EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media

Monthly newsletter
ISSN 1021-2353

frontier-free EUROPE

All European law on the Internet

by Marcelino Oreja, Member of the European Commission

The 'EU Law Service' will shortly put all EU legislation, along with its interpretation, on a single Internet site. It represents a major achievement in terms of transparency.

The world's largest Internet site

Under the stimulus of the European Parliament and the European Commission, the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities will provide the following legal material free on the Internet:

- a consolidated version of the Treaties — I do not have to stress the importance of this material, following the decision to go over the numbering of the Treaties with, I imagine, the risk of confusion that this can give rise to;
- documents dealing with ongoing consultations published by the European Commission and draft legislation;
- existing legislation, drawn from the CELEX database;
- consolidated legal texts;
- access to the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Communities;
- the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, the L and C series, for the latest 20-day period.

The EU Law Service is likely to be the world's largest Internet site in terms of quantity, with some 800 000 documents — that is to say four times more than is currently available on Europa (http://europa.eu.int). Legislation in force and the Official Journal alone represent 500 000 pages.

This material will be made available progressively. In practice, it will probably be available towards the end of this January. The documents should be accessible either by subject matter or chronologically, starting with the European Union's monthly bulletin. The consolidated legislation will also be updated each month; however, a good deal of work remains to be done in this connection. It goes without saying that this operation presents numerous legal difficulties. The Office for Official Publications has undertaken to improve gradually the quality of access to this site, by not only using the most effective methods but also following up on the comments made by users.

A feature of the transparency policy

There will continue to be a charge for access to the CELEX database, which offers professional users an additional service of commercial value. This will also be the case as regards the Official Journal, which will continue to be available on paper, microfiche and CD-ROM.

I am aware that this initiative does not fill the gap when it comes to transparency and the information needs of both ordinary citizens and professionals. To do this successfully requires a multitude of information and transparency tools; information technology by itself is not enough.

However, I believe that the EU Law Service must provide information in real time, and on a priority basis, to national parliaments, local authorities, those with a professional interest in EU law, and citizens who are particularly interested and to their organisations.

This initiative is an element in the modernisation of our publications; in the last analysis, the aim is to make it easier to obtain information on Community policies and law. As for the dissemination of Community law, we have two main areas of activity.

- We are offering our publications as widely as possible in electronic form — in real time (on-line) and on CD-ROM (off-line). These new forms of communication allow us to reach large numbers of people more quickly and easily, and at very low cost — in fact, at no cost to the citizen.
- We are actively consolidating Community law. This is essential if we are to simplify our legislation, thus making it more accessible to Europeans.

But I am not overlooking the more general issue of transparency, particularly as the Amsterdam Treaty places on us — I am tempted to add, at last! — very precise obligations. In my view, transparency includes the right of citizens to check what is being done and the democratic right to information, so that they can benefit fully from Community measures.

Cross-border joint ventures

With a view to encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from different European Union (EU) countries to set up cross-border joint ventures, the European Commission launched its joint European venture (JEV) initiative on 5 November. As such ventures are still something of a rarity, budding JEVs will be granted up to ECU 100 000 per project (ECU 1 = GBP 0.67 or IEP 0.78), provided they involve at least two SMEs from two different EU Member States. The selected JEVs will also have to create new jobs, which will have to be viable in the long term; the acquisition of existing enterprises will not count. A network of financial institutions, chosen by the Commission, will select the projects and allocate the funds to them. The EU's aid will be in grant form, the initial payment being in the form of a reimbursable advance, convertible into a grant. The budget for the JEV initiative has been set at ECU 5 million for 1997.

Better cooperation on VAT/excise duties

Government departments in the 15-nation European Union with responsibility for VAT and excise duties will cooperate more closely with each other between 1998 and 2002, thanks to the Fiscalis programme, which the EU Council of Ministers approved in principle on 1 December. With a budget of ECU 40 million, the programme will both prolong and extend the activities carried out until this year under the Matthaeus-Tax programme. The aim is to strengthen the computerised communication and control systems, and to provide civil servant training that is both effective and coordinated at the European level. This should guarantee the uniform application of European rules in the single market, and greater effectiveness in the fight against fraud [1].

