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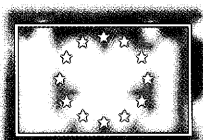
The bulletin of enterprise policy



**The Euro Info Centres met
in Edinburgh**

**Survey: SMEs confident
about their future**

CEE: III / 48



S U M M A R Y

Dossier of the month

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- Survey: SMEs confident about their future

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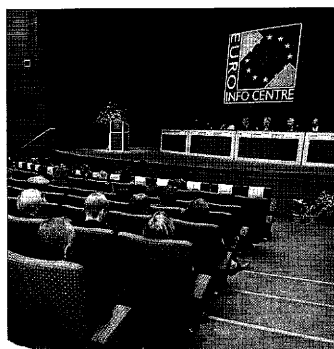
Paola PICCAROLO - European Commission - Directorate General XXIII

"Enterprise Policy, Distributive Trades, Tourism and Co-operatives"

The Euro Info Centres met in Edinburgh to adapt their services to the information requirements of enterprises



The network of Euro Info Centres (EIC) held a conference on 23 and 24 October in Edinburgh, Scotland. The EIC conferences follow a tradition of exchanges and meetings between members and aim to cement the idea of a network. These conferences are also the occasion to deal with the dominant themes concerning the strategy for the network.



The Edinburgh Conference, whose theme was "My enterprise in 20 years time", enabled an analysis to be made of the evolution of European SMEs in the medium term and to forecast the practical and strategic consequences of this evolution for the intermediaries who are at the service of the SMEs, and in particular the consequences of the use of new information technology.

Four hundred and fifty participants, representing 235 Euro Info Centres and 20 associate members were present at this meeting. In parallel with the Conference, 45 working sessions took place, enabling EICs to exchange experiences and develop joint projects. Mr. Christos Papoutsis, Member of the European Commission in charge of enterprise policy, opened the Conference. He underlined the importance of the EICs as "first stop shops for access to community information" for SMEs and emphasised their contribution "to support and facilitate the implementation of the 3rd multi-annual programme in favour of SMEs". He also emphasised the importance of information on the euro and encouraged EICs to continue their work helping SMEs prepare for the single currency.

The work of the Conference enabled a certain number of lessons to be drawn with regard to the implications of new technology on the management style of enterprises.

New technology is an integral factor in the growth and development of new markets. It influences the way the enterprises are organised by enabling them to work in networks and inciting them to do so, and creates partnerships between SMEs and relationships between small and large enterprises, etc.

The intermediaries, among which are the Euro Info Centres, should model their organisation on this new style of inter-enterprise relationships in order to continue to take account of the real situation of enterprises and to offer them a satisfactory service: a network organisation of intermediaries must match a network organisation of enterprises.

The EICs must use the resources of new technology to guide SMEs towards the most reliable and effective sources of information. In this respect, the creation of a site which would be a guidance centre (within the framework of the "Dialogue with Business" project and/or a Euro Info Centre site) would be useful, and a policy based on quality should be implemented to manage the Euro Info Centre sites.

Other fields of activity, aimed at improving the services of EICs and emanating from the use of new technology, have also been defined:

- An effort must be made to favour complementarity with regard to information which is already accessible, from which arises the necessity to provide services with added value, such as informative monitoring services to anticipate the needs of SMEs;
- This type of service could deal with the legislative and administrative environment of enterprises, questions related to border zones, CEEC, access to public markets, access to community programmes, development and distribution of materials establishing a reassuring and user-friendly approach to electronic commerce;
- Proximity is a major asset of the Euro Info Centres. It must be preserved and put to good use, particularly in regard to the EICs' approach to new information technology;
- The richness of the network and the specificity of many Euro Info Centres must favour the development of "packages" of

services which are offered to particular categories of enterprises.

The conclusions of these two days indicate that the EICs must focus on the continuous adaptation of their services to

the needs of the SMEs. In this respect, the Commissioner called on the EICs to take advantage of the new network structure to serve SMEs better and to help them to increase their growth and competitiveness.

Survey: SMEs confident about their future

On the occasion of the annual conference of the EICs, the results of two surveys ordered by Directorate General XXIII and carried out by EOS-Gallup were presented. These results underlined the confidence of SMEs in their own future and indicated that they expected to see immediate effectiveness resulting from the use of new information technology.

