

## ***The Annual EURO INFO CENTRES Conference: New Challenges Facing the EIC Network***



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The Annual EURO INFO CENTRES Conference will be held in Brussels on 20 and 21 September 1996 under the chairmanship of Mr Christos Papoutsis, Member of the European Commission responsible for SME policy. This 7th annual conference will bring together the 230 Euro Info Centres established throughout the European Economic Area, the 20 Correspondence Centres located in third countries, the main people involved with the network from the Commission and other institutions, as well as a certain number of guests from the Belgian and Community political and economic scene.

The EIC network's main strength and its effectiveness as an information and counselling tool for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lies, among other things, in the permanent exchange of information between its members and DG XXIII (enterprise policy), between the EIC and the Correspondence Centres themselves, and between the EIC and the other services and networks of the European Commission. As a result, the EICs are fully operational and effective actors on the SME scene.

For EICs, therefore, the Conference is absolutely necessary to fully carry out the Community's policy in favour of SMEs. It will help to strengthen the network relationships which in turn helps to offer better services and information to enterprises. This meeting will also contribute to making the network more aware of the economic and political developments which effect SMEs.

Two main topics will appear on the programme of this year's conference: the third Multiannual Programme for SMEs in the European Union (1997-2000) proposed within the framework of the updated Second Integrated Programme in Favour of SMEs and the Craft Sector, and the establishment of the Single Currency. Presentations on the main themes of these two topics will alternate with vital recommendations for the proper functioning of the network and the establishment of good practice.

The next multiannual programme (currently being discussed in the Council) will have implications for the operations of the EICs which will see their informational and consulting role increased. They will become the 'first stop shops' where SMEs in search of Community information can come in order to find simplified access to the different programmes set up to help them.

During the Conference, the main network partners from the Commission will explain their projects for future cooperation between the different networks, and the various working groups will deal with the following themes: improving quality, relations with the other Commission services, with local service providers.

The second topic of the Conference is the Single Currency and the involvement of the EICs in the information campaigns planned to promote it. Several working groups will discuss, among other topics, the aid to provide to SMEs upon introduction and use of the Euro, and their participation in the promotional campaigns.

## TOURISM: Council Results

The ministers of tourism held a preliminary debate on the proposal for a Council decision to establish the 'PHILOXENIA' programme (1997-2000) to assist European Tourism which was adopted by the Commission on 30 April 1996<sup>1</sup>. The programme's ultimate objective, which has received a favourable initial reaction, is to stimulate the quality and competitiveness of European tourism in order to contribute to growth and employment. In order to give new vigour to an important field of activity (the European tourist industry employs 9 million people and accounts for 5.5% of the EU gross national product), the Commission suggests concentrating on four objectives:

- improving knowledge in the field of tourism;
- improving the legislative and financial environment for tourism;
- raising quality;
- increasing the number of tourists from third countries.

Both the current presidency (Italy) and the next (Ireland) committed themselves to promoting a speedy examination of the proposal within the Council working group with a view to reaching decision, if possible, at the next Tourism Council meeting planned for October 1996.

The Council also held an orientation debate on the results of the consultation carried out upon launching the Commission's Green Paper on 'The Role of the European Union in the Field of Tourism'<sup>2</sup>. The Green Paper, published by the Commission in April 1995, describes the level of current Community participation in the field of tourism and sets out different possibilities for its future involvement. Views expressed within the Council ranged from broadly maintaining the existing approach to the introducing a Community Tourism Policy founded on a specific provision of the revised Treaty.

In addition, the Council examined the Commission's report on Community measures affecting tourism in 1994<sup>3</sup>. The commissioner responsible for tourism, Mr PAPOUTSIS, also presented to the Council the Report on the Evaluation of the Community Action Plan (1993-95) to Assist Tourism<sup>4</sup>. The report was particularly well received by the Fifteen, as much for its content as for the Commission's totally transparent approach in evaluating the actions carried out in the past.

Finally, a targeted political framework was given to the *Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation* in the field of tourism, with the adoption by the Fifteen of a resolution to follow up on the commitments accepted at the Barcelona Conference on 26 and 27 November 1995. The text of the resolution emphasises information, training and promotion as priority areas which must be the object of increased cooperation between the European Union and partner countries in the Mediterranean basin. Apart from specific actions, the resolution calls on all parties to strive for an optimal employment of human potential in this sector and an improvement in the general quality of services provided.