Stimulating the information society

In order to help small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as private individuals, take advantage of information and communication technologies, the EU Council of Ministers adopted on 1 December a European programme covering the period from 1998 to 2002, with a budget of ECU 25 million. It covers three major types of activities. The lion's share — 57 % of the total budget — will be used to exploit the programme's European dimension, in order to make better use of these new technologies. The aim is to encourage EU countries to share their experiences, identify the obstacles to the operation of the single market and study the reasons which prevent SMEs, regions and disadvantaged categories from taking part in the information society. The second area of activity is mainly concerned with creating public awareness and with measures to encourage SMEs active in this sector to participate fully in the changes which are taking place. The third area of activity relates to the global dimension of the information society, and covers exchanges with non-EU countries.

The internal market for postal services

Liberalisation, a universal service and common quality standards — these are the principles governing the common internal market for postal services, which will have to be in place in 1999, according to a directive adopted by the EU Council on 1 December, after its adoption by the European Parliament. The directive defines the services to be liberalised, as well as those which the Fifteen can reserve for the universal service provider — a permanent provision of services at affordable prices and throughout the Member States' territory. It also sets out the requirements of a universal service — collection and delivery every working day, for example. The directive introduces quality standards for cross-border mail: 85 % of postal items in the fastest standard category should be delivered within three working days after posting, and 97 % within five days. Independent bodies will monitor the quality of postal services at least once a year. The directive requires the Fifteen to have at least one regulatory authority which is independent of postal operators. It also stipulates that postal charges must be geared to costs.

A START IS MADE ON FISCAL COORDINATION

For the first time the 15 European Union countries have committed themselves to coordinating their fiscal policies, to the extent required for the effective operation of the European single market and the forthcoming European monetary union. A meeting of the EU's finance and economic ministers adopted on 1 December a code of conduct in the area of company taxation. The ministers at the same time asked the European Commission to put forward two directives: one on the taxation of savings, and the other on inter-company interest and royalty payments, as these can give rise to double taxation and discrimination. The ministers even set out the broad outlines of the first of these two directives. Through the code of conduct, the Fifteen have committed themselves politically to combat the use of tax and other incentives by Member States to attract economic activities, to the detriment of other Member States. The Fifteen thus have undertaken to refrain from introducing new measures of this kind, and to abandon gradually existing measures and practices. They consider, with the Commission, that this process should take place before 1 January 2003. The code provides for the setting-up of a special group to assess the fiscal measures in question. The Commission will look at fiscal measures which may be said to amount to State aid.

[1] The text will be adopted definitively after its approval by the European Parliament.

EUROPE INVESTS IN ITS REGIONS (I)

The European Union is a diverse community of nations living in close cooperation. A total of 370 million people share a territory that extends from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to well within the Arctic Circle with many different cultures, languages, and ways of life.

A community of opportunities for all?

Although in global terms the EU is prosperous, there are striking internal contrasts of wealth and opportunity. Consider the following scenario.

A pupil in school in the German region of Upper Bavaria looks forward to a promising future. She is fortunate to come from one of Europe's richest areas. Along with more than three quarters of her friends, she is likely to continue studying for some further qualifications which will make finding a job much easier. On completing higher education or training, she will look for a job in a dynamic economy joining a healthy labour market with unemployment at a comparatively low 4 %. She is likely to find work that matches her qualifications and she will probably receive further training on the job. In short, our brave Bavarian will enjoy a standard of living that is the target for her contemporaries in other countries.

Meanwhile, in rural southern Spain, a young Andalusian finishes school and along with 70 % of his class he will not get access to further training, education or vocational qualifications. With unemployment at around 30 %, he finds himself joining the labour market only to face fierce competition for work. As he has had no training, he offers few marketable skills to a potential employer, who in turn is operating in an unfavourable economic climate in one of Europe's least developed regions. For our valiant Andalusian, the future is far from assured.

Why care?

But why should our Bavarian be concerned for the plight of her Spanish contemporary?

Why does it concern the European Union that some regions are underperforming?

Regional differences in standards of living and economic performance are not only bad news for those regions at the bottom of the scale. In the long run, these differences also work against the interests of the most developed areas. Beyond just being unfair, there are many economic reasons to support this case.

Firstly, Europe is one of the world's largest markets for manufactured goods. EU businesses sell most of their products within Europe itself. It is therefore in the interests of producers that all of Europe's markets are healthy, sophisticated and demonstrate a growing demand for high-quality end products.