The first survey, entitled "My enterprise in 20 years time", was carried out in the 15 Member States of the European Union from 18 May to 6 June 1998 and involved 1,500 directors of enterprises employing 10 to 50 people (100 enterprises per country). It showed that 46.5% of the enterprises questioned considered growth to be their current priority, whereas for 21% of them the priority was the struggle for survival. 29.6% believed that in 20 years time, they will have formed alliances with other enterprises and 14.4% that they will have taken over other enterprises.

61% of enterprises questioned believed that there will be fewer of them in 20 years time. However, 53.8% considered that they would be in a position to generate more employment in the years to come than at the present time. For 34.8% of respondents, the main factor of change for enterprises was considered to be the organisation of work and time spent at work, whereas for 23.6% it was globalisation.

For 42.4%, product quality was considered to be the principal factor for success. 37.9% and 19.4% respectively believed that new information technology would improve their organisation and would create new markets. 26.5% did not believe that they would receive any aid in the future to help them succeed, whereas 25.2% believed that they will have the support of European institutions. In addition, emphasis should be laid on the fact that 55.8% felt that their enterprise would be more difficult to manage in the future, but that it may be better valued, 65.6%. Finally, opinions were balanced as to whether they would exert more or less influence in 20 years time.

The second survey entitled "The information requirements of enterprises and the Internet", was carried out in the 15 Member States from 15 August to 15 September 1998. It involved 2,000 directors of enterprises employing 10 to 50 people (130 to 150 enterprises per country). It revealed that 43% of the SMEs questioned used the Internet and that in 44% of the cases the user was the manager of the company. The majority of them declared themselves loyal to the sites they visited.

For 30.8% of respondents, the Internet is a time saver, and for 36.8% it facilitates access to known sources of information. Finally, 47.9% stated that they were satisfied with the results of their research on the Internet.

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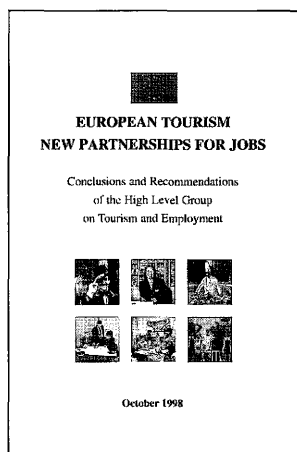
The news

Tourism: the potential for the creation of thousands of jobs.



On 22 October in Brussels, Mr. Christos Papoutsis, European Commissioner in charge of tourism, received from Dr. Ralf Corsten, President of the board of TUI GmbH and President of the Top Level Group on tourism and employment, the

final report of the Group (made up of tourism entrepreneurs and professionals). This report assessed the economic impact of tourism and its potential for growth and presented recommendations on the conditions and resources necessary for fostering growth and employment.



The report of the Top Level Group (TLG) confirmed the major role played by tourism in the achievement of the objectives of the European Union (EU), with regard to economic growth and job creation in particular. According to the TLG, over the next 10 years tourism should see substantial rates of growth, above the average for the economy. These rates of growth should be in the bracket of 2.5% to 4% per annum in terms of turnover, and of 1.0% to 1.5% for employment. This means that between 2.2 and 3.3 million new jobs could be created in tourist activities at the E.U. level between now and the end of the next decade. The impact of tourism on other activities will also generate employment.

In its report the TLG stipulated the conditions and resources necessary for fostering growth and employment in tourism and presented several recommendations with regard to measures and actions to be undertaken in five major fields:

Encouraging tourist enterprises to respond to customer needs. The TLG expected the EU to: set up an on-line "observation network" which will link official sources of information on the market and employment; encourage the voluntary setting of quality norms; support the identification and spreading of good practice and imaginative concepts with regard to tourist products and services;

Improving the performance of the tourist market by improving the environment of enterprises. Amongst other things, the TLG recommended that the EU and the Member States: continue their task of convergence and, where possible, of harmonisation of tax systems and reduction of work-related social charges; encourage the creation of instruments to facilitate consultation and co-operation between the representatives of the tourist sector and those responsible for the diffusion of current information, on the performance and the competitiveness of European tourism in particular.