**For further information:** DG XXIII/C/3 — Concerted Actions and Community Contributions in Favour of Tourism

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<sup>1</sup> COM(96)168 Final — see EURO-INFO no. 90 — May 1996

<sup>2</sup> COM(95)97 Final

<sup>3</sup> COM(96) 29 final. Parallel to specific measures of the Action Plan, the report reviews Community policies in questions of structural funds, and regional, transport and environmental policy.

<sup>4</sup> COM(96) 166 final. See EURO-INFO no. 90 — May 1996

## **INDUSTRY COUNCIL: SMEs, Textile and Chemical Industries**

During the 'Industry' Council held in Brussels on 20 May 1996, the Fifteen reached broad agreement on the text of the proposal for a Decision concerning a third multiannual programme for SMEs in the European Union<sup>5</sup>. However, the question of the sum earmarked for its implementation was held in abeyance pending in particular the Opinion of the European Parliament. The Commission feels that ECU 180 million is necessary to fund the programme.

In general, the Fifteen are in agreement over the programme's outlines, and have instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to begin examining the introductory part (recitals) and its Annexes (containing a list of specific measures for attaining the objectives of the programme) with a view to finalising the entire text in the light of the Opinions of the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions.

It will be recalled that the programme, covering the period from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 2000, targets the following objectives:

- simplifying and improving the administrative and regulatory environment of enterprises;
- improving the financial environment of enterprises;
- helping SMEs to Europeanise and internationalise their strategies, in particular through better information and cooperation services;
- strengthening SMEs' competitiveness and improving their access to research, innovation and training;
- promoting the enterprise spirit and supporting target groups;
- improving the instruments of the policy to assist SMEs.

With its legal basis in article 130 of the Treaty, this programme requires a unanimous vote in the Council after receiving the opinion of the European Parliament.

The Council also heard a presentation on the communication entitled '*Competitiveness of Subcontracting in the Textiles/Clothing Sector of the European Union*'<sup>6</sup>. Commissioner Bangemann, responsible for industry, stated that the purpose of the communication was to propose a range of measures and support structures aimed at helping the efforts made by the textiles/clothing to improve competitiveness. The Commission could, with the assistance of a working party representing that industry, play a role of promotion and encouragement by ensuring complementarity and synergy between the various levels and partners (see also page 4).

In other action, the Council took note of the Commission Communication<sup>7</sup> on *The Competitiveness of the Chemical Industry*, of which a great many SMEs are part.

The Communication lists the main challenges and needs to be met by the chemical industry and proposes measures to be taken by companies, the Community and Member States. It stresses the need for simplified and consolidated legislation (taking into account the concomitant financial implications), and for international competition on an equal footing and a reduction in energy costs (principally by establishing an internal market in electricity). In order to ensure the sector's future competitiveness, it is vitally important to promote product quality, training and innovation.

## **COMMERCE: Encouraging 'Competitive Adaptation'**

Commerce is the second largest employer in the European Union after the industrial sector. It accounts for some 15% of global employment, 13% of the value added and a third of all EU enterprises. As with all other sectors, it is confronted with new challenges: the new information and communication technologies are revolutionising daily the storage, transportation, marketing and management capacities of every commercial enterprise. '*Commerce Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century*' was the theme of a plenary meeting of the Committee for Commerce and Distribution (CCD), held in Brussels on 26 April 1996 in the presence of the European Commissioner responsible for this sector, Mr Christos PAPOUTSIS, the Directors-General in charge of internal commerce of the Member States, along with representatives of the European Professional Federations of commerce.

<sup>5</sup> COM(96)98 Final — see EURO-INFO no. 89

<sup>6</sup> COM(96)210 Final

<sup>7</sup> COM(96)187 Final: A industrial competitiveness policy for the European chemical industry: an example.

On this occasion, Mr Papoutsis emphasised that commerce had only one way of responding to the challenges of the 21st century: competitive adaptation. The gains in productivity based on the use of new technologies must be added to quality services for all end users, thus increasing the value added to merchandise which will offer new prospects for growth to enterprises, will benefit consumers and especially will ensure increased employment opportunities. In this context, strategies were developed for responding to the developments of a world in the midst of change. By adopting a long-term approach, both heads of enterprises and political decision-makers will be able to optimise actions by creating a political framework. This framework must allow enterprises to achieve their fullest potential to the benefit of commerce itself and the European citizen.

The CTD (65 full members and 65 substitutes) was created in 1981 under the auspices of the European Commission with a view to associating more closely the economic and commercial actors with the activities of the Commission and to analyse the impact of Community policies on their activities. It meets throughout the year in 8 working groups organised around major themes such as the internal market and external commerce, the protection of the environment and consumers, social affairs, tourism, economic and financial matters, and the information society. Once a year the CDD meets in plenary session to examine a broad topic of general interest to the trading sector and to establish its work programme for the coming year.