Secondly, within the single market big differences between wages, operating costs and so on will distort competition — upsetting the market place and condemning weaker regions to act as assembly lines for products developed in wealthier areas.

Thirdly, the single currency (a declared goal of the EU countries) can only be launched if all European economies are operating in similar conditions. Economic underperformance in some countries makes the whole of Europe weaker, more vulnerable and less competitive.

So, the EU is working to give all its citizens a high and sustainable quality of life not only because it is more fair, but because it will benefit everyone in the long run and will pave the way for a dynamic and integrated Europe of the future.

What are the Structural Funds?

The European Union has at its disposal a financial instrument called the Structural Funds to address long-term social and economic problems. The EU, working closely with Member States and regional authorities, uses these Funds to promote development and reduce inequalities between regions and social groups. The four Funds are as follows:

- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- the European Social Fund (ESF);
- the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF);
- the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).

Which issues are being tackled?

The Structural Funds target geographic regions with the following characteristics:

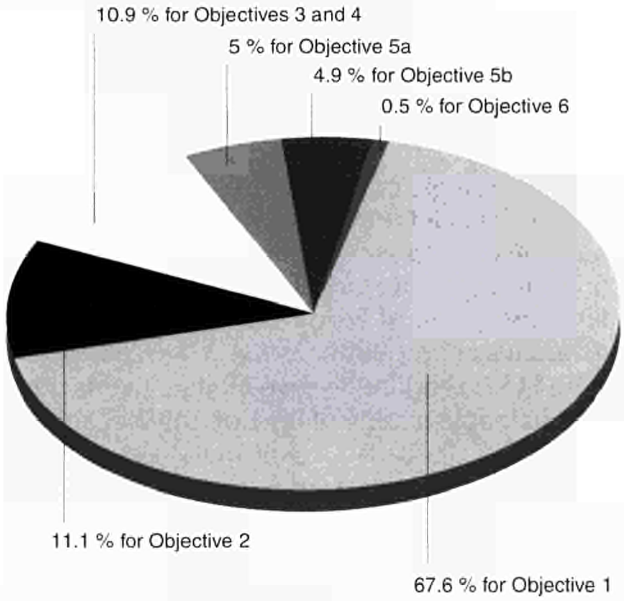
- regions whose development is lagging behind (Objective 1);

- regions seriously affected by industrial decline (Objective 2);
- rural areas (Objective 5b);
- regions with an extremely low population density (Objective 6).

The Funds also address the following issues across the Union:

- long-term unemployment and the socio-economic integration of excluded groups (Objective 3);
- unemployment associated with industrial change (Objective 4);
- structural adaptation of agriculture and fisheries (Objective 5a).

Breakdown of structural assistance



How much is being spent?

The resources made available by the Structural Funds for regional assistance have been growing steadily to rise to the challenge of assisting the less developed areas. The money allocated for 1994 to 1999 amounts to ECU 154.5 billion (at 1994 prices) equivalent to nearly GBP 120 billion. This represents about one third of the European Union's total budget.

This considerable financial effort is modest when viewed in terms of the resources deployed by the national governments of the Member States. However, it bears witness to the size of the task needed to achieve the goal of economic and social cohesion.

How long will it take?

EU assistance in the regions is having a positive impact, but it will take time to achieve the results that Europe needs.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is one of the tools used to measure wealth, and while the differences are large between the EU Member States, they are even larger between the regions. For example, the country with the highest GDP per capita is Luxembourg at 160 % of the EU average; the country with the lowest is Greece at 63 %. However, the regions show a much wider gap with the German city of Hamburg reaching 190 %, as opposed to the Portuguese regions of Alentejo and the Azores with only 42 %.

The situation is similar to a cross-country race in which a very fit athlete starts the competition with a head start over a weaker competitor. Obviously, the less fit runner not only needs to match the pace of his rival to maintain a position in the race; if he hopes to close the gap he must run even faster.

In the same way, Europe's weaker regions need to match the performance of the most successful regions and indeed to exceed them over the course of many years if they are to catch up.

Thanks in part to European assistance, the four poorest countries of the EU — Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal — have raised their income per head from 66 to 74 % of the Community average. But this took 10 years to achieve, and there is still a long way to go. In the end, success will require a continued concentration of assistance on the less wealthy regions.

How does it work?

