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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL XXIII: THE BULLETIN OF ENTERPRISE POLICY

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# EURO

With the extension of the third multiannual programme to the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs), Directorate-general XXIII has taken a further step towards preparing these countries for accession.

▼  
**Extension of the third multiannual programme to the CEECs**

▼  
**The Euro Info Centre network opens up to the east**

*Letters page...*



EUROPEAN COMMISSION



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In this issue, the file of the month is devoted to the extension of Community business policy instruments to economic operators in the central and east European countries (CEECs). There are two reasons why this is a particularly interesting development. Firstly, it will enable these countries to better prepare their economies for accession to the European Union and secondly, it creates opportunities for SMEs in the EU in terms of new markets and possible cooperative ventures. DG XXIII, which has allowed some of the applicant countries access to its instruments since 1 December 1998, is proud of these recent developments, which are sure to play their part in improving economic integration. The new 'letters page' will, we hope, lead to a constructive dialogue between DG XXIII and businesses.

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It is sent to those who put in a written request. Euro-info is published 10 times a year.

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THE FILE OF THE MONTH

**1 EXTENSION OF THE THIRD MULTIANNUAL PROGRAMME TO THE APPLICANT CEECs**

INFORMATION

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The date, 1 December, 1998 marked an important stage in the development of relations between DG XXIII and the countries applying to join the European Union. Since that date, six applicant countries — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and the Slovak Republic — have been involved in the third multiannual programme on very much the same basis as the Member States. These first six countries to take part in the programme were joined by Romania on 1 January 1999, which means that there are currently 25 countries, including the EEA countries, involved in the multiannual programme.

The European Commission is also making preparations to open the programme to Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania and Cyprus.

The involvement of the CEECs in Community programmes is an important step in their preparations for accession. Opening up Community programmes is one of the key components of the 'pre-accession strategy' introduced by the European Union. By being involved in these programmes, they gain a better awareness of EU priorities and actions, as well as of its working methods.

In addition to the third multiannual programme for SMEs, a large number of other Community programmes have already been opened up to countries with associate status, and others should soon follow. These include, for example, Socrates, Leonardo, Youth for Europe, Save II, Ariane, Media II and certain programmes in the field of health.

**Background**

The third multiannual programme forms the keystone of Community policy to promote SMEs, as it aims to foster an environment which is conducive to their development throughout the European Union, improve their competitiveness, and encourage their Europeanisation and internationalisation. The multiannual programme for SMEs forms the legal and budgetary framework for specific Community measures in the field of SME policy. It covers the period from 1997 to 2000. The measures launched under this programme can be grouped under five priority objectives:

- Simplifying and improving the administrative and legislative environment for enterprises;
- Improving the financial environment of enterprises;
- Helping SMEs to Europeanise and internationalise their strategies, especially by means of better information services;
- Boosting the competitiveness of SMEs and improving their access to research, innovation and training;

- Fostering the spirit of enterprise and supporting target groups.

The programme is aimed at all SMEs without any distinction being made between sector, legal form or location within the European Economic Area.

Organisations and SMEs in the associate countries are already familiar with certain aspects and actions in the third multiannual programme through an ad hoc participation which preceded their current form of involvement. Euro Info Correspondence Centres (EICC) had already been opened with financial support from the Phare programme. Many businesses in the CEECs had already taken part in business cooperation events (Europartenariat, Interprise) and the BC-NET and BRE cooperation networks had been extended to several of these countries.

Extending the programme to the associate countries will allow organisations and SMEs in these countries to become involved at more or less the same level as in the Member States. Each country finances its participation in the programme, either entirely from its national budget, or with co-financing from the Phare programme.

Their involvement in the programme will allow them to enjoy a closer dialogue with the Commission. The associate countries can thereby benefit from the substantial expansion of the Euro Info Centres network (see separate article), Interprise events could be organised in each of these countries, SMEs will be able to take part in Europartenariat events, and those countries which wish to do so will be able to take part in actions launched to promote the craft sector, small businesses and the trade and distribution sector, and may also organise an IBEX event. Each country has indicated its priorities with regard to these actions. The table below summarises the operational activities in which they are involved:

Country	Actions					
	Expansion of the EIC network	Participation by SMEs in Europartenariats	Organisation of one Interprise per year	Organisation of an IBEX	Craft sector and small enterprises	Distributive trades
Bulgaria	X	X	X	X	X	X
Estonia	X	X	X		X	X
Hungary	X	X	X	X	X	X
Poland	X	X	X	X	X	X
Czech Republic	X	X	X		X	X
Romania	X	X	X			
Slovakia	X	X	X	X	X	

Coordination meetings are also organised with the associate countries taking part in the programme. This coordination is carried out prior to each meeting of the committee made up of Member States' representatives, which assists the Commission in carrying out the programme.