It also invited national and regional authorities to limit the taxes and charges imposed on tourist services and recommended enterprises and professional associations in the tourist sector to analyse their activities at all levels, to ensure full participation in the consultation and co-operation processes that are in place at different decision-making levels, that of the EU in particular;

Modernising and improving the effectiveness of the infrastructure linked to tourism.

The TLG invited the EU and the Member States to: promote the setting up of a co-ordinated air traffic control system in Europe and favour the total deregulation of services linked to air transport; encourage effective interconnection and the strengthening of the inter-operability of infrastructures, information technology resources and transport; give high priority to the development of the transport infrastructure in disadvantaged regions in order to complete the European communication network; favour the use of information technology in tourism and promote the exchange of best practice with regard to new technological applications;

Better use of human resources in tourism. European tourism is undergoing an extensive transformation which is



fundamental to the improvement of its competitiveness and which forces changes in the job market in this sector.

The TLG recommended that the EU and the Member States should: give tourism a privileged place in the implementation of the European strategy for employment and its key activities; ensure that education and training policies, and the support activities undertaken across the whole of the EU, reflect the needs of tourism; encourage joint programmes between international tourist enterprises and training/teaching institutions; improve cross-border recognition of qualifications:

Encouraging the long term development of tourism. The TLG recommended that the EU and the Member States should: integrate the principles of long term development into plans and strategies for the development of tourism; provide reliable and comparable information on environmental norms in European tourist destinations; launch a programme of revitalisation involving different types of tourist destinations which are in decline.

In conclusion, the report seeks the political recognition for European tourism which, as a key sector, it deserves. It invites the Commission to ensure effective, coherent and systematic co-ordination and consultation between its services with regard to measures which affect tourism and to assess, by the end of 1999, the follow-up of the conclusions and recommendations presented. The organisation of an annual Summit on tourism should enable an in-depth exchange of views on the issues raised in the report.

The Commission will study to what extent the recommendations of the TLG can be implemented at European level within the scope of existing programmes and will identify those which could require the adoption of additional measures by the Council of Ministers and Member States. It will submit a global assessment of the report to the European Parliament and the Council, as well as guidance with regard to the follow-up to be undertaken.

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Third Multi-annual Programme in favour of SMEs: assessment in progress

In line with Article 6 of the 3rd Multi-annual Programme in favour of SMEs (Council decision 97/15/EC), the European Commission must present to the Council, the Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee for the Regions an external assessment report on the 3rd Programme, before the end of 1999 at the latest. This assessment will examine the implementation of the Programme in order to determine if the fundamental objectives have been achieved and will include a cost/effectiveness evaluation.

At the beginning of the year, following a call for tenders, the Commission selected Deloitte Touche Europe Services to undertake this assessment.

This will be carried out until March 1999 and will include interviews with representatives of Member States and the sending out of questionnaires to the countries of the Union in order to collect the points of view of enterprise organisations and those of the participants in the initiatives of the 3rd Multi-annual Programme.

The Commission aims to present the report by July/August 1999. This will serve as a basis for discussion for all proposals concerning the 4th Programme, which is planned for the end of 1999.

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Encouraging the creation of enterprises: launch of the new Round Table of Bankers and SMEs

European Commissioner Christos Papoutsis, in charge of enterprise policy, the 15th of October in Brussels inaugura-

ted the third Round Table of Bankers and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), thus opening the next chapter in the European Commission's well established initiative aimed at improving relationships between the banks and SMEs. This round table will concentrate primarily on the financing of start-ups and the initial phase of operation of enterprises. This complements the other recent initiatives of the Commission in this sector and reinforces its efforts to stimulate the creation of enterprises and jobs. The round table will not only seek to identify best practice, as before, but will also go further by finding new ways to bring together more effectively the resources of SMEs and outside capital, in order to improve SMEs' access to financing.

The 3rd round table has been significantly modified, when compared to previous round tables: a wider membership to include experts in risk capital, mutual guarantees and the role of regional development agencies; the presence, for the first time, of three European banking associations; the inclusion of several state banks which deal with the development of SMEs.

