

## **PROMOTING THE ENTERPRISE SPIRIT TO FIGHT AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT**



### IN THIS NUMBER

*Promoting the Enterprise Spirit to Fight Against Unemployment* p. 1



*EIB: Increased Support for High Tec or Rapidly Growing SMEs* p. 2



**PAYMENT PERIODS:**  
*Public Hearing Organised by the Commission* p. 2



**COMPETITION:** *New Exemptions for Agreements between Small Enterprises* p. 3



**SUB-CONTRACTING:**  
*IBEX International Buyer's Exhibition* p. 4



**CRAFT SECTOR:**  
*Recommendations from the Larissa Conference* p. 5



**EUROPARTENARIAT FRANCE 'MASSIVE CENTRAL'** *a great success* p. 6



**INTERPRISE** p. 6

In the run-up to the extraordinary European Council on Employment (Jobs Summit) which will take place in Luxembourg on 20-21 November 1997, the European Commission adopted on 1 October 1997 draft 'Guidelines for Member States' Employment Policies 1998'.<sup>1</sup> The objective of this document is to increase the employment rate from 60.4% to 65% within five years.

In order to meet this challenge, the European Commission believes that the Member States should focus their efforts on the following measures:

- development of a new culture and **enterprise spirit** in the European Union in order to promote the creation of more and better jobs;
- strengthening of job seekers' **employability** to enable them to take advantage of new employment possibilities;
- addressing the issue of **equal opportunities at work** to ensure fair prospects for women and men and the long-term growth capacity of our economy;
- promotion of the **adaptability** of enterprises and the workforce to respond to changing market conditions while ensuring no group is left behind.

The Commission emphasises that one third of private-sector employment is concentrated in micro-enterprises of less than 10 employees, while another third is taken up by companies of less than 250 workers. Small and medium-sized enterprises are where the majority of new jobs are being created. In order to meet the employment challenge, it is important to create a new enterprise spirit in the European Union by taking the following actions:

- **Making it easier to start up and run a business** by providing a clear, stable and predictable set of rules. Member States should review and simplify the administrative burdens on SMEs, taking into account the new proposals to be developed by the Business Environment Simplification (BEST) Task Force.

*Particular attention should be given to reducing significantly the overhead costs for enterprises of hiring an additional worker.*

<sup>1</sup> COM(97)497 final of 01-10-1997 - Commission Communication - Draft Guidelines for Employment Policies in the Member States in 1998.

*The obstacles, especially those within existing social security regimes, to people moving from employment to self-employment and setting up micro-enterprises need to be eliminated and existing regulations must be adapted to facilitate easier transition to self-employment.*

- **Developing the markets for venture capital** thereby mobilising Europe's wealth behind entrepreneurs and innovators. Member States should examine the specific needs of SMEs as regards financing, principally in the form of equity or guarantee capital, building on EIB initiatives in this area.
- **Making the taxation system more employment friendly.** In order to encourage enterprises to create new jobs, Member States must exploit the current favourable macroeconomic climate to finally reverse the consistent long-term trend towards higher taxes and charges on labour (which have increased from 35% in 1980 to over 42% in 1995).

*Each Member State should set a target for reducing the tax burden on labour, while maintaining budget neutrality, with a view to achieving substantial progress by the year 2000.*

The Commission will support the efforts deployed by the Member States to give greater importance to enterprise spirit in education and training systems in order to home in on current obstacles and to disseminate information on good practice and new initiatives. It will also launch **an initiative on Enterprise Spirit in Europe** to promote this process.

In line with the Amsterdam Treaty which provides for the early application of the Employment Chapter, the European Commission will now submit the current guidelines to the extraordinary European Council on 20-21 November 1997. Based on the Presidency conclusions to be issued immediately following the Employment Summit, the Commission will present a final draft with a view to its adoption by the Council of the European Union.

## **EIB: Increased Support for High Tec or Rapidly Growing SMEs**

In order to implement the resolution on growth and employment adopted by the European Council of Amsterdam, the European Investment Bank (EIB) will develop financing for effective infrastructure projects and extend its activities in the fields of education, health, urban renewal and environmental protection. The EIB will likewise initiate new measures to increase its support to high tec and rapidly growing SMEs while working to facilitate access to venture capital and thus reinforce SME potential for creating stable and competitive jobs. The EIB Board of Governors (the European Union Finance Ministers) has decided that over the next three years the Bank can draw upon its surplus and invest up to one billion ECU to support its action plan for SMEs. The EIB is currently up-dating new financing terms which will allow SMEs to take advantage of instruments of shared risk, subordinate loans or support on venture capital. Talks are currently under way with the intermediary financial partners of the Bank in several Member States. Negotiations are furthest advanced in Spain, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. In the meantime, a new **'European Technology Mechanism'** is being set up with European Investment Funds (EIF)<sup>2</sup>, aimed at providing venture capital and equity to support projects developed by rapidly growing SMEs or those in high technology fields.