**For further information:** DG XXIII/A/3 — Commerce and Distribution  
Livio RICCI RISSO  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
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## **TEXTILE & CLOTHING: Helping Subcontractors**

In a communication<sup>8</sup> adopted on 15 May 1996 and presented to the INDUSTRY Council on 20 May, the European Commission proposes to support the efforts undertaken by the textile & clothing subcontracting sector in order to improve its competitiveness.

Depending on the Member State, small and medium-sized subcontracting enterprises represent from 10 to 60% of the entire textile & clothing sector in Europe. The latest employment estimations indicate 650,000 persons work in this sector, of whom 200,000 are craftsmen. There is an additional estimated 150,000 non-declared workers in this sector. Furthermore, the sector offers domestic employment, mostly to women, in rural areas.

In its communication, the Commission analyses the restraints to which these subcontracting enterprises are subject (transfer of production to countries with cheap labour costs, added weight of the distributor, etc). Currently, the Community actions implemented in favour of subcontracting are mainly concerned with the establishment of a favourable environment for these activities in the framework of the single market, and the improvement of communication between principals and subcontractors. The Commission communication proposes a range of actions and a support structure aimed at helping the efforts made by the textiles & clothing subcontracting sector to improve its competitiveness. This structure would be permanent, and would be responsible for examining the developments and priorities in the sector, especially the economic situation, competitiveness and employment, the impact and effectiveness of sectoral measures, programmes and instruments. The Commission also highlighted the difficulties encountered by these businesses in the area of training. This should be orientated toward specific problems related to subcontracting and adapted to the operating conditions of the enterprises (distance training, in-house training). It should be made available at an accessible price. The Commission suggests an increase in participation on the part of subcontracting SMEs in the textile & clothing sector in existing Community programmes without neglecting the development of adequate synergy between the European Commission, national authorities, representatives of the social partners and the enterprises.

The Commission also foresees the possibility of supporting events such as inverted commerce shows as places for pre-arranged meetings organised between principles and subcontractors. Other more permanent means of promoting the subcontracting sector, open to a large number of enterprises and suited to taking advantage of the single market will be studied.

**For further information:** EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DG XXIII — Strengthening the Competitiveness of SMEs and Promoting Subcontracting  
Theodoros KALLIANOS  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: +32-2/296.60.48

<sup>8</sup> COM(96)210 Final

## **COMMUNITY SME INITIATIVE:**

### **Helping SMEs in Brandenburg Adapt to the Internal Market**

Under the Community SME initiative, the small and medium-sized enterprises of Brandenburg (Germany) received at the end of May nearly ECU 14.9 million in European Structural Funds (European Regional Development Funds and European Social Funds). The objective: to help them adapt to the internal market and improve their international competitiveness. The financial means made available to the programme will allow Brandenburger SMEs to improve management quality, strengthen competitiveness, improve production and products while respecting the environment. Among the actions supported are: assistance and consulting for SMEs, introduction of systems of quality management, aid to research projects which can be generalised, accreditation of analysis and evaluation laboratories, environmental audits, training of those responsible for product quality and the environment, setting up of services or decentralised consulting centres at Potsdam, Cottbus, Frankfurt/Oden, Wittenberger and Eberswalde.

**Requests for help should be addressed to:** Brandenburgisches Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Mittelstand and Technologie — Herr FRANKE — Heinrich-Mann-Allee 107 — D-14473 POTSDAM — Germany — Tel: +49-331.866.1634 — Fax: +49-331.866.1738

**For further information:** DG XXIII/A/1 — Improvement of the Enterprise Environment  
Anne-Marie FIQUET  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: +32-2/295.97.84

### **REGIE Conference: 'Results after Six Years Experience with the EEIG'**

Within the scope of the REGIE programme, aimed at promoting the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG),<sup>9</sup> DG XXIII held a Conference on 25 and 26 May 1996 at the Brussels Convention Centre in order to examine the results of six years of using this European legal instrument.

These two days of reflection, inaugurated by Mr Mario Monti, Member of the European Commission, gave proof of the interest raised by this form of transnational cooperation which is characterised by a great deal of flexibility and the concept of contractual freedom.

Many possible uses of the grouping became apparent during the conference. Several EEIGs described their experiences in a widely varied field of activities: research into new technologies and renewable energy, promotion of tourism in cross-border regions, management of social activities or even the realisation of engineering services.