Greater flexibility has also been introduced for the monthly working groups of experts. This will enable a larger number of entrepreneurs and financial experts to participate, as well as ensuring the availability of a much larger range of skills.

In addition to its principal work on the financing of start-ups and the first phase of operations, the round table will also investigate the issues arising from the transfer of enterprises and trans-national financing. The working groups will start in November 1998 and finish at the end of July 1999. The final report is planned for November 1999.

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Sub-contracting: what is the European context?



Some 200 experts in sub-contracting, coming from the whole of the European Union and the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), met in Graz in Austria on 5 and 6 October for the second European forum on sub-contracting. The objective of this event, which was organised by Directorate General XXIII in collaboration with the Austrian Government, was to give new impetus to Community policy in this field, six years after the first Forum on Sub-contracting was organised in Madrid in December 1992.

Three working groups enabled participants to express their views on a certain number of strategic issues with regard to sub-contracting, in particular those which are linked to the current needs of the sector, to major concerns and to market trends. The participants were also able to contribute directly to the planned review of the European Commission's support instruments for sub-contracting.

The first working group carried out a critical analysis of the existing Community initiatives in the field of sub-contracting. Amongst other conclusions, this analysis indicated that:

- The initiatives which have been developed to date are effective, but must be adapted to new developments and must cover a larger number of sectors;
- Better representation of the interests of the sub-contracting sector at European level must be provided.

The second working group tried to define a strategy for European sub-contracting. It made the following recommendations:

- The development of small sub-contractors should be improved, those from the 2nd or 3rd level in particular;
- A global approach should be developed including all the parties concerned, through strengthened partnerships between sub-contractors and entrepreneurs;
- Sub-contractors' access to innovation, technology and training should be facilitated;



- Sub-contractors should be provided with better legal protection with regard to terms of payment and other issues;
- Work in "clusters" should be encouraged, since it can provide answers to the problems of the size of SMEs and also contribute to their competitiveness.

The third working group tackled the question of the competitiveness of European sub-contracting and indicated that:

- Programmes and instruments for co-operation should be developed in order to increase opportunities in the CEEC and in Mediterranean countries;
- Practical guides on "benchmarking" should be published to enable enterprises to measure not only their competitiveness, but also the performance of their environmental and social policy.

The participants called for a co-ordinated and integrated policy on sub-contracting at Community level. With nearly three million people active in sub-contracting and a turnover comparable to the GNP of the Netherlands, the issues connected to sub-contracting are central to discussions on competitiveness, growth and the creation of employment in Europe.

The European Commission is aware of this situation and in 1999 will prepare a Communication on sub-contracting, in which it will present its programme of work for the years to come and which will take the remarks and suggestions made during the forum into account.

The report of the conference will be available (early 1999) in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The results of the survey of the Community actions in the field of sub-contracting are available in English.

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Paris: the general meeting of the Alliance Coopérative Internationale Europe



On 15 and 16 October 1998 in Paris, the Alliance Coopérative Internationale Europe (ACI) held its general meeting (biennial). ACI-Europe brings together co-operatives from all sectors and from all the countries of wider Europe and demonstrates the benefit of fostering meetings between co-operators from Eastern and Western Europe.

The participants were able to review the difficulties encountered by the co-operatives, analyse the progress achieved and discuss future prospects. The principal themes of discussion were employment and enlargement.

Several high points marked this meeting, such as the speech by Mr. Laurent Fabius, President of the French National Assembly, who came to open the proceedings on one of the two days, and the message from the French President, Mr. Jacques Chirac.

Also to be noted was the speech by Mr. Hugues Sibille, Directeur de la Délégation Interministérielle à l'Innovation Sociale et à l'Economie Sociale, who, on behalf of the Prime Minister Mr. Lionel Jospin, reaffirmed the French determination to develop the social economy in France as well as in Europe.

Mr. Sibille also recalled the proposal made during the meeting with Mr. Crauser, Director General of Directorate General XXIII, which was to organise meetings, at European level, of directors and/or those responsible for the social economy in the different Member States. He repeated the idea of creating agencies for the social economy in Member States. After that, the Commission could support their installation as a network.