**For further information:** European Investment Bank  
Information and Communication Department  
Henry MARTY-GAUQUIE  
100, Blvd Konrad Adenauer  
L-1950 Luxembourg  
Tel: +352-4378-3153  
Fax: +352-4379-3188

## **PUBLIC HEARING ON LATE PAYMENTS IN COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS**

Directorate General XXIII of the European Commission organised a public hearing on late payments in commercial transactions on Tuesday 7 October 1997 in Brussels. Over 200 people were present. The hearing is part of the consultation exercise following the Commission's Communication on late payments published in July<sup>1</sup>.

Commissioner Christos Papoutsis, responsible for Enterprise Policy, underlined in his opening speech that late payments in commercial transactions affect all European businesses, but have the most serious consequences for SMEs, leading to cash-flow difficulties, undermining profitability and damaging competitiveness. Late payments are hindering the development of cross-

<sup>2</sup> The EIF, public-private partnership created in 1994 and belonging to the EIB (40%), the European Commission (30%) and the banking sector (30%), takes contributions and issues long-term guarantees for financing of infrastructure and investments carried out by SMEs.

<sup>3</sup> Report on late payments in commercial transactions, OJ No C216 of 17.7.1997 p.10. For details of this Communication, see our last two numbers (EURO-INFO Nos. 103 and 102).

border trade and the smooth functioning of the Single Market. In the worst cases, they result in insolvencies and job losses. There is also particular concern about the effects of late payments by the public sector.

Moreover, there are wide variations between average payment periods in Member States and between Member States' legislation on late payments, such as a statutory right to interest. Different redress procedures and different approaches to compensation for the costs of pursuing debts make recovery of cross-border debts a complex and often time-consuming business.

Commissioner Papoutsis reaffirmed the Commission's intention to propose a Directive on late payments by the end of 1997, as set out in the Single Market Action Plan<sup>2</sup>.

Lyndon Harrison, Member of the European Parliament, and Colin Lustenhouwer, Vice-President of the Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services of the Economic and Social Committee, gave their support to the Commission's initiative.

Entrepreneurs across Europe presented their experience of late payments. In Spain, for example, average payment times of 215 days for SMEs supplying building materials in the construction sector were reported. A representative of suppliers of health equipment to public hospitals in Spain set out the consequences of firms receiving payments after over 300 days on average. Examples of the difficulties of collecting debts for export sales to other Member States were also given.

Representatives from various national administrations described current legislation and procedures to tackle late payments. For example the Swedish legislation, which is generally recognised as simple and effective, gives the creditor strong rights to interest on late payments and to compensation from the debtor for the other costs of pursuing debts, such as the costs of reminders, collection agencies and legal fees. Recent legislative initiatives were also described, such as the new Irish law on prompt payment by the public sector which gives suppliers an automatic right to interest on late payments by the public sector.

In the discussions of specific topics such as compensation for late payment, redress procedures, the costs and speed of debt collection in Europe and the public sector, there was strong support for the Commission's initiative.

- **The full text of the Commissioner's opening speech, other presentations and the minutes of the hearing will be available on the Internet at the following address:**

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

**For further information:** Reinhard Schulte-Braucks  
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## **COMPETITION: New Exemptions for Agreements between Small Enterprises**

Within the framework of its policy of modernising the rules of competition, on 8 October 1997 the European Commission adopted a new Communication<sup>5</sup> which defines the agreements which are not liable to effect competition or intra-community exchanges and which are consequently not prohibited under the provisions of the Treaty (article 85.1).

The Communication, entitled '*on agreements of minor importance*' and which was published in draft form in January 1997, was the object of consultation in business and professional circles as well as in the Member States. It modifies the earlier texts of 1986 and 1994. The most important changes are:

- the turnover threshold of 300 million ECU is eliminated;
- horizontal and vertical agreements are treated differently. For the first, the market share threshold remains fixed at 5% while for the second type, it has been raised to 10%;
- a black list will enumerate the restrictions which will not be tolerated, even when the market share remains under the threshold indicated above. These restrictions apply to *horizontal agreements* whose aim is to fix prices or production (or delivery) quotas, share out the markets or supply sources. They also apply to *vertical agreements* aimed at fixing resale prices or which contain clauses of territorial protection;
- independent SMEs, ie those whose annual turnover or total balance sheet do not exceed 40 million ECU or 27 million ECU respectively and which employ a maximum of 250 workers, will enjoy special advantages. Their agreements will, in principle, not be subject to intervention from the Commission, no matter what their market share. The Commission, however, reserves the right to intervene in such agreements, should they hinder in any significant way the competitiveness of a substantial part of a

<sup>4</sup> CSE(97)1 final, 4.6.1997 pp. 8 & 38.