The actions open to the seven applicant countries now participating in the third multiannual programme for SMEs are launched using identical procedures to those applied in the



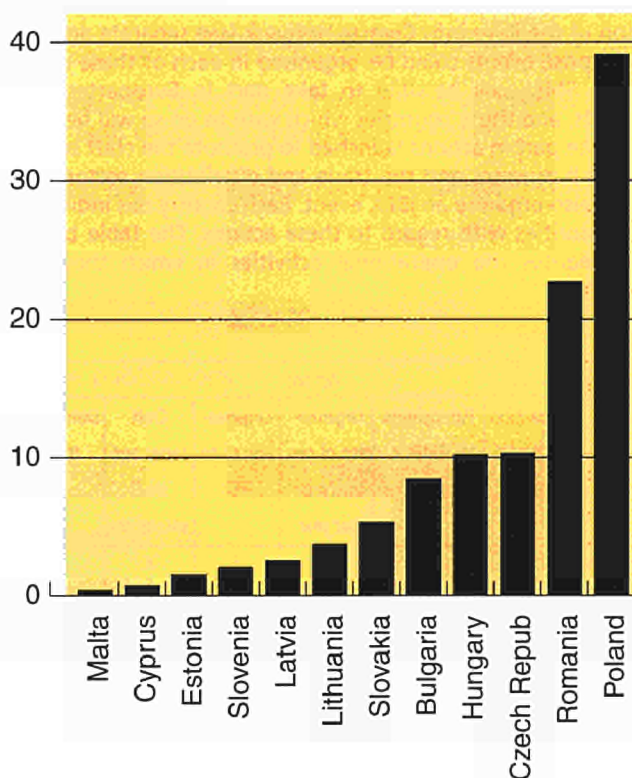
Member States. A call for proposals to extend the Euro Info Centres network was therefore published last December in the Official Journal and a call for proposals for the organisation of Interprise events was published in the Official Journal (OJ C 81, 24.3.1999). Other calls for tender will be launched during 1999 and 2000 to encourage these countries to take part in the programme. It should also be noted that it is possible to submit projects in response to the call for proposals for pilot actions to promote the spirit of enterprise in schools (Lot 10.1), which was published in the Official Journal of 20 August 1998 with a closing date of 30 June 2000.

### Contact

For more information on the third multiannual programme and actions launched for the applicant countries taking part in it, please contact your nearest Euro Info Centre. You will find details on all the Euro Info Centres on the Europa site, at the following address:

[http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg23/guide\\_en/index2.htm](http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg23/guide_en/index2.htm)

Population (million)



### The context of enlargement

In view of the radical restructuring under way in the CEECs, it is essential that they develop a business policy to promote employment.

In the CEECs, the top priority is to meet the accession criteria set by the European Council. Some have already developed market economies which function correctly, and others are making strides towards achieving this objective. They

are also endeavouring to develop their capacity to resist competitive pressure and market forces within the EU. In Cyprus and Malta, there has been no interruption in the development of private enterprise, as was the case in the east European countries, but their commercial environment will need to adjust to the new conditions in the internal market.

In order to stimulate competitiveness, it is important that governments support businesses in their countries by developing a political, regulatory and administrative environment which conforms to conditions in the European Union.

During the first years of economic transition in central and eastern Europe, priority was given to privatisation, the restructuring of large enterprises and macroeconomic stabilisation. With help from the Phare programme, each of these countries buckled down to the task of developing the basic legal frameworks and support infrastructures (development agencies, etc.) required for the emergence and development of SMEs and their representative organisations. Governments in the CEECs have become more and more aware of the fact that SMEs are beginning to dominate the economic scene — if only in terms of number — and that they account for an increasing proportion of jobs. In so saying, however, not enough use is yet being made of SMEs in terms of their potential contribution to the growth and vitality of the CEEC economies.

The economies of Cyprus and Malta are dominated by SMEs.

The Commission is continuing to encourage the applicant countries to pursue an active policy to support and foster the creation and development of SMEs. In addition to the support given by the Phare programme to the central and east European countries in developing the private sector, and the involvement of these countries in the Community programme, the Commission is currently stepping up talks with the applicant countries on business policy.

## 2 THE EURO INFO CENTRE NETWORK OPENS UP TO THE EAST

### INFORMATION



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Directorate-General XXIII is playing its part in meeting the challenge of EU enlargement to include the central and east European countries (CEECs): its EICs will prepare SMEs in these countries for the single market. Forty-five new Euro

Info Centres will be opening up in the CEECs.

Over the next few years, and before the first of the CEECs joins the European Union, these countries will need to adapt their national policies and institutions to meet the political, institutional and economic conditions of the EU. In order for enlargement to succeed, this adaptation will need to be accompanied by other, more fundamental, changes made by their economic operators.