Many interventions enabled the following conclusions to be drawn:

- there was a very strong participation from the CEEC, who often make demands for considerable financial and other aid, but who are also very committed to the new direction that co-operation is taking in those countries;
- there was a determination on behalf of all the participants, notably from Central and Eastern European Countries, to strengthen partnerships and collaboration between co-operatives and structures of the social economy;

- there was a significant development of new co-operatives, such as is the case in Finland, where the movement is showing growth and renewal in spite of the economic crisis (40% of the population are members of co-operatives);
- there was a clear affirmation of the characteristics and democratic and ethical values of co-operatives, and also of their economic weight;
- co-operatives have even more need of competence in management and training;
- the sector of the social economy requires a clear legislative framework;
- the sector would like to have European statutes.



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Lisbon: launch of a "Masters Degree in social economy"



The Independent University of Lisbon (IUL), the only European university to have a co-operative structure, organised a conference on 26 and 27 October, whose objective was the launch of a "Masters Degree in social economy".

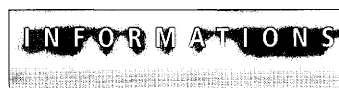
This European "Masters Degree" will start in January 1999 and be jointly organised by IUL, the University of Rennes II and the University of Barcelona. The latter two have been organising this 3rd cycle training for several years. It is primarily aimed at operators in the field who wish to develop their experience and gain qualifications, or merely to increase their knowledge.

This initiative fits in perfectly with the proposal made in the programme-framework project (1999-2004) in favour of the social economy which, among other things, foresees the networking of training in the social economy which exists at university and secondary education level.

On this occasion the participants discussed the FENPROF project, one of the principal teachers' unions (all levels) in Portugal, which proposed to the other unions that a common initiative be taken with regard to insurance. The reason: pension contributions from the State are decreasing and increasingly the question is raised of having good sickness-life insurance cover for teachers as well. The initiative consists of launching a call for tenders in order to find an organisation capable of meeting certain criteria. The successful bidder must offer teachers cover which is as advantageous, or more so, than what is offered on the market. Brokers are excluded and any profit thus generated will go to social activities; an association - ASSPROF - will be created in the medium term and will become a mutual society after three years.

Portuguese teachers hope that this model will bear fruit at European level.

It emerged from this conference that the universities and researchers are becoming more and more interested in the social economy, an inescapable socio-economic reality.



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New Accounting Plan intended for non- profit organisations in Spain



The XIVth Days of "Management and Training of Organisations in the Social Economy" organised by the AST (Association for Social Training) with the collaboration of Directorate General for the Promotion of the Social Economy (Ministry of Work and Social Affairs), were held in Madrid on 8 and 9 October.

On this occasion one of the main issues discussed was the new Accounting Plan, made up of a series of norms which



enable the General Plan to be adapted to the nature and characteristics specific to non-profit organisations.

The principal adaptations are the opening of new accounts, the introduction of new accounting definitions and relationships, to which are added concepts which are specific to the non-profit activity, modifications to the annual accounts with the adaptation of balance sheet models, profit and loss accounts and the annual report including features which are specific to non-profit organisations.

The adapted norms will be mandatory for the financial years which start after 31 December 1998.

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Commerce better represented in the agricultural consultative committees



The agricultural consultative committees and the working groups which were created to advise the European Commission, DG VI (agriculture) in particular, on the numerous decisions concerning the common organisation of agricultural markets and other agricultural issues, have recently been appointed. On this occasion the committees have been reorganised and restructured, and the number of members has been reduced to increase effectiveness.

These committees and working groups have the task of providing clear, objective and pertinent information on all sectors of the market. Even though they only have a consultative role (no voting rights), the Commission often relies on their reports to take its decisions. It is therefore essential

that the interests of commerce are represented there. Directorate General XXIII and Directorate General VI have had fruitful exchanges on this subject. These committees now have several full-time members who have commercial experience. Furthermore, in certain committees and working groups, specialists in commerce, including retail representatives, have been appointed as permanent observers.

At present DG XXIII is confident that retail, wholesale and international commerce are adequately represented in these committees. Let us remember that one of the roles of DG XXIII is to guarantee that the interests of commerce are taken into account in the drawing up of all European policy.

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Disappearance of town-centre commerce: what is the Commission doing?