Financing from the Structural Funds is in the form of non-reimbursable assistance, not loans. The money is channelled through two- to six-year development programmes which are negotiated between the European Commission and each Member State, and implemented in cooperation with the regional and local authorities concerned. These programmes lay out the specific priorities and measures eligible for financial support. When the programmes for each country have been agreed, the relevant national authorities announce that money is available, and request that individual project proposals be submitted for consideration. Projects which receive money are, therefore, not selected directly by the European Commission, but by the national or regional authorities responsible for each programme. All projects which receive European assistance must also receive co-financing from national or other sources.

(The second part of this article will appear in a subsequent issue.)

eurostat

KEY FIGURES

Data Shop Eurostat Luxembourg
tel. (352) 43 35 22-51 — fax (352) 43 35 22-221

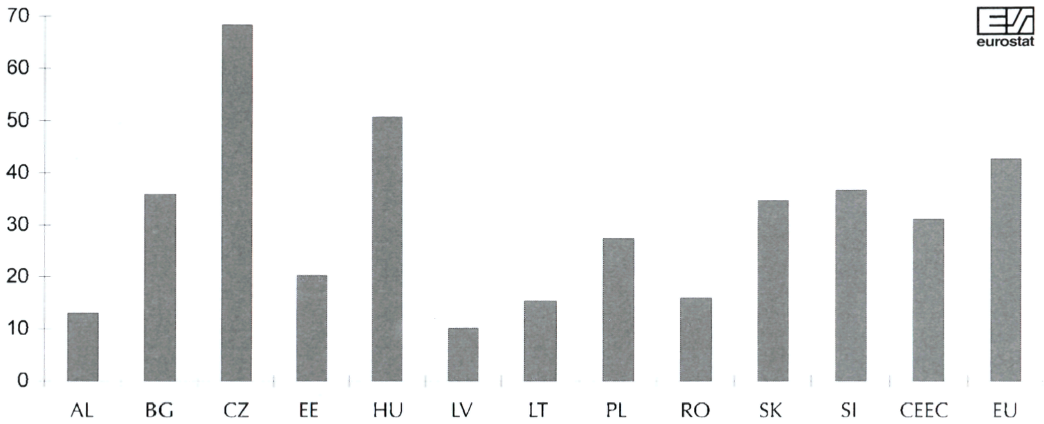
Enterprises in central and eastern Europe

A majority of very small enterprises

In September 1995, about 3.4 enterprises were carrying out activites in accordance with the laws of the market in the 11 recipient countries under the European Union's PHARE programme

The average density of enterprises in the CEECs [1], i.e. 3.1 enterprises per 1 000 inhabitants, is lower than in the European Union (42.8 per 1 000). This density varies considerably depending on the country. It is above the EU average in the Czech Republic and Hungary, but is low in the Baltic countries and the Balkan States.

