURE CONFERENCE**

*Meetings:* 29 March 1996 at ATHENS (Greece)

*Countries involved:* Belgium, Austria, Czech and Slovak Republics, Germany, Greece, Italy

*Sectors:* mechanical engineering, metals, trade

*Organisation:* EMSU — M<sup>me</sup> U. BRAUN-MOSER — 4, rue de Lalaing — B-1040 Bruxelles — Belgium — Tel.: +32-2-230.28.60 — Fax: +32-2-230.65.72

- For further information on a particular INTERPRISE event, please contact the organisers.
- For information on the INTERPRISE PROGRAMME:  
EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DG XXIII/B2 — INTERPRISE  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)- B-1049 BRUSSELS — Fax: +32-2/295.17.40

## The First European Grand Prize for TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In an effort to increase the awareness of Member States and individual citizens of the need for environmental protection in the tourism industry, the European Commission launched in March 1995 the first European Grand prize for 'Tourism and the Environment'. All Members States of the EU, as well as Iceland and Norway, were eligible to compete. This prize aims to promote sustainable tourism which encourages the long term economic and social development of a particular village or region. It aims to reward exemplary cases of striving for a balance between tourism policy and respect for the environment. In order to encourage a large number of diverse applications, the Commission organised selections at national levels, followed by a selection at the European level. Each region was eligible to submit one or more applications to a national jury, which in turn presented from three to five dossiers from its country to the European jury.

On 22 November 1995 the European jury designated the city of KINSALE in Ireland as the winner of the first European Prize for 'TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT'. The three other finalists (the national park of Cévennes in France, the Weissensee region in Austria, and the Peak District National Park in the United Kingdom) each received a special certificate. In addition, the jury awarded eight special prizes to the following organisations or regions: Touristisches Zielgebiet Colbitz Letzlinger Heide (Germany), Oscos Eo (Spain), Päijänne, Lake District (Finland), British Waterways (United Kingdom), Historic Centre of Corfu Town and Vido Island (Greece), Veluwe Mobility Plan (Netherlands), Azores (Portugal), Ponte de Lima (Portugal).

### In Brief...

- **The decision on transparency in exceptions to the principle of free movement of goods** was the subject of a final adoption at the 'Internal Market' Council of 23 November 1995. This decision, which requires no transposition measures, establishes a procedure by which from 1 January 1997 the Member States will notify the Commission of measures which hinder the free movement of goods of a certain model or type which have been legally produced or marketed in another Member State. These measures must be reported if they result directly or indirectly in general prohibition, refusal of authorisation, modification of a model or type of good, or withdrawal from the market of a product. Various enquiries carried out for example on SMEs show that the lack of mutual recognition of national regulations which have not been harmonised at the Community level constitute an important barrier to trade within the single market. Reporting cases of refusal to allow on the market goods legally produced or marketed in another Member State will contribute to ensuring that mutual recognition functions correctly and with greater transparency, while guaranteeing the principle of free movement without having to implement a large-scale harmonisation of technical regulations at the Community level.
- **In order to raise the ceilings on state aid for research**, the European Commission adopted on 6 December 1995 a new framework for public assistance for research for the coming five years. The ceilings imposed by the European Union until now (25% for applied research — closest to the market — and 50% for basic research) could be raised under certain conditions. **Bonuses are possible for projects involving SMEs (+10%)** or located in less favoured regions (+10%) and for projects pertaining to the priorities of the Fourth Framework Programme (+15%). In addition, the intensity of the acceptable grants will likewise benefit (+10%) for projects with spin-offs for business as a whole: cross-border cooperation between independent enterprises; broad distribution of research results; cooperation between industry and university. Under the system adopted it would be possible, if necessary and with prior authorisation from the Commission, to attain the aid ceilings in areas of research agreed to under the Uruguay Round, ie 50% for applied research and 75% for basic research when justified by general interest. The system is to be applied immediately. Simultaneously, this new system will reduce the administrative burdens of enterprises and Member States. Prior notice will be limited to individual research projects which go beyond a cost of ECU 25 million and which have a grant of more than ECU 5 million.

- **On 5 December 1995 the European Commission adopted criteria for awarding the Community 'ecolabel' to single-base light-bulbs.** Readers will remember that being awarded the ecological label means that a producer is authorised to use the official flower-shaped logo on the product concerned. In accordance with Council Rule (CEE) no. 880/92 of 23 March 1992, the label is awarded to those goods within a range of products which have the least impact on the environment. The categories of products are carefully defined so that all products directly equivalent in terms of their use, are included in the same group. The system is voluntary. It is up to the manufacturer to decide, following publication of the criteria in the Official Journal, if he wishes to apply for the label. If his request is accepted, he can distribute his product with the label in the 15 Member States of the EU. To date, the ecological criteria have been published for washing machines (Official Journal L 198 of 7/8/93); dishwashers (OJ L 198 7/8/93); soil enriching agents (OJ L 364 of 31/12/94); toilet paper (OJ L 364 of 31/12/94); kitchen roll (OJ L 364 of 31/12/94); laundry detergents (OJ L 217 of 13/9/95) and now for single-base light-bulbs. The groups of priority products which should soon be eligible for an ecolabel are double-base electric bulbs, fine papers, T-shirts and bed linen.

**For further information:** EUROPEAN COMMISSION — DG XI/E4 — Environment — Mark MOYS  
— rue de la Loi, 200 — B-1049 BRUSSELS — Tel: +32-2/299.03.24 — Fax: +32- 2/295.56.84

- \* EURO-INFO is a newsletter for small businesses and craft trades. It is distributed free of charge to business organisations, associations and groups and to correspondents of the Business Cooperation Centre (BRE) to members of the BC-NET (Business Cooperation Network) and to EURO INFO CENTRES and to SME executives who request a copy. EURO-Info appears 10 times per year.
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Directorate General XXIII Enterprise Policy, Trade, Tourism and Cooperatives — Euro-Info — Paola PICCAROLO — Rue de la Loi 200 (AN 80), B — 1049 BRUSSELS — Tél.: +32-2/296.19.04 / 299.13.06 — Fax: +32-2/295.55.40

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