

Concerted Action N° 3 Increasing the Visibility and Efficiency of SME Support Services



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The 'Integrated Programme in Favour of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and the Craft Sector'¹ was implemented in 1994 to provide a global and coherent framework in which to incorporate all the different initiatives put into place to develop the full employment growth potential of SMEs at the Community, national and regional levels. In particular, the Integrated Programme provides for the implementation of a new type of initiatives, the so-called 'Concerted Actions'. This approach consists of encouraging the fifteen Member States and all other parties concerned with SME development to involve their measures in a dynamic of dialogue and partnership in a quest for greater visibility, efficiency and coherence. These measures are, on the one hand, designed to simplify the legal, administrative and fiscal conditions in which enterprises must function (concerted action n° 1) and, on the other, to examine the different SME aid packages for enterprises developed in the different Member States (concerted action n° 2) which aim at supporting SMEs in the most sensitive stages of their development, creation, growth, transferral). The method proposed consists in maintaining the 'Forums' which allow the Fifteen to exchange particularly innovative experiences and to compare the 'best practices' selected at the national, regional or local level. A third concerted action designed to encourage a greater utilisation of services offered to enterprises was established this year. It will be implemented through the organisation of the first Forum in DUBLIN on 18-19 November 1996 under the title '**Increasing the Visibility and Efficiency of SME Support Services**'. This Forum will combine workshops focused on specific topics with plenary sessions, and will provide participants with a greater awareness of the national, regional or local initiatives developed by the public

¹ COM(94) 207 Final

authorities or intermediaries aimed at the creation or development of enterprise support services (presentation of innovative experiences and 'best practice'). It will likewise allow participants to identify the best mechanisms for encouraging SMEs to use these services. This Forum, open to representatives of the public authorities, to intermediaries offering services to enterprises as well as to businessmen, is designed not only to provide better information on the conditions for adapting services to the real needs of SMEs, but also to increase the visibility and efficiency of measures taken in the field by stimulating better dialogue and communication between the businessman and the various support services.

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COMMUNITY SME INITIATIVE: Helping the SMEs of Baden-Württemberg to Adapt to the Internal Market

Quality management and ensuring quality are an increasingly important factor in terms of competitiveness and capacity for innovation. In order to help Baden-Württemberg, Germany adapt to the Internal Market and to carry out a policy of global quality management which includes the quality standards DIN ISO, the European Commission granted at the end of June 1996 an aid package of ECU 850,000. The total grant for this programme amounts to ECU 1.83 million: ECU 850,000 (46%) derive from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the remaining being made up of funds from private sources and craft chambers. The programme is designed to stimulate businesses located in rural zones such as Hohenlohekreis, Schäbisch Hall, Breisgau- Hochschwarzwald, Lörrach Waldshut,, Alb-Konaukreis and Sigmaringen.

The programme goals of informing, increasing awareness and disseminating know-how in such areas as quality management and establishing quality certificates will be carried out essentially by Chambers of Commerce and Craft Chambers.

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TEXTILE & CLOTHING: Towards a European Strategy

Three specialised working groups will study the future of the European textile industry. The working groups will be made up of representatives from industrial associations, trade unions and government, and will present a strategy for the sector by the end of this year. Such is the decision taken by the participants of the textile & clothing forum held in Brussels on 19 June 1996 before some 50 heads of professional associations and government representatives. The objective: search for solutions likely to help the sector overcome its problems.

The group in charge of **promoting competitiveness in the sector** will concentrate on coordinating the efforts of industry, Member States and the European Union in the areas of innovation, research and development, training, utilisation of information technologies and instruments of structural policy. The group dealing with 'external affairs' will present proposals concerning access to third country markets,

industrial cooperation with third countries, measures to combat fraud and other illicit practices. The group concerned with 'internal affairs' will study the functioning of the internal market for textiles & clothing, the potential for strengthening industrial cooperation within the European Union and questions dealing with State Aids.

EU/MEDITERRANEAN: Industrial Cooperation to Prepare a Free-Trade Zone

The fifteen industry ministers of the European Union and their colleagues from twelve Mediterranean countries² met in Brussels on 20-21 May 1996 during a conference on the industrial aspects of the new Euro-Mediterranean partnership established at the Conference of Barcelona on 27-28 November 1995. Against the backdrop of the process which will lead the European Union and its Mediterranean partners to establish a free-trade zone in the year 2010, the conference indicated the guidelines for starting up the process of modernisation and industrial development which will allow the creation of a shared zone of prosperity in the Mediterranean Basin.