Enterprises per 1 000 inhabitants, 1995



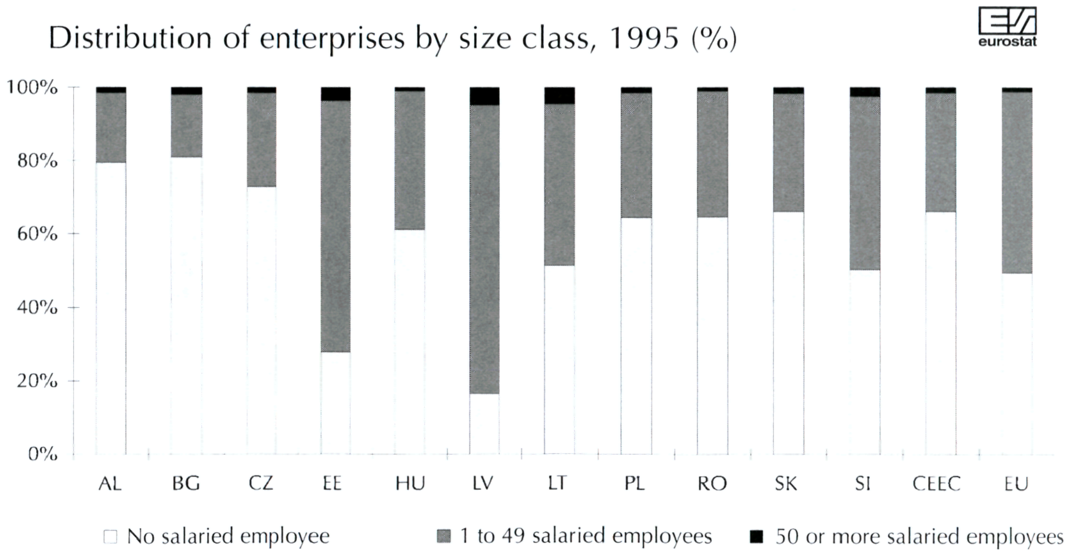
Enterprises per 1 000 inhabitants, 1995

AL	BG	CZ	EE	HU	LV	LT	PL	RO	SK	SI	CEEC	EU
13.1	35.9	68.4	20.3	50.7	10.1	15.4	27.4	16	34.8	36.8	31.1	42.8

The majority of enterprises are very small (no salaried employees). The proportion of medium-sized and large enterprises (over 49 salaried employees) is almost negligible

Medium-sized and large enterprises account for a similar slice of the total of the EU and the CEECs. Enterprises with no salaried employees do, on the other hand, feature more largely both in the number and in terms of total employment in the CEECs. The average size of enterprises (7.4 employees) is quite comparable with the EU (6.5 employees)

Distribution of enterprises by size class, 1995 (%)



Distribution of enterprises by size class, 1995 (%)

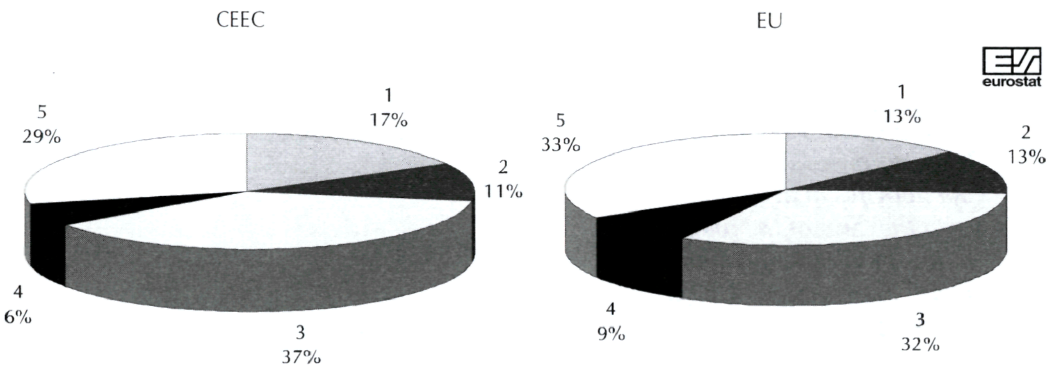
	AL	BG	CZ	EE	HU	LV	LT	PL	RO	SK	SI	CEEC	EU
No salaried employee	79.6	81.0	72.9	27.9	61.1	16.5	51.6	64.6	64.8	66.1	50.6	66.2	49.7
1 to 49 salaried employees	19.1	17.1	25.7	68.5	37.9	78.7	44.0	34.1	34.3	32.2	47.0	32.4	49.2
50 or more salaried employees	1.3	1.9	1.4	3.5	1.0	4.8	4.4	1.3	0.9	1.6	2.4	1.4	1.1

[1] CEECs: central and eastern European countries: Albania (AL), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE),Hungary (HU), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI).

The breakdown by main sector of activity is fairly similar to the situation in the European Union

The EU has a larger proportion of service enterprises, whilst the countries of central and eastern Europe remain more industrial. Albania and Bulgaria stand out for their high proportion of enterprises in the Horeca sector (hotels, restaurants and cafes).

Distribution of enterprises by sector of activity, 1995 (%)