<sup>5</sup> SEC(97) 1799

<sup>6</sup> OJ EC no. C 29 of 30.01.1997 - p. 3.

specific market, or when, in the market in question, competitiveness is restricted by the cumulative effect of parallel networks of similar agreements established by several manufacturers or merchants.

**For further information:** DG IV Competition - Terence Whaley - Tél: +32-2/295.32.66 - Fax: +32-2/295.54.37

## **SUBCONTRACTING: IBEX (International Buyers' EXhibition)**

IBEXs have been developed by DG XXIII as part of its enterprise policy and further to the request of the Council<sup>7</sup>.

What is an IBEX? An IBEX consists in pre-arranged meetings between big enterprises and smaller enterprises on the basis of the precise and often confidential requirements expressed by the major firms and the specific abilities of the SMEs to meet those needs.

Organised in a particular strategic sector (e.g. cars, foodstuffs, textiles) or for a precise range of enterprises (e.g. high tech companies, craft industries), it is intended to help both major firms in their international search for SME partners to meet specific co-operation needs and to promote contacts between these two categories of firms by offering SMEs the opportunity to make direct contact with major firms which are interested in their products, services or know-how.

### **VIBEX: 12-14 May 1998 in Göteborg, Sweden**

VIBEX (Vehicle Industry Buyers' Expo) will take place in Göteborg, Sweden on 12, 13, and 14 May 1998. It is the third buyers' exhibition supported by the Commission following the two VETIS exhibitions that took place in Turin, Italy, in 1994 and 1996. On the contrary to the two previous and highly successful IBEX exhibitions, VIBEX will be particularly dedicated to the heavy vehicles (busses, lorries, working vehicles etc.). Organised by NUTEK (Swedish National Board for Industrial and Technical Development) and TIDA (Trade Development Agency in Göteborg), VIBEX will promote meetings between large enterprises (constructors and equipment suppliers) and first and second-tier suppliers. Approximately 60 large groups from throughout the world and 300 European suppliers are expected. Amongst the large groups are Volvo, Saab, Scania, Leyland Truck and Fiat-Hitachi.

The VIBEX Exhibition is organised in parallel to other events which will highlight its interest: a cycle of conferences organised by the Swedish Exhibition & Congress Centre of Göteborg and the VISE (Vehicle Industry Suppliers' Expo) automotive fair.

**For further information:**

VIBEX: Tel: +46-31-701.32.20 - Fax: +46-31-701.32.29  
e-mail: vibex@tida.goteborg.se  
Internet: www.swefair.se/visevibex

VISE: Tel: +46-31-708.80.00 - +46-31-16.03.30  
e-mail: vibex@tida.goteborg.se  
Internet: www.swefair.se/visevibex

A major firm's search for new partners among the SMEs falling within the categories or sector which is the subject of an IBEX may have as its goal the purchase of simple or complex components, finished products for large-scale marketing and distribution, transfers of technology, distribution agreements or any other form of commercial or technological partnership, whether located in Europe or in a non-member country. Its specific methodology enables it to promote particularly useful quality contacts between small and major firms. Its form offers participants savings in both time and financial commitment as compared with traditional sub-contracting fairs. A buyers' exhibition project that fulfils the criteria of the European Commission for the "IBEX" label can obtain a technical and financial support.

- DG XXIII can provide a **financial support** that is limited to a maximum of 25% of the cost of the event up to 100,000 ECU (which may be increased to 150,000 ECU where there is co-financing from another Community policy). For IBEX exhibitions organised in regions eligible under Objectives 1, 6, 2 and 5(b) of the Structural Funds and aimed exclusively at SMEs from these regions (without limitations as to the origin of the large enterprises), financing is also granted by DG XVI (Regional Policy and Cohesion).
- The technical support consists mainly in advice on establishing the structure for preparing, implementing and monitoring the buyers' exhibition. It also includes use of the information (EIC) and co-operation (BC-Net, BRE) networks operated by DG.
- Please note that DG XXIII will shortly publish a call for proposals for the organisation of International Buyers' Exhibitions (IBEX). This call will be published in the Official Journal, C series.

<sup>7</sup> Council Resolution of 22/11/93 - OJ Ce 326/1 of 3/12/1993

- To organise an IBEX under enterprise policy, please write to DG XXIII (Enterprise Policy) fax: +32- 2-296.75.58.
- To organise an IBEX in regions eligible for funds under Objectives 1, 6, 2 and 5b, please write to DG XVI (Regional Policy and Cohesion) - fax: +32-2-296.32.73.