In addition to a political declaration, the Brussels Conference adopted a work programme aimed at creating favourable legal, administrative, economic and financial conditions for investors while promoting actions in favour of cooperation between economic operators. The partnership initiatives between Euro-Mediterranean SMEs such as EUROPARTENARIAT, MED-PARTENARIAT, MED-INTERPRISE, Business Cooperation Centres (BCC), Business Cooperation Network (BC-Net), European Community Investment Partners (ECIP), Euro Info Correspondence Centres will be followed up and reinforced.

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 actions (organisation of personalised meetings) between heads of enterprises with a view to developing cooperation agreements between small and medium-sized enterprises. Projects must include at least three regions from three Member States of the European Union and, in certain cases, may involve regions from non-member countries. For Mediterranean third countries, a specific action — MED-INTERPRISE — exists under the MED-INVEST programme.

The following INTERPRISE events are scheduled over the coming months³:

● INTERPRISE ICELAND

Meetings: 20-21 September 1996 at REYKJAVIK, Iceland

Countries involved: Iceland, Germany, Denmark, United Kingdom

Sectors: the sea and fishing

Organisation: FEDERATION OF ICELANDIC INDUSTRIES — David LUDVIKSSON — Hallveigars-tigur 1 — IS-101-REYKJAVIK — Iceland — Tel.: +354-511.55.55 — Fax: +354-511.55.66

● INTERPRISE 'PARTNERS FOR LIMOUSIN WOOD'

Meetings: 21-22 October 1996 at POMPADOUR, France

Countries involved: France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, Portugal, Poland, Sweden

Sectors: industrial transformation of wood

Organisation: AGENCE REGIONALE DE DEVELOPPEMENT DU LIMOUSIN — Mrs DEMAZOIN — 27, boulevard de la Corderie — F-87031 LIMOGES — Tel.: +33-55.45.18.30 — Fax: +33-55.79.77.89

² Algeria, Palestinian Authority, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

³ See also EURO INFO 91 — June 1996

● **INTERPRISE 'TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS'**

Meetings: 24-25 October 1996 at Macon, France

Countries involved: France, Spain, United Kingdom

Sectors: transport and logistics

Organisation: MACON DEVELOPPEMENT — Mairie de Macon — Jean-François BARON — Hôtel de Ville — Quai Lamartine — F-71018 MACON — France — Tel.: +33-85.39.71.00 — Fax: +33-85.39.71.29.

● **INTERPRISE TELEMATICS**

Meetings: 25-26 October 1996 at BERLIN, Germany

Countries involved: Germany, Denmark

Sectors: Telematics (transport, elderly and handicapped persons, the environment)

Organisation: ELOQU METABASIS GmbH — Michael SANDROCK — Alt Moabit 96C — D-10559 BERLIN — Allemagne — Tel.: +49-30.39.90.23.20 — Fax: +49-30.39.90.23.22

● **EURO REGIO PARTNERS**

Meetings: 7-8 November 1996 at LUXEMBOURG, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Countries involved: Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Slovak Republic

Sectors: industrial equipment and subcontracting

Organisation: EIC — CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE DU GRAND DUCHE DE LUXEMBOURG — M^{me} S. SAGRAMOLA, M. HIPPERT — rue Alcide De Gasperi, 7 — BP 1304 — L-1013 LUXEMBOURG — Tel.: +352-42.39.39-1 — Fax: +352-43.83.26

For information on a specific INTERPRISE event, contact the organiser.

For further 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

GREEN PAPER on Commercial Communications in the Internal Market

The problems encountered in completing the internal market in the area of commercial communications (all forms of publicity, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations activities, sponsorship)⁴ as well as future policy in this field make up the subject matter covered by the Green Paper⁵ which the European Commission adopted on 8 May 1996. The Green Paper analyses the disparities between national regulations in this area. Considering the increasing internationalisation of these services, the current problems could become even more serious with the growth of the Information Society. The Green Paper solicits the advice of the Member States, the European Parliament and interested circles (business and associations) on the procedure they suggest for evaluating the proportionality and coherence of the national and Community measures which govern this important sector of the economy, and for establishing a structured dialogue at the European level (creation of a committee composed of representatives from the Member States, chaired by the European Commission) with a view to improving coordination between the interested spheres.