Distribution of enterprises by sector of activity (%), 1995

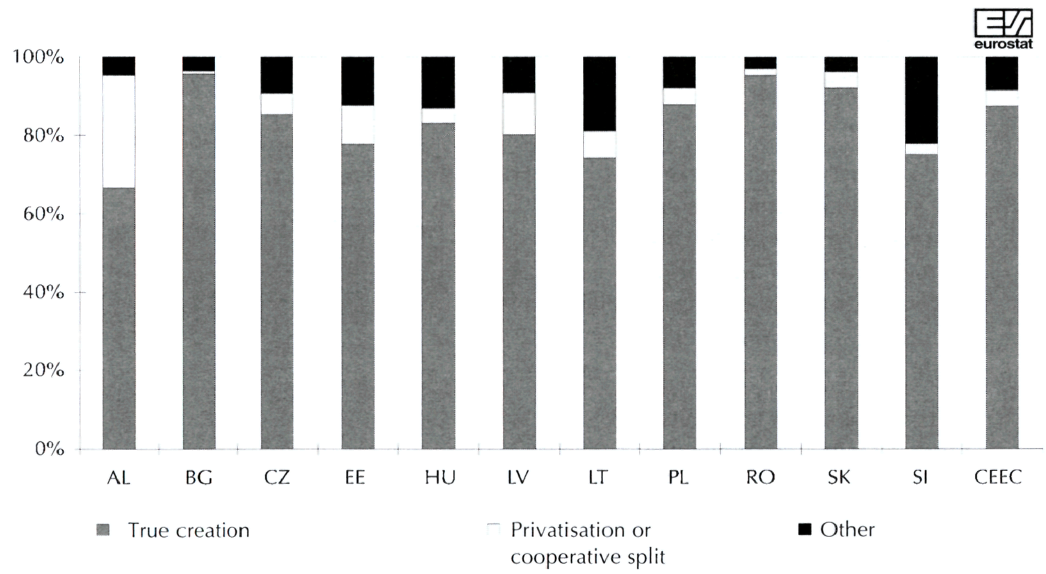
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
CEEC	16.9	10.6	37.6	6.1	28.7	100
EU	13.3	12.7	31.8	8.5	33.6	100

1: Manufacture; 2: Construction; 3: Distributive trade; 4: Hotels, restaurants and cafes; 5:Transport and services

In all countries, with the exception of the Baltic states and Albania, the proportion of enterprises created through the privatisation of former State enterprises is negligible

It is mainly larger enterprises which have been privatised. The vast majority of enterprises have been created from scratch without any resumption of former activities.

Distribution of enterprises by type of creation (%), 1995



Distribution of enterprises by type of creation (%), 1995

	AL	BG	CZ	EE	HU	LV	LT	PL	RO	SK	SI	CEEC
True creation	66.5	95.6	85.5	77.8	83.2	80.3	74.3	87.8	95.3	92.0	75.3	87.4
Privatisation or cooperative split	28.6	0.7	5.3	9.8	3.7	10.6	6.9	4.2	1.7	4.2	2.6	4.1
Other	4.8	3.7	9.2	12.3	13.1	9.1	18.8	8.1	3.1	3.8	22.1	8.4

IN BRIEF

Euro banknotes will make their appearance on 1 January 2002, according to the decision taken by the European Monetary Institute, the forerunner of the European Central Bank, on 4 November. **Euro coins** will be introduced on the same date, as decided by the EU Council of Ministers on 17 November. The Council also approved (¹) on 20 November technical specifications for the coins, which will come in eight denominations: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 50 cent as well as 1 and 2 euro. One side of the coins will be European and the other national.

As from 1 January 2000 at the latest, telephone subscribers in 10 European Union countries will be able to **pre-select the dialling code** of the telephone company they have chosen and **keep their own telephone number**, even if they change from one company to another. Under the timetable approved by the EU Council on 1 December, these possibilities will become available to subscribers in the following countries on the dates indicated: Luxembourg — 1 July 2000; Spain — 1 December 2000; Ireland and Portugal — 1 January 2002; Greece — 1 January 2003.

National and regional legislation can give **priority to women for promotion in the civil service**, as long as they are equally qualified, and on condition that male candidates are not excluded a priori. In handing down this ruling on 11 November, in a case brought by a teacher, Helmut Marschall, against the German *Land* of North Rhine-Westphalia, the European Court of Justice took the view that European rules authorise a wide range of 'positive measures' in favour of women.

European rules will apply as from 24 October 1998 at the latest to **data protection** and the **rights of subscribers** to digital telecommunications networks, both fixed — ISDN in particular — and mobile. A directive adopted by the EU Council on 1 December, following its adoption by the European Parliament, sets out these rules in order to prevent the appearance of divergent regulations within the single market. The directive also ensures the confidentiality of communications, under binding rules, as from 24 October 2000.

As from the year 2000, retailers will have to show clearly both the sales price and the **price per unit of measurement** — such as a kilogram or a litre — according to a directive agreed by the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament on 6 November. Each EU Member State will set out its own marking and labelling rules. It will also be able to exempt from the scope of the directive products supplied in the course of providing a service as well as auction sales and sales of works of art and antiques. The Fifteen will also be able to grant temporary derogations to certain small businesses.