## **CRAFTS AND SMALL BUSINESSES: Recommendations from the Preparatory Conference of Larissa**

The final Preparatory Conference leading up to the Third European Conference of Crafts and Small Businesses was held in Larissa, Greece on 25-26 September 1997. Entitled 'Young Entrepreneurs, Enterprise Spirit and Job Creation', the Preparatory Conference was divided into three working groups whose main recommendations were:

### **I. Encourage the Enterprise Spirit through Education and Training**

- improve knowledge of this concept through a campaign targeted at education institutions, public authorities and public opinion in general in order to encourage young people to seek out activities requiring spirit of enterprise.
- encourage apprenticeships as a bridge between school and the business world. Within this framework, develop an aptitude for management in order to increase the number of young people who create their own businesses.
- up-date specific training programmes which meet the needs of young people who have established or want to establish their own business.

#### ***Employment through Innovation: The Third European Conference of Crafts and Small Businesses - MILAN - 20-21 November 1997***

On average during the period from 1988 to 1995, the loss of employment in large companies has been compensated by the creation of jobs in SMEs. Businesses with less than 100 employees have contributed more than 250,000 jobs per year, while more than 200,000 jobs have been lost annually in companies with more than 100 employees. The Third European Conference of Crafts and Small Businesses, under the theme '**Employment through Innovation**', should allow for a better consideration of the specific nature and potential of the sector while providing an improved dissemination of information to the sectoral representative bodies and the enterprises themselves.

**The aims of the event will be:** to create a favourable environment for the development of the sector; to create a legal and administrative framework which responds to the needs of this type of business; to intensify the commitment of the European Union and the Member States in favour of the crafts and small business sector; to intensify the dialogue between the social and professional organisations at the European level as the intermediaries between the European Union, the national organisations and business, and to encourage their coming together by type of entrepreneur (young people, women, etc).

Participating in this Conference will be representatives from the Member States, sectoral representative organisations at the national and European level, economic agents and the social partners.

### **II. Incentives and services provided for young entrepreneurs during the creation of an enterprise - Employment possibilities in the crafts and small business sector**

- creation or development of centres of specialised assistance targeted at young entrepreneurs offering advice, management training, access to financing, business plans - support for training of instructors;
- banks must share the social responsibility for unemployment. They should, therefore, offer a new type of venture capital to certain special target groups;
- the transfer of enterprises should be made easier by simplifying the legal and administrative obstacles.

### **III. Support structures aimed at improving the environment for new enterprises**

- granting by the European Commission of a 'European Label of Quality' to business centres which offer enterprises diversified quality services in the following fields: training, enterprise creation by young people, transfer of enterprises, internationalisation of their activities, management, access to financing;
- creation at the European level of a list (ie a database) of support structures which have received the European label to be made available to enterprises;
- granting by Member States - for a period to be defined - of more favourable measures for enterprises which use the services offered by the support structures bearing the European label.

**For further information:** DG XXIII/A4 - Crafts and Small Businesses  
Francesco IANNIELLO  
rue de la Loi 200 (AN80) - B-1049 Brussels  
Tel: +32-2/295.51.55  
Fax: +32-2/295.45.90

## Corrigendum

**Euro Info July 1997, under the heading 'Craft and Small Business', page 4, paragraph 3 should read:**

Particular mention should be made of the large number of participants from Algeria, the majority of whom were women heads of craft enterprises, the Turkish delegation and the important participation of delegations from Cyprus, Israel and Palestine.

## EUROPARTENARIAT FRANCE 'MASSIVE CENTRAL' a Great Success

The 17th EUROPARTENARIAT was held in Clermont-Ferrand on 16-17 October 1997. EUROPARTENARIAT forms part of the policy framework of the European Commission aimed at stimulating economic growth in the less favoured regions by encouraging cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises and industry. During this event (which is the second to be held in France), 418 French SMEs selected by the organisers met with approximately 1,750 heads of enterprise from more than 70 countries. Amongst the visitors registered, 974 were from the European Union (333 from France), 48 from EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries, 213 from Mediterranean countries, 210 from Central and Eastern Europe, 138 from the New Independent States, 104 from Asia, 34 from Latin America, 25 from the United States and 13 from Canada.

These representatives business discussed sub-contracting, technical partnerships, technology transfer, search for distributors, granting or acquiring licenses and patents, cross distribution, research and development exchanges, financial cooperation, etc with the participating French enterprises. The profiles and offers for cooperation of the French companies had been made available prior to the event through a catalogue distributed widely throughout Europe and the world by a network of specialised consultants.

Thanks to its perfect logistical organisation, this event allowed the 418 French enterprises hold 8,600 meetings at their stands (1,700 meeting were organised during the event itself by means of a computerised system), while not forgetting the large number of spontaneous and informal