It became apparent in the meantime that all the possibilities of the EEIGs are far from being exploited. One interesting suggestion in this regard was to use the EEIG as a centralising treasury instrument for groups of companies. Public markets constitute a sector which has been discovered to be particularly well adapted to using the European grouping in this area.

In addition, solutions were proposed to overcome the reserves expressed by certain economic operators, deriving mainly from the specific legal framework of the EEIGs. For example, it was suggested that the accounts of EEIGs be established in ECUs or Euros in order to simplify the financial relations between members of the groupings and to be prepared in advance for the forthcoming single currency.

REGIE will continue its activities in order to maintain a constructive dialogue between the Commission, existing EEIGs and the economic operators interested in this new form of cooperation.

In particular, REGIE:

- provides answers to practical questions relating to setting up and developing an EEIG;
- improves the quality of information available to EEIGs;
- evaluates the potential for improvement of EEIGs.

**For further information:** DG XXIII/A/1  
Reinhard SCHULTE-BRAUCKS  
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<sup>9</sup> EEC Rule no. 2137/85 of the Council — Official Journal of the European Communities — L 199 of 31.07.1985.

## INTERPRISE

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

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

The following INTERPRISE events are scheduled over the coming weeks:

#### ● INTERPRISE PULP & PAPER '96

*Meetings:* 3 To 6 September 1996 at JYVASKYLA, Finland

*Countries involved:* Finland, Austria, Spain, Sweden

*Sectors:* technology and services in the paper and paper paste manufacturing sector

*Organisation:* JYVASKYLA SCIENCE PARK Ltd — Veijo MIIHKINEN, M. Lasse KUNELIUS — ylistonmaentie, 31 — FIN-40500 JYVASKYLA — Finland — Tel.: +358-41.650.100 — Fax: +358-41.650.120.

#### ● INTERPRISE FIST '96

*Meetings:* 18 to 20 September 1996 at DIJON, France

*Countries involved:* France, Belgium, Germany, Spain

*Sectors:* subcontracting (metals, plastics and electronics, etc)

*Organisation:* CRCI BOURGOGNE/EIC — Marc SPIEGEL — rue Chevreur, 68 — BP 209 — F-21006 DIJON Cedex — Tel.: +33-80.63.52.52 — Fax: +33-80.63.52.53.

#### ● EUROFURN '96

*Meetings:* 2 to 3 October 1996 in FREDERICIA, Denmark

*Countries involved:* Denmark, Spain, Estonia, France, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Sweden

*Sectors:* furnishings

*Organisation:*

— DTI WEST ZEALAND — SLAGELSE — Linda ROER — Willem Oesvej, 2 — DK-4200 SLAGELSE — Denmark — Tel.: +45-58.55.01.99 — Fax: +45-58.55.01.88

— EURO CENTRE — DTI TAASTRUP — Helle FOGHT — Gregersensvej — P.O.BOX 141 — DK 2630 TAASTRUP — Denmark — Tel.: +45-43.50.40.00 — Fax: +45-43.71.63.00

— FREDERICIA CONFERENCE CENTRE — Hanne MARKLUND — Vestre Ringvej 101 — DK-7000 FREDERICIA — Denmark — Tel.: +45-75.92.25.66 — Fax: +45-75.93.21.49

#### ● EASTERN FINLAND INTERPRISE

*Meetings:* 15 to 15 October 1996 in JOENSUU, Finland

*Countries involved:* Finland, Germany, Ireland, Sweden,

*Sectors:* wood (production and transformation)

*Organisation:* NORTH KARELIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE — Esa KOMULAINEN — Siltakatu 10FIN-80100 JOENSUU — Tel.: +358-73.125.412 — Fax: +358-73.123.133

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

For further information on the INTERPRISE programme: EUROPEAN COMMISSION — DG XXIII/B2 — INTERPRISE — rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)- B-1049 BRUSSELS — Fax: +32-2/295.17.40

## **CRAFT SECTOR AND SMALL ENTERPRISES:**

### **A New Call for Proposals in the Area of Transnational Cooperation**

Given the good results achieved under the call for Proposals 504/94, the Commission has decided to implement a similar programme entitled 'Aid in the Area of Transnational Cooperation between Craft and Very Small Enterprises'. The action was published in the OJ of 14 May 1996 (no. 96/C 142/14) with corrections published on 23 May 1996 (no. 96/C 149/12). It is directed at organisations with solid experience in advising and accompanying craft and very small enterprises. Through pre-arranged meetings between enterprises set up by accompanying organisations, the project should facilitate contact between potential partners in the European Union and other Member States of the European Economic Area with a view to create long-lasting partnerships between companies. These partnerships should allow craft and very small enterprises take better advantage of the benefits offered by the European single market. Each pilot project must involve accompanying organisations and enterprises of at least two countries of the European Economic Area. The Commission will provide up to 50% of the total cost of each project accepted up to ECU 20,000. Projects may be submitted to the Commission no later than 1 November 1996. Additional information and an explanatory note are available at the address below.