The Fifteen will harmonise their laws regarding the **patentable nature of inventions in the field of biotechnology**, according to a directive approved by the EU Council (¹) in principle on 27 November. As a result, the single market in this sector will now be able to operate freely. At the insistence of the European Parliament, the text bans the cloning of human beings, as well as all manipulations of genetic identity. It also stipulates that a natural substance which has been discovered cannot be patented.

The Fifteen will soon have to notify all their draft regulations on **services in the information society** to the European Commission. The directive, which was approved by the EU Council (¹) in principle on 27 November, seeks to prevent divergences from arising between Member States, lest they hamper the free movement of these services.

The **holder of a marque** cannot oppose its utilisation by a stockist, who wants to publicise the corresponding products in a marketing campaign. In setting out this principle, in a ruling which it handed down on 4 November, the European Court of Justice made an important exception, whose relevance will have to be assessed for each dispute. This is because the exception applies to cases in which utilisation of the marque would seriously undermine its reputation. The ruling was given in a case brought by Christian Dior perfumes against Kruidvat, a hardware chain that had included the Dior marque in its leaflets.

An agreement between the European Parliament and the EU Council seeks to prevent reverse discrimination against EU companies, in relation to their competitors based elsewhere in the world, as regards **public works contracts in the water, energy, transport and telecommunications sectors**. The agreement, reached on 6 November, covers amendments to EU procedures in these sectors, in order to bring them into line with the agreement reached in the Uruguay Round.

The European Commission adopted on 25 November a **new list of agricultural products specific to a given region**, thus ensuring that their designations are protected throughout the EU. The 25 products in question come from Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Sweden, and are added to the list of 415 designations already protected at the EU level.

The bodies which train **judges, prosecutors and lawyers**, and future members of these professions, will be able to ask for financial support in order to provide training and information on European law, thanks to the Robert Schuman action. Approved by the EU Council (¹) on 27 November, the sum available in principle is ECU 5.6 million for three years.

As from 31 December 1998 at the latest, the Fifteen will have to ban the sale of coloured or scented paraffin oil in containers of less than 15 litres, under the terms of a directive adopted by the European Commission on 14 November. The aim is to prevent the use of this oil in **ornamental table lamps**, given that some children have swallowed the oil, occasionally with fatal results. The Commission has also asked the European Standards Committee to draw up a standard which ensures that children cannot reach the contents of these lamps.

The **exchanges involving national civil servants who must apply European internal market rules** are to be continued in 1998 and 1999, in the framework of the Karolus programme, which is being extended. Under the terms of a mechanism approved by the EU Council (¹) in principle on 27 November, these exchanges will be extended to other countries of western Europe as well as to the countries of central and eastern Europe, and Cyprus. The sum allocated for this purpose is ECU 4.5 million.

Ensuring the free movement of **medical devices for *in vitro* diagnosis**, even while protecting patients' health, is the aim of a directive approved in principle by the EU Council (¹) on 27 November. It sets out the basic requirements as regards safety and effectiveness which the devices in question will have to meet in order to be marketed throughout the EU.

By adopting in principle a directive on **coffee extracts and chicory powder**, the EU Council (¹) decided on 27 November to simplify existing European legislation. It kept only those basic requirements needed to guarantee free movement within the single market.

The EU Council (¹) adopted in principle on 27 November an amendment to EU law extending **the list of food additives, other than colourants and sweeteners**. The aim is to adapt the rules in question to changes in technology, and to take account of the additives used for making traditional foodstuffs in Austria, Finland and Sweden, EU Member States since 1 January 1995.

The **Swedish monopoly for the retail sale of alcoholic beverages** is not incompatible with the EC Treaty; what is incompatible, however, is the provision which reserves the right to import these beverages to firms authorised to manufacture or engage in wholesale trade in them. A ruling to this effect was handed down by the European Court of Justice on 23 October, in a case in which the national monopoly was challenged by someone accused of having sold wine in Sweden without authorisation.

(¹) The text will be adopted definitively after its approval by the European Parliament.