It is with this goal in mind that DG XXIII is extending its Euro Info Centre network to embrace 45 new members located in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Slovak Republic.

The Euro Info Centre network already has a presence in the CEECs, with 10 Euro Info Correspondence Centres (EICC) having been established in these countries since 1991.

Working closely with organisations which have experience in offering assistance to SMEs (Chambers of Commerce, trade federations, development agencies, etc.), these new Euro Info Centres will have a vital role to play in helping businesses adapt to Community rules.

Clearly, businesses in the CEECs will have to adjust their management and production methods and product specifications to single market rules.

In order to meet their specific needs, the Euro Info Centres will disseminate all the necessary information on Community policies, actions and programmes. They will provide assistance in adapting organisational, management and production methods to the demands of the European Union, and will also be able to advise businesses on their internationalisation strategies and on how to position themselves in external markets.

These Euro Info Centres will also offer invaluable advice to SMEs from the European Union which wish to extend their activities to these new markets which have opened up.

**DIFFICULTIES FOR SMEs IN FINDING FINANCE**

**3 'BUSINESS ANGELS' PROJECTS: SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES**

**INFORMATION**

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**Introduction**

Businesses which are in the process of setting up have problems in obtaining finance. Banks are often loath to provide this because of a lack of guarantees, and venture capital companies do not tend to invest in the start-up phase. A private investor with time and money may be the solution. A study launched by the Commission demonstrated the potential of 'business angels' in Europe. Following this study, a call for proposals was launched (OJ 263 of 20.8.1998) with the following objectives:

- to promote the concept of 'business angels' networks;
- to conduct specific feasibility studies on establishing networks;
- to draw up pilot projects for setting up networks.

We think it would be useful to illustrate the concept by giving some examples of projects selected for each of the objectives.

NB: The next deadline for submitting projects is 30 September 1999.

**1. Promotion of the concept of 'business angels' networks**

**Eurada: European Association of Development Agencies**

Eurada is an organisation of European regional development agencies which has around 150 members. It actively represents the interests of its members vis-à-vis the European institutions, promotes dialogue among its members, encourages inter-regional cooperation and aims to be at the forefront of innovation in regional development. Eurada organises a series of conferences and seminars in collaboration with EBAN (the European 'business angels' network) and JCI (Junior Chamber International), which represents young entrepreneurs. This partnership was chosen by the Commission because it combines Eurada's know-how in the field of dissemination with EBAN's experience of 'business angels', and JCI is present as a target group for investors.

Thirty-five regional seminars will be organised to provide potential applicants with information on setting up 'business angels' networks and to allow an exchange of information. The seminars will cover four main fields:

- introduction to the concept of informal venture capital;
- the legal, financial and administrative environment in which informal venture capital operates;
- case studies;
- general discussion on opportunities and needs in developing a 'business angels' network.

**2. Feasibility studies**

**Svi Lombardia SpA**

Svi Lombardia SpA, which is responsible for regional development in Lombardy, is under the control of the Italian governmental body dealing with business policy, reindustrialisation and regional development (SPI), itself a branch of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. This project will be carried out in partnership with the Centro Sviluppato SpA Valle d'Aosta, Cevit SpA and the United Kingdom 'business angels' office. The project has been chosen because it forms a regional partnership, but it also has a national dimension by dint of the cooperation between SPI and Svi Lombardia and the central government. The experience offered by the UK 'business angels' office is an added bonus.

The aim of the project is to look into the possibility of creating an Italian 'business angels' network. It will be carried out in four stages.

- A general study of the problems associated with mobilising the resources of 'business angels' in Italy, taking regional factors into account.



- Informing skilled professionals about the 'business angels' concept in Italy and analysing the needs of investors, potential entrepreneurs and new businesses.
- Meetings of the project's steering committee in order to discuss the issue of regional problems and the publication of a report.
- Final report — feasibility analysis and establishment of a national 'business angels' network, taking regional needs into account.

The final objective, i.e. the establishment of a national 'business angels' network, will be achieved by developing a sort of 'marriage agency', through which potential investors will be able to access information on promising investments. This will take the form of a website, and the publication of an information sheet for those without Internet access. Annual regional investment forums will also be organised to disseminate information on new businesses, develop existing businesses and publicise facts about the local system.

#### **Pythagore nv**

Pythagore NV is a Belgian company offering know-how and advice to industry in the fields of business development, fund management, subsidies and social finance for new ideas and young companies, particularly in the new information technology (NIT) sector. Pythagore NV aims to close the gap between entrepreneurs, technology and finance. A vast international network of contacts helps the company achieve its objectives. The innovative nature of this project, which aims to develop a European-wide 'business angels' network to exploit the potential of NIT, was a determining factor in its being chosen by the Commission.

#### **EACF (extension and acceleration of financial confidence)**

The project will look into the possibility of setting up a 'virtual community', via the Internet, where people with new ideas can meet investors and entrepreneurs.

The project's aims are:

- Extension: the dissemination of information on contacts and opportunities through promoting greater transparency;
- Acceleration: an increase in the speed with which potential investors can identify opportunities and vice versa;
- Financing: improving the mutual understanding of financial needs and objectives;
- Confidence: the development of a system which is trusted by the community it is intended to serve.

The chances of setting up the EACF will be assessed by means of studies and analyses. The final report will contain an overall design for the EACF.

### **3. Creation and coordination of networks**

#### **Utveckling Norrköping AB**

Utveckling Norrköping AB is a Swedish body which aims to develop trade and industry in the town of Norrköping. A feasibility study on establishing a 'business angels' network for

the region has already been carried out. This project was therefore an obvious choice, since the infrastructure required for a regional network was already in place.

The proposed 'business angels' network will cover the Norrköping-Linköping-Jonköping region in Sweden, an area which accounts for around 10 % of Sweden's economic activity. Previous cooperation between these three towns has laid the foundations for this project and the area covered is of an optimum size for a network of this type.

Following on from the feasibility study, the first step will be to organise a series of joint meetings between the 'business angels' (BAs) and businesses seeking investment. This involves facilitating exchanges between the BAs and businesses and should lead to further meetings being arranged. The project also aims to use a database to store and process all the information. Working documents will be drawn up to describe each BA and each business. It will also raise public awareness of BAs.

#### **Gepafin SpA**

The economic situation of Umbria in Italy typifies the problems SMEs face in gaining access to the financial markets, and the resulting low levels of capitalisation. In order for SMEs to grow in Umbria, active innovation and technological development need better access to venture capital through 'business angels' networks. Gepafin SpA is working to support and improve the financial environment for SMEs by promoting greater access to venture capital. The company also aims to set up an international network of potential investors by making use of NIT.

The project will be carried out in three stages. The first stage is to identify businesses in Umbria which have innovation- or technology-transfer projects requiring investment. The next stage is to set up a database which is accessible via the Internet. The third stage is to then establish an international 'business angels' network in partnership with Eurosud Capital EEIG, which will organise a series of seminars.

#### **REVITALISING THE COOPERATIVE SECTOR**

4

### **A NEW APPROACH TO COOPERATION FOR GROWTH IN AN OPEN MARKET AND A SOCIETY BASED ON SOLIDARITY**

INFORMATION



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*The National League of Cooperatives and Mutual Societies in Italy held its national convention from 14 to 16 April 1999, during which it analysed the means required to adapt cooperatives to the new demands of the market. The participants at the convention fully endorsed the work carried out by the Commission in presenting a White Paper for the sector.*



This triennial convention was the culmination of a series of regional and sectoral conventions and its deliberations were based on a very comprehensive document. It analysed ways of adapting cooperatives to the new demands of the market, whilst adhering to the principles of democratic management, solidarity and defence of the civic values of cooperatives. It was attended by 512 delegates, with a strong international representation.

The Chairman's opening address summarised the positive results achieved since the 1996 convention: investment, new jobs, and especially the setting-up of new cooperatives (particularly of a social nature and in the Mezzogiorno), thus assisting in the development of problem areas and helping to solve the economic crisis.

The convention proceedings revealed a clear desire for change and adaptation to developments in the market and society, for renewal in management structures and management methods, and an appreciation of the need to open up to Europe, the world and other structures, regardless of political or philosophical leanings.

A number of ministers took part in the convention, including the Prime Minister, Mr Massimo D'Alema, secretaries of State and representatives from all the Italian political parties. Some of the positions taken by the ministers were related to issues such as taxation (an announcement of a reduction in the tax burden and a revision of the pension system), growth, and the revitalisation of the Mezzogiorno, thus picking up on the proposal by the Chairman, Mr Ivano Barberini, to develop strong links between large cooperatives in the north and centre with those in the Mezzogiorno; these remarks did not escape the attention of the press, which gave the convention wide coverage.

The proposal by Mr Barberini to open the market up to external investors was warmly welcomed by the Prime Minister, Mr D'Alema. Cooperatives are set to become modern enterprises with abundant potential, without losing sight of their identity and cultural background. They represent a different form of enterprise which has its place in the economic structure of our society alongside private and public limited companies or other types of company.

The convention approved a resolution on the crisis situation in Italy and Europe and reaffirmed its determination to explore every avenue in seeking a peaceful solution which takes account of human rights.