**For further information:** EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DG XXIII/B/3  
rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80)  
B-1049 BRUSSELS  
Fax: +32-2/295.21.54

### **THIRD EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON THE CRAFT SECTOR AND SMALL ENTERPRISES: Initiation of Work**

The third European conference on the craft sector and small enterprises is scheduled for May 1997 in Italy. Preparations for this conference will begin on 28-29 June in Bari, Italy with a pre-conference on the topic of internationalising the enterprise. On this occasion, three main characteristics of a highly productive organisational model for the craft sector in Italy will be studied: exportation, areas of production, and cooperation groupings. These characteristics of the Italian craft sector will be compared to the experiences of the craft cooperation networks in other Member States.

At the request of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers and of the Italian Minister of Industry, the Bari conference is being organised by the Region of Pouilles in conjunction with European professional associations and co-financed by the European Commission. The work programme foresees in particular speeches by Mr Bersani, Italian Minister of Industry, Commerce and the Craft Sector, by a representative of the European Commission, by Mr Kamminga, President of UEAPME and by Mr Prime, President of EUROPMI.

**For further information contact:** Mr Bizzoco, Fiera del Levante, Bari. Tel: +39-80/20.63.95 — Fax: +39-80/20.64.87.

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

### EURO INFO CENTRES: Seminars on Deadlines for Payment in Commercial Transactions

Supported by DG XXIII and in conjunction with the EURO INFO CENTRES of several Member States, several seminars are being held in the near future (see below) on the topic of deadlines for payment in commercial transactions. Run by experts, these working days will give heads of SMEs an opportunity to find answers to their worries in questions of painlessly mastering increasingly rapid technological transformations<sup>10</sup>.

- **ITALY: 1.10.1996** — **Organisers:** UFFICIO ESTERO DELLE CAMERE DI COMMERCIO DEL VENETO (EIC) — Dott. Gian Angelo Bellati — via G. Peper, 104 — I-30172 VENEZIA — Tel.: +39-41-988.200 — Fax: +39-41-989.548.
- **BELGIUM: 23.10.1996** — **Organisers:** BUREAU ECONOMIQUE DE LA PROVINCE DE NAMUR (EIC) — Bernard RUYSSSEN — Avenue Sergent Vriethoff, 2 — B-5000 NAMUR — Tel.: +32-81-73.52.09 — Fax: +32-81-74.29.45.
- **PORTUGAL: 29.10.1996** — **Organisers:** ASSOCIAÇÃO INDUSTRIAL PORTUGAL (EIC) — Silvana Baptista — Apartado 3200 — 1304 LISBOA Codex — Tel.: +351-1-360.11.36 — Fax: +351-1-364.67.86.
- **FRANCE (SOUTH): 26.11.1996** — **Organisers:** CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE ET D'INDUSTRIE DE GRENOBLE (EIC) — Michel Beyet — GREX World Commerce Centre Grenoble — Place Robert Schuman Europe — F-38025 GRENOBLE CEDEX 1 — Tel.: +33-76.28.28.43 — FAX: +33-76.28.28.35
- **FRANCE (NORTH): 5.12.1996** — **Organisers:** CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE ET D'INDUSTRIE «ILE DE FRANCE» (EIC) — Isabelle Drevet — rue de la Porte de Buc 9A — F-78000 VERSAILLES — Tel.: +33-1-39.20.58.50 — Fax: +33-1-39.20.58.78
- **LUXEMBOURG: 11.12.1996** — **Organisers:** EURO INFO CENTRE — LUXEMBOURG — Sabrina Sagramola — rue Alcide De Gasperi, 7 — L-1615 LUXEMBOURG — Tel.: +352-435.853 — Fax: +352-438.326.

**For further information:** LIC-INTERNATIONAL — League International for Creditors — Roemersstrasse, 56 — D-51491 OVERATH — Germany — Tel: +49-2204-71189 — Fax: +49-2204-71608.

<sup>10</sup> Also see EURO-INFO 87 of January/February 1996.

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