INITIATIVES

Guides and fact sheets for EU citizens

Travelling within the 15-nation European Union, buying goods and services in the single market, and equal opportunities for men and women — these are the subjects of three new guides which Europeans can download from the 'Citizens first' Internet site (http://citizens.eu.int), or by dialling the following free phone numbers: 0800 58 15 91 in the UK and 1800 55 31 88 in Ireland. The new guides, published by the European Commission on 25 November, are in addition to the three published last year. The latter are still available, and deal with living, working and studying in an EU country other than one's own. Twenty-five fact sheets have been published to accompany the new guides; they cover such specific subjects as insuring your car or opening a bank account in another EU country. Those seeking advice on personal problems can contact the 'Citizens first' signpost service, through either the telephone numbers given above or the Internet site. An expert will return the call within three working days, and give information on the national or European bodies offering relevant advice. Since the 'Citizens first' operation was launched in November 1996, it has been contacted by more than one million people.

SINGLE MARKET: THE MISSING 25 %

In all, 25 % of the single market directives have gone unheeded in at least one European Union country, according to the first single market 'noticeboard' published by the European Commission on 19 November. The proportion of directives awaiting implementation ranges from 3 % in Denmark to 10 % in Austria. The areas posing the most problems are transport, government procurement and intellectual and industrial property. The fact that Member States are taking far longer than they should to reply to the European Commission, when contacted by it over infringement proceedings, is another source of concern. On the other hand, nearly all EU countries have set up contact points for both companies and private individuals. They have also established coordination centres, which must now be organised as a network and made operational. The effects of the single market are being felt, according to an opinion poll of some 3 500 companies, including 3 000 SMEs, carried out in September. SMEs are more reticent, however, than large companies, while industrial companies view the single market more favourably than firms in the service sector.

● Employment guidelines

In order to combat youth and long-term unemployment, the EU Heads of State or Government approved guidelines for 1998 when they met in an extraordinary session in Luxembourg on 20 and 21 November. The Fifteen indicated that over the next five years they will offer a fresh start to all unemployed young people before they reach six months of unemployment and unemployed adults before they reach 12 months of unemployment. This fresh start will take the form of training, retraining, work practice or some other activity aimed at reintegration into the labour market. The Fifteen also set themselves the goal of offering such reintegration activities to 20 % of the unemployed, the current average for the EU as a whole being 10 %. Through such measures, the Fifteen have undertaken to implement at once certain provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty — which still awaits ratification by national parliaments. The guidelines should be adopted by the EU Council of Ministers at the end of December, so that they can appear in the various national employment plans which the Fifteen should present to the Heads of State or Government when they meet in June 1998.

○ IN BRIEF

The European Commission proposed on 12 November a system that would allow young people, whatever their level of training, to **train as apprentices in another EU country**. The proposal is based on an existing system for students and teachers. The young people would receive a document which would be recognised in their own country. Entitled 'Europass — Training', it would testify to the training they had received.

To facilitate the **cross-border execution of civil and commercial judgments** throughout the 15-nation EU, the European Commission proposed on 26 November that existing international conventions be amended. The aim is to make the execution of a judgment delivered in another EU country virtually automatic.

Concrete proposals for **simplifying single market rules** in the areas of VAT, banking services, fertilisers and foreign trade terminology have resulted from the second stage of the SLIM initiative. They were presented by the European Commission on 25 November.

SEEN FROM OUTSIDE

▶ Switzerland and the euro

Switzerland's Federal Council (government) 'is examining the appropriateness of anchoring the Swiss franc to the euro', the country's Foreign Minister, Falvio Cotti, declared on 28 October in Madrid, before the Hispano-Swiss Economic Association. He took the view that 'when a country is absent from the United Nations and the European Union, it ends up punishing itself'. The President of the Swiss National Bank, the country's central bank, Hans Meyer, declared in Zurich on 4 November that he envisaged a temporary link between the Swiss franc and the euro were the Swiss currency to appreciate sharply. But a permanent fixed exchange rate *vis-à-vis* the euro would result in Switzerland losing its relative autonomy in monetary matters, and would oblige it to raise interest rates to the level of those of the future euro area, according to Mr Meyer. Even so, Switzerland has a 'vital interest' in the success of the European monetary union, in Mr Meyer's view.

**A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet.
It can be accessed through the Europa server (http://europa.eu.int).**

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OFFICE FOR OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS
OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
L-2985 Luxembourg

Catalogue number: CC-AI-98-001-EN-C