In conclusion, the Chairman stressed a number of points. These included: the defence and promotion of cooperative identity, culture and values; the need for continuing progress through the acquisition of knowledge; and the importance of according women and the young their rightful place, whilst showing respect for the capabilities of older workers. He went on to stress the need to develop strategic thinking within businesses in the various sectors; to ensure consistency between values and actions; and to combine innovation with quality, market ethics with social ethics, and the free market with a society based on solidarity. He felt that action should be taken to foster the establishment and growth of cooperatives, set up networks, appreciate their cultural role, and promote democratic and effective management, without neglecting the needs of citizens.

In conclusion, he stressed the need for a pluralism of businesses in Italy and in Europe.

The White Paper was mentioned as a European objective.

He was happy to note that the preparatory work for the White Paper was revitalising cooperation and strengthening the resolve of cooperatives to coordinate their activities and organise themselves at European level.

## 5 COOPERATION BETWEEN COOPERATIVES



*The convention of Portuguese cooperatives held in Lisbon on 16 and 17 April 1999 had a similar aim of revitalising this sector, and focused on the theme of cooperation between cooperatives.*

The central theme of this convention, which was the first to bring together all Portuguese cooperatives from all sectors, was cooperation between cooperatives and how to develop this in the next century.

There were a number of impressive contributions to the discussion from among the 800 participants. The foreign delegations were made up of representatives from the government sector, from Spanish and Brazilian cooperatives, including the president of the ACI, from Cecodhas and also Portuguese speakers from the rest of the world, including East Timor. A number of ministers were also present, including the Prime Minister, Mr Guterres, and also secretaries of State, including the Secretary of State for Employment who wound up the proceedings with a very spirited speech in favour of cooperation and its wide range of possibilities.

The convention was organised impeccably and attended by an enthusiastic public. It was organised under the patronage of the António Sérgio Cooperatives Sector Institute and chaired by Mr Canaveira de Campos, member of the CCMAF.

Topics discussed included: 'Cooperatives and the EU', by Mrs Alice Copette; 'The Internationalisation of cooperatives' by Mr Marcos de Castro Sanz, President of the CEPES (Confederación Emperasarial Española de la Economía Social); 'Agenda 2000 and the CCA', by Mr Bento Gonçalves, member of the ESC (agricultural cooperatives) and 'Local power and cooperatives', by Professor Luis de Sà (University of Lisbon), a former MEP.

Portuguese cooperatives are dynamic and go-ahead businesses which warmly welcome the White Paper. They will continue to make an active contribution.

Some of the issues discussed during the convention deserve closer consideration, such as cooperation between cooperatives and the subdivision of unitary methods of working among different cooperative sectors (agriculture, housing, consumption, services, production, health, culture, etc.) which wish to strengthen cooperation and develop true partnerships with each other. This interesting example could serve as a model for encouraging partnerships and assistance between stronger and weaker sectors or between developed and less developed regions, leading to the creation of new cooperatives, new activities and jobs.

Finally, there was a noticeable desire, on the part of those representing cooperatives, for decentralisation and greater autonomy for sectoral and/or regional cooperatives so that they can increase their operational efficiency.



THE CRAFT SECTOR

**6 MR C. PAPOUTSIS, MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION, INAUGURATES THE FIRST HELP CENTRE FOR YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS**



When Mr Papoutsis, Member of the Commission, opened the first of five specialised help centres for young entrepreneurs in Athens on 27 April 1999, the Eyge-net project, which is financed under the multiannual programme for SMEs (1997–2000) following the call for proposals 97/C117-17, entered its operational phase.

The other four centres, which are scheduled to open over the next three months, will be located in Larissa, Thessalonika, Ioannina and Bologna. These centres will provide future young entrepreneurs with technical and administrative assistance in setting up their businesses.

Addressing an audience of around 500 participants, Mr Papoutsis described the Commission's policies for SMEs and the spirit of enterprise. He stressed the importance of pilot actions with job-creating potential and emphasised the substantial support given to the Eyge-net pilot action by the national authorities. He also underlined how important it is that actions are consistent with both national and Community initiatives, and stated that the national authorities should look closely at the Community guidelines for employment and include the new national programme 'Greece under 30' in the national action plan for employment which was to be presented to the Commission at the end of May 1999.

The Deputy Minister for Development, Mrs Anna Diamantopoulou, and other representatives of the Greek Government supported the coordinated actions to promote the spirit of enterprise, and presented their future actions under the national programme entitled 'Greece under 30'. More specifically, the Greek Minister for Education, Mr Gerasimos Arsenis, (who is also the minister in charge of coordinating the programme in question) announced measures aimed at promoting the spirit of enterprise: specialist studies at both secondary schools and universities.

As for the day-to-day operation of these centres, they will work in close cooperation with the local and national authorities, and with organisations representing the craft sector and small businesses. Each centre will operate independently and cover a different region. Potential young entrepreneurs will have access to the training tools developed during the preliminary phase of the project. The action plans will be carefully evaluated before the entrepreneurs set up their businesses.

Further information is available at the following site: [www.dimitra.gr/eugenet](http://www.dimitra.gr/eugenet)

**7 PROMOTING THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OF SMES (SEMINARS)**

INFORMATION



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Two of the three seminars organised by local authorities, in conjunction with the Committee of the Regions and Directorate-General XXIII (see Euro Info of March 1999), took place as planned in Gijon, Spain (18 and 19 March 1999) and Bayreuth, Germany (23 and 24 April 1999).

Over 300 participants from 14 Member States and 6 applicant countries attended these seminars in Gijon and Bayreuth. They drew up specific recommendations based on a comparison of best practices concerning the role of local and regional authorities in promoting small businesses and entrepreneurship.

The main recommendations made by the participants at the Gijon seminar were the establishment of European systems of benchmarking good practices in raising awareness of entrepreneurship, cooperation between enterprises and between the public and private sectors, mentoring and advice, and incorporating new technologies into training systems.

The Bayreuth seminar focused on the challenges posed by the enlargement of the European Union, and some of its main conclusions were the need for special actions for small businesses and craft businesses in the CEECs in order to smooth the process of adaptation, and the need to create specific back-up services for small businesses and craft businesses in the border regions of the EU.

The third seminar will be held on 23 and 24 June 1999 in Kemi, Finland, and looks at new opportunities for local businesses in the context of economic globalisation, taking into account new technologies and reforms in the European funding mechanisms. The list of persons expected to take part in the seminar includes Jorma Virtanen, the Mayor of Kemi, Martti Korhonen, the Finnish Minister for Regional Development, Hannele Pokka, the Governor of Lapland, and various other personalities from the small business sector, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions, and the world of politics and academia.

NEW RELEASES

**8 AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS**

INFORMATION



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A. Enhancing tourism's potential for employment: Follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations of the High Level Group on Tourism and Employment

Communication from the Commission COM(1998) 205 final of 28.4.1999.

Available in all languages on the Internet: <http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg23/tourisme/publications/tourismpubl.htm>

B. Proceedings of the second European forum on subcontracting: Graz, 5 and 6 October 1998

Available in ES, DE, EN, FR, and IT from Unit XXIII/A.3: fax (32-2) 296 75 58.

knowledge, development agencies, training and the role of women in the cooperative sector. The appropriateness and scope of recommendations on the various subjects was also discussed.

The White Paper will be based on direct exchanges between experts, on information obtained from a number of questionnaires and on contributions by all the relevant Commission Directorates-General.

The next meeting of the group of experts was scheduled to be held in Paris on 4 May 1999.

For further information, please contact Alice Copette, e-mail: [alice.copette@dg23.cec.be](mailto:alice.copette@dg23.cec.be)

## LATEST NEWS

### 9 RECOMMENDED SITES

#### INFORMATION



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### Index of sites on fisheries

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg14/site.htm>

### Sites highlighted by our readers:

- <http://www.cepes.es> (site containing information on SMEs and socioeconomic organisations in Spain);
- <http://almalaurea.cineca.it> (database containing the CVs of graduates compiled in conjunction with Italian universities).

**Let us know by e-mail of any sites of interest to SMEs, and these will be published in Euro Info.**

### 10 COOPERATIVES



#### 1) Preparation of the White Paper entitled 'Cooperative Entrepreneurship in the Europe of 2000'

A second meeting of experts was held in Brussels on 8 March 1999 in connection with the preparation of the White Paper entitled 'Cooperative Entrepreneurship in the Europe of 2000'.

The results of the conference held in Bologna in November 1998 constitute the raw material for this White Paper. General agreement has been reached by all the cooperatives in the various countries and sectors on the definition of cooperatives and their specific features, particularly on the basis of the conclusions of the 1995 Centenary Congress of the International Cooperative Alliance.

The experts examined the main topics of the document in turn, including competition (for which a specific working party was set up), taxation, external finance, statistical

#### 2) The European Parliament's Intergroup on the social economy discusses the reform of the structural funds and the outlook for the third system

The European Parliament's Intergroup on the social economy met in Strasbourg on 9 February 1999 to discuss the Structural Funds. The meeting was also attended by representatives of DGs V, XVI and XXIII of the Commission.

DG XVI explained the lessons learnt over the period from 1994 to 1999 and went on to describe, for the new programming period from 2000 to 2006, the complementary nature of the funds and the outlook in the Member States, as well as the possibility of placing the emphasis on integrated, thematic and/or territorial approaches. It stressed the aim of opening up the financial engineering instruments to the cooperative structures.

DG V stressed the importance of the social economy for employment, quoting action in connection with the 'Third system and employment' and 'Local capital for social purposes' (Art. 6 of ESF).