The European Commission was recently questioned by a European Member of Parliament, Richard Corbett (Socialist, Merseyside, UK). He wished to know if it would take measures in favour of old people and those without transport who were confronted with the problem of the closure of town centre commerce, given the increase in out of town hypermarkets and commercial centres.

In a written reply, Commissioner Papoutsis explained that the Commission has been aware of these problems for a long time. He recalled the follow-up of a Communication which had been published by his services entitled "Towards an urban agenda in the European Union". In this document the Commission planned to present an action plan concerning the problems linked to the urban spread and the growing need to circulate in towns.

Mr. Papoutsis also made reference to the Community programme "Commerce 2000", whose results are expected at the beginning of next year and one of whose principal objectives is to identify the problems common to urban zones in decline. Following that, commerce could be introduced into the sphere of activity of the European structural funds, as certain Member States have requested, and discussions concerning the identification of best practice and its dissemination could take place. Amongst others, these practices could concern modern management methods such as electronic commerce, the training of retailers and better access to financing.

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Agenda

"AL-Partenariat '99"



"AL-Partenariat '99", organised by Eurocentro de Nacional Financiera et Eurochambres, with the support of the European Commission, will be held on 24, 25 and 26 February 1999 in the World Trade Centre (WTC) in Mexico City.

The objective of this meeting is to offer to European, Mexican and Central American enterprises the opportunity to create strategic alliances, joint ventures and to increase their competitiveness through reciprocal widening of their market as well as providing the tools necessary for their development in the context of the globalisation of the economy.

550 Mexican enterprises, 70 from Central America and 250 from the 15 Member States of the European Union, coming from 8 different industrial sectors, are expected.

Other Partenariat events will take place in 1999:

- EU-INDIA Partenariat, New Delhi, 15-16 March
- US-EU Partenariat, Texas, 14-16 April

- EuroPartenariat Austria, Vienna, 10-11 May
- EuroPartenariat Germany, Potsdam, during October

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Worth reading

Recommendation of the Committee for Commerce and Distribution on the euro



The Committee for Commerce and Distribution (CCD) recently adopted a recommendation on the concerns of the commercial sector with regard to the introduction of the euro. The text of this recommendation is available in French and English from:

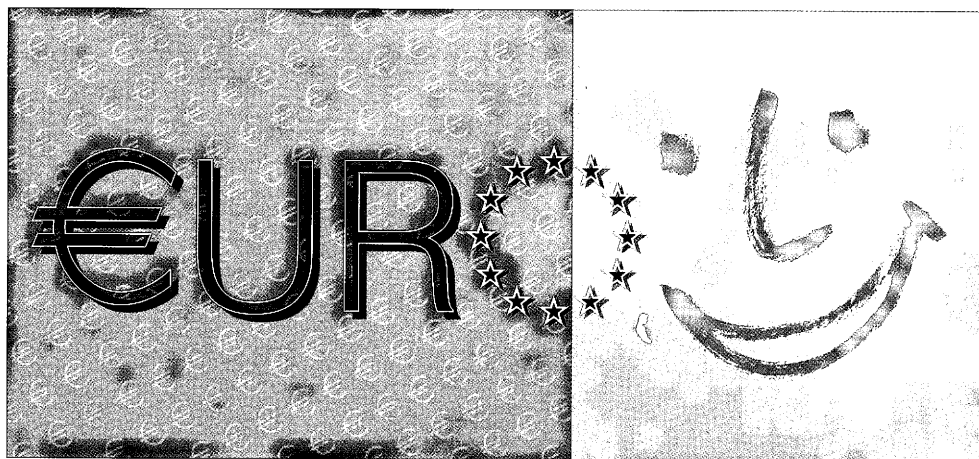
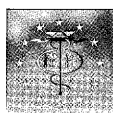
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Annual report of the CEN

The 1997-1998 Annual report of the CEN (European Committee for Normalisation) has just been published. It is available from:

Kristien Van Ingelgem
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Or on de internet: www.cenorm.be





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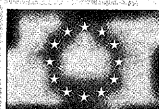


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The bulletin of enterprise policy

Corrigendum

EURO-INFO regrets to inform its readers that Mr. Guy Crauser's new year message, which appeared in the December issue, was badly translated and consequently contained several errors. With our sincere apologies for this unfortunate occurrence, EURO-INFO has pleasure in attaching the correct version of the message from the Director General of DG XXIII.