Comments on the analysis and the proposals contained in the Green Paper should be sent to the European Commission before 30 October 1996. The Commission will decide on the nature and form of its action in this area in accordance with the response received from the interested parties.

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⁴ **Commercial Communication:** all forms of communication aimed at promoting the products, services or image of an enterprise or an organisation to the end user or distributors.

⁵ COM(96)192 Final — Commercial Communications in the Internal Market — Commission Green Paper.

EUROPE'S 500: The 'Hit Parade' of the Best Performing SMEs

In the presence of Christos PAPOUTSIS, Member of the European Commission responsible for small and medium-sized enterprises, the Round Table of Dynamic Entrepreneurs (ERTDE) began its activities in Brussels in mid-May. This new association regroups, in accordance with well-established criteria, 500 small and medium-sized enterprises judged to be among the best performing in Europe (European Union, plus Norway and Iceland). Its goal is to make the best performing enterprises in Europe known to the public, to assist them, to help young people create their own companies, and to advise political decision-makers — at the national and European level — on the best measures for motivating and encouraging a generation of high-performing and dynamic SMEs. While many specialists have tried to determine the obstacles to starting up an SME, little has been written on the reasons for growth in SMEs nor on the characteristics of the best performing enterprises in terms of creating wealth and employment. Under the patronage of the European Commission, EFER (European foundation for Entrepreneurship Research) has published — in cooperation with IP Strategies, Ernst & Young and EIM Small Business Research and Consultancy — a directory with information on the 500 best performing enterprises in Europe. The directory is accompanied by a study (EUROPE'S 500 — Dynamic Entrepreneurs — The Job Creators) which describes the situation, the characteristics and the strategies utilised by these 500 enterprises which, in times of decreasing employment, have witnessed an increase of some 160% in their workforce over a period of 5 years.

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THE EU/JAPAN INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION CENTRE: A New Office Opens in Brussels

Created in 1987, the EU/Japan Industrial Cooperation Centre is a joint initiative of MITI (Japanese Ministry of Industry) and the European Commission, with headquarters in Tokyo. A second office has recently been opened in Brussels (see address below). Its mission will be to reinforce the administration of the Centre's current activities. In addition to an information service for European and Japanese enterprises, the centre's activities primarily consist of implementing training programmes in Japan for high-level European managers (long courses of 11 or 16 weeks, short courses of 2 weeks), and the launching of the new VULCANUS programme which offers Japanese students the possibility of 8 months training in a European enterprise.

Currently, more than 600 managers and investigators have benefited from the many programmes offered. These programmes have been of benefit not only to large enterprises. SMEs profit from financial support from DG XXIII and more than 70 heads of SMEs have already taken advantage of this unique experience of training in Japan while establishing beneficial contacts with Japanese businessmen.

The Centre will also be charged with promoting contacts between enterprises, universities and training centres in Japan and the European Union in order to determine the needs which should be met by the initiatives future in the areas of industrial cooperation between the EU and Japan. The association of former students and scholarship holders will contribute to the follow-up to this objective by providing a network of some 600 members interested in the Centre's activities. In addition, the Centre will distribute the results of industrial cooperation programmes between the EU and Japan in the sectors of consumer electronics and automobile components, and will provide support for implementing new actions, such as a programme concerning mopeds.

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THE EUROPEAN INFORMATION SOCIETY AWARENESS WEEK: Promising Results

In order to encourage SMEs to adopt and use the new information and communication technologies, a 'European Information Society Awareness Week' was organised throughout Europe from 6 to 10 May 1996. Within the framework of this programme, other events will be held in Tunis, Bucharest and Budapest from 16 to 20 September 1996. Other events in Poland, Bulgaria and Slovenia will probably be added.

Launched at the initiative of DG XXIII and ISPO (Information Society Project Office), this campaign comprised 44 events of which the majority were organised by members of the EURO INFO CENTRES (EIC) network. The programme of events was conceived to meet local needs and covered such themes as the initiatives of the European Commission and the G7, existing legislation, and practical implications for the business world. The programme also provided demonstrations of an entire series of new technologies and their applications.