DG XXIII stressed three aspects:

- the recognition by the Structural Funds of the social economy as a partner to the regional and local authorities, particularly in the draft guidelines for the programmes for the period 2000–06. This must be viewed in relation to the incorporation in 1998 of the social economy into the guidelines for employment in the pillar 'entrepreneurship'.
- the importance of a lasting reflection of this recognition, particularly through involving the social economy in information and decision-making activities (in the monitoring committee, for example) and improving the managerial skills of cooperative organisations.
- the need to take account of the social economy in the various Community policies.

Questions were asked on matters including the implementation of evaluation criteria specific to the social economy, the contribution of the social economy to innovation and the problems of access by small associations to the structural funds.

For further information, please contact Armand Rauch, e-mail: [armand.rauch@dg23.cec.be](mailto:armand.rauch@dg23.cec.be).

#### 3) The plenary meeting of the Consultative Committee for cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations in the European Union was scheduled to be held in Brussels on 28 May 1999.



## 11 CONSULTATION MEETING BETWEEN DG XXIII AND THE EUROPEAN SME ORGANISATIONS

INFORMATION



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The purpose of the consultation meeting between DG XXIII and the European SME organisations held on 19 January 1999 was to receive proposals for the new multiannual programme for SMEs as from 2001, which should be adopted by the end of 1999.

EUROPMI (the European Committee for Small and Medium-Sized Industrial Enterprises) was in favour of the Commission consulting the Member States because of their direct involvement in the application of SME policy and in economic activity.

The Commission confirmed that it was involved in close consultation with the Member States, and called on the European SME organisations to keep their members informed so that they could exert the necessary pressure on their national governments.

EUROPMI was also pleased at DG XXIII's progress on the BEST report (Business Environment Simplification Task Force). It was, however, opposed to the policy of publishing DG XXIII invitations to tender on the grounds that programmes would be more appropriate than projects. The Commission replied that in order to devise suitable programmes for SMEs and to establish whether they were working properly, a study or pilot project was necessary.

Finally, DG XXIII said that it was in favour of these information and promotion events being organised during the first half of 1999.

## 12 MEETING WITH THE NATIONAL COORDINATORS OF THE BC-NET AND BRE NETWORKS



The meetings organised in the Member States between the Commission and the members of BC-NET (Business Cooperation Network) and BRE (Business Cooperation Centre) were among the most important elements in the 1999 work programme. The aim was to promote personal contacts between members, to permit an exchange of ideas and experience with the networks

and to encourage joint reflection on the outlook for the future and the development of these networks.

One of the main subjects discussed at the national meetings was the possibility of designating national coordinators in each Member State. The idea is to consolidate and improve the quality of the activities of the networks at national level, to facilitate contacts between members and the Commission and place them on a regular footing, and to make the networks operate more efficiently and in a more coordinated fashion. The role of the coordinators will depend on the wishes expressed by the members of the country concerned and, of course, on the initiative of the coordinator and the opportunities available. National meetings have now been held in most of the Member States; the idea has been generally well received and the national coordinators have been designated the majority of cases.

The Commission intends in the near future to invite the national coordinators to Brussels to discuss the role of the coordinators, the future of the cooperation networks, the possible synergy with other Community networks and proposals for decentralised activities in the networks.

## 13 'TRANSATLANTIC BUSINESS DIALOGUE' (TABD): GROWING SME INVOLVEMENT

Throughout and following the annual transatlantic conference of the 'Chief Executive Officers' (CEO) of the TABD, which was held in Charlotte, North Carolina from 5 to 7 November 1998, the members of the 'SMEs Group' made particular efforts to promote a realisation of the importance of SMEs in transatlantic economic relations so that they could come to the fore and take on increasing responsibilities in the TABD.

One of the most notable results was that in future the interests of SMEs would be taken into account whenever a recommendation was adopted. This decision, which was adopted by the four TABD groups, means that it will not be possible for their recommendations to be adopted by the TABD at the next CEO conference, scheduled to be held in Berlin on 29 and 30 October 1999, unless the SMEs group has first been consulted.

Three key objectives for 1999 were highlighted: increased involvement of SMEs throughout the European Union and the SME federations in TABD; genuine systematic access of SMEs to TABD; real benefits for SMEs from their participation in TABD.

With these aims in mind, Mrs Lorraine Sweeney, European Chairman of the SMEs-TABD working party, is currently selecting the businesses to be involved in the TABD 1999 work programme and the next TABD conference in Berlin. She has already contacted SMEs, federations, chambers of commerce, etc., and DG XXIII has distributed this information to all its cooperation networks.