The whole of the corrected December issue is available on the following internet site: EUROPA:
<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg23index.htm>

New year message from Mr. Guy Crauser Director General of DG XXIII



1998 has been a successful year for the Community's enterprise policy. We have launched a number of important new initiatives in favour of European businesses, as well as pursuing the implementation of the Third Multiannual Programme for SMEs.

The focus of our work has been increasingly on fostering entrepreneurship across the Community and promoting an enterprise culture. An important Communication on this subject was adopted in April, and we have continued to work with colleagues in the Commission and in the Member States to make sure that entrepreneurship is fully taken into account in the co-ordinated employment strategy which is delivered through the National Action Plans for Employment in the Member States.

The BEST report, delivered in May, gives a comprehensive overview of issues affecting businesses and sets out a number of recommendations to simplify the business environment. We have responded by proposing an Action Plan so that the priority issues identified in the report can be translated into concrete measures within a set time frame.

Much has been achieved to improve the financial environment of businesses. A Directive to tackle the persistent problem of late payments was proposed in March. An important new financial instrument to encourage Joint European Ventures (JEV) was adopted in April, as part of the Growth and Employment Initiative. And a new Seed Capital action (CREA) has recently been launched.

Another important development has been the report of the High Level Group on Tourism and Employment, delivered in October. This too contains wide-ranging recommendations to encourage growth and employment in this sector, and we shall be following up the recommendations vigorously.

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What then are our objectives for 1999? There are eight major priorities.

The first is to set out new guidelines for Community enterprise policy. We will propose the next Multiannual Programme for SMEs, starting in 2001, to meet the challenges facing SMEs in the years ahead. The proposal will be based on the evaluation of the current programme, which is already underway. We will also be implementing with Member States the BEST Action Plan.

Secondly, we will be seeking to improve the efficiency of Community programmes and instruments from which businesses can benefit. A recommendation on this issue is planned for the second quarter. We will also be working on support services to businesses, with a communication as well as identification and dissemination of best practice on support measures to small businesses and the craft sector.

A third priority is encouraging entrepreneurship and stimulating sub-contracting. A number of actions on entrepreneurial training will be launched, following a communication on this subject in the first quarter and the setting up of a network of educational organisations involved in the teaching of entrepreneurship or the training of entrepreneurs (BENE). A new Community policy on sub-contracting will be mapped out in a communication on this subject.

1999 will see the advent of the euro, and DG XXIII will continue its efforts to help businesses prepare in this new context. These will include the dissemination of tools such as a free brochure and CD-Rom designed to help SME make the changeover, a targeted campaign by the Euro-Info Centres and pilot actions in tourist destinations.

The extension of our enterprise policy to businesses in the candidate countries will be a fifth priority. Here we will see the implementation of the Association Agreements with CEECs and Cyprus, with the Multiannual Programme opened up to SMEs in these countries. We will work towards helping these businesses gear up for and be fully integrated into the Single Market. The impact of enlargement on SMEs in the EU will also be assessed.

To promote commerce enterprises, we will concentrate on implementing the actions contained in the White Paper due shortly, and in particular to improve the access to and use of electronic commerce for SMEs. Best practices identified to improve the competitiveness of shops in rural and urban areas will be disseminated widely.

A seventh priority is to help unlock the job-creating and growth potential of the social economy. We intend to propose a multiannual programme for the social economy and issue White Papers on co-operatives and on mutual societies.

Last but not least, we foresee action to promote the competitiveness and quality of European tourism. These will include a communication on the follow-up to the recommendations of the High Level Group on Tourism and Employment. The campaign against child sex tourism will also continue, with a report on the progress made.

Looking further ahead, we shall reflect in 1999 on the crucial issue of improving access of SMEs to innovation and technology. This will involve a collective effort in DG XXIII, together with colleagues in the Commission and with the business organisations, and should lead to actions in 2000 and in the next Multiannual Programme.

These are challenging but realistic priorities, which I believe will benefit European businesses.

I wish all of our readers a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Guy Crauser
Director General of DG XXIII