These events were attended by more than 400 businessmen, with an average attendance of 70 people per event. In addition, the organisers sent information to thousands of enterprises on the potential of the Information Society for managing their businesses, while the ISPO Web pages describing the European Awareness Week were consulted by more than 8000 Internet users.

As one of the main objectives of the European Awareness Week was to encourage SMEs to consider how their activities could be improved by these new technologies, a questionnaire was distributed to participants. The first results were very positive. More than 60% of those responding intend to undertake specific steps as a result of their participation in an event, and especially to seek out further information and training. Moreover, many indicated their intention to purchase new equipment or to subscribe to sources of information which use these technologies. Of particular interest and appreciation during this European Awareness Week was the satellite link with the Conference 'DOING BUSINESS ON THE WEB' which took place in Paris on 9-10 May 1996 (see box).

For information on the events planned for September 1996:

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ISPO — Information Society Project Office
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DOING BUSINESS ON THE WEB

As the centre-piece of the 5th International World Wide Web Conference held in Paris on 9-10 May, the 'Doing Business on the WEB' event met with enormous success not only in Paris, but also throughout Europe via satellite and cable TV. Subject to heavy media coverage, this European Commission communication initiative was designed to make more readily apparent the opportunities offered by the Information Society and to help SMEs better target their potential needs in terms of advanced technologies. The initiative provided an opportunity for both suppliers and users to meet on the subject of commercial electronics which is exerting an influence on a good number of commercial activities by its rapid expansion through private telecommunication networks, but also through the increasing utilisation of open networks such as the INTERNET. During the conference, results were presented of the work carried out by the **entrepreneurs' contact group for electronic trade** which was established by the Commission in June 1995, and regroups several hundred businessmen and intermediaries who are especially concerned by electronic trade.

Several working groups on these subjects attracted a large number of businessmen during the course of the conference. Likewise, the media awareness and publicity for the work being carried out by the G7 pilot project 'A World Market for SMEs' also received a strong push forward from the event. The first world conference on this subject was announced and will take place in Bonn during the Spring of 1997. In addition to presenting the 'EUROPE/WWW/Business Award' and its special prizes which rewarded European Union SMEs, high level presentations also allowed participants — through a multipoint video link between Paris, Brussels and several other organising centres of the European Awareness Week — to become acquainted with all aspects of the initiatives concerning the Information Society, both those of the Commission and of the G7. Examples of 'success Stories' and a session on what should be done or not done on the web (how to set up an attractive site on the web, costs and performance, marketing strategy to adopt, etc) showed SMEs that new ways of doing business are opening up new markets all over the world.

CRAFT SECTOR AND SMALL ENTERPRISES: Results of the First Preparatory Conference

The first preparatory conference, aimed at launching the Third European Conference on the Craft Sector and Small Enterprises scheduled to take place in Italy in 1997, was held in Bari, Italy on 28-29 June 1996.

The conference was prepared during the Italian Presidency of the European Council and organised by the Pouilles regions in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Industry and European professional organisations.

Held under the title 'Perspectives on European Integration and Internationalism — Economic Relations in the Craft Sector and Small Enterprises: Experiences', this conference brought together 200 participants (local authorities and representatives from European craft and small enterprise organisations) of whom one third were from other Member States.

The participants invited the Commission to intensify the exchanges of best practice in the different areas aimed at improving the competitiveness of the craft sector and small enterprises, and their integration into the internal market. Of particular mention were the development of cooperation and the utilisation of networks for information and services in favour of craft and small enterprises in order to develop their exports, for example.

In addition, the conference highlighted the need for the craft sector and small enterprises — in order to reinforce their job creation potential — to participate in Community programmes such

as LEONARDO, PHARE, TACIS, JOPP, the Structural Funds, and the 5th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (the preparation for which is to begin soon). The participants did not request a substantial reinforcement of the Community instruments, but instead demanded better access for the craft sector and small enterprises to the existing instruments. They feel that the instruments should take the potential of the craft sector and small enterprise for job creation more into consideration. Finally, they insisted on the rapid adoption by the Council of the 'Third Multiannual Programme (1997-2000) in Favour of SMEs' and of the ELISE programme on the granting of loans for investments undertaken by job creating SMEs.

In the framework of other preparatory conferences, the next gathering will take place in Toledo, Spain on 8-9 November 1996 on the subject 'The Craft Sector, Small Enterprises and Technology Transfers'.

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