## 14 THE EURO INFO CENTRE NETWORK AND EMECA GET TOGETHER TO SERVE BUSINESS BETTER

### INFORMATION



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*This year, the Euro Info Centre has concluded a partnership with EMECA, Europe's biggest exhibition association*

The Euro Info Centres (EIC) were set up in 1987 by the Commission's Directorate-General XXIII (Enterprise Policy, Distributive Trades, Tourism and Social Economy). They form the biggest network in Europe providing businesses with information and advice – with more than 300 contact points in 37 countries.

At all stages in their development and irrespective of their degree of familiarity with Europe, they provide SMEs with information, advice and assistance on all European matters affecting them. They also provide assistance with Community projects and help them find suitable partners.

In their capacity as promoters of activities for SMEs, the Euro Info Centres organise regular seminars, colloquiums, information meetings, workshops, conferences, etc.

In order to support activities aimed at stimulating direct contacts and cooperation agreements between heads of businesses, they also take part in numerous European business events and are involved in the Community programmes, Interprise and Europartenariat – international

business exchanges that enable SMEs to meet potential partners on personalised and pre-arranged occasions.

This year saw the start of another initiative likely to help give SMEs a European dimension with the conclusion of a partnership agreement between the Euro Info Centre network and EMECA – (European Major Exhibition Centres Association), Europe's biggest exhibition association.

In order to enhance the services it offers to SMEs, which are among the most important visitors to its events, the EMECA wanted to get together with the Euro Info Centre network, since it recognised its importance as regards information and assistance for businesses on all European matters.

The aim of EMECA is to bring together the main European exhibition venues. The 18 member venues host more than 1 000 events – most of them of world importance and the leaders in their respective branches. This sector is in full spate, and its dynamism and experience mean that nowadays 30 % of trade by business is via exhibitions.

This year, the partnership between the EIC network and EMECA will be devoted to the changeover to the euro. It falls into two parts:

1. Cooperation on the Internet  
The EMECA web site (<http://www.emeca.com>) contains a presentation of the EIC network and a selection of EIC tools and websites on the euro.
2. Cooperation at exhibition venues  
The Euro Info Centres will be represented at exhibition venues selected in cooperation with EMECA to provide SMEs with tailor-made information and practical assistance on the euro. In 1999, there will be EMECA-EIC stands at 10 exhibition centres at a total of 22 events, some of which will be held as early as May.

This partnership is still in its infancy but it should develop to cover a larger number of events and to provide businesses with information on other subjects in addition to the euro.s



## 15 READERS' QUESTIONS

### INFORMATION



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*This 'letters page' is a new section where we hope to be able to answer different questions which often relate to the same subject.*

*We are of course always happy to reply by direct mail, or to send out specific documentation to satisfy the information requirements of SMEs.*

*Our Directorate-General is very interested in conducting a dialogue on major issues of general interest, in order to provide a better response to the expectations of those who use information on SMEs.*

*Euro Info is intended to be a tool for information and communication, and that is our purpose. Readers are therefore welcome to get in touch with the contact person indicated for the particular sector, who will be happy to assist you with advice, support and explanations.*

### Questions

**What is the actual objective of the 'Interprise' programme?**

**What is the difference between it and 'Europartenariat'?**

The objective of an Interprise is to support local and sectoral initiatives which may encourage meetings between entrepreneurs with a view to developing active cooperation among European SMEs.

An Interprise project is the product of an initiative by a local body (Chamber of Commerce, association of businessmen, consultants, local and regional authorities, etc.) on the basis of a proposal drawn up under a call for proposals published in the Official Journal.

The Commission makes a financial contribution of up to 50 % of the total budget with an absolute ceiling of EUR 60 000.

Unlike Europartenariat, Interprise supports smaller-scale projects (around 100 businesses) focusing on one or two sectors of activity. In addition, the projects may be run in any of the European regions, without any restrictions relating to Structural Fund objectives.

Europartenariat is a unique and very important instrument, which mobilises thousands of enterprises and creates contacts which very often become permanent.

### Question

**The JEV initiative aims to help small and medium-sized enterprises to integrate fully into the single market and internationalise their activities, and also to take advantage of the cross-border commercial opportunities opened up by the single market.**

**It is therefore about creating joint ventures in the broadest sense.**

**How can a small enterprise cope with the initial impact of the costs of the preliminary study?**

The Commission has selected a network of specialised financial institutions ranging from commercial banks to investment banks and venture capital funds, and this network is responsible for giving SMEs information and assistance with their projects.

It is the responsibility of these bodies to forward projects to the Commission and then to monitor the follow-up action. It is therefore in their interest to provide substantial aid to SMEs which request this assistance.

The small enterprise will receive all possible support from these bodies: it simply needs to be the creative force behind an idea or ambition.

We have already published the list of contact points on a number of occasions, and would like to take this opportunity to point out to readers that the 'Access to sources of finance' unit in the directorate 'Support services for SMEs', DG XXIII/B.3, is always happy to send out basic documentation and to answer specific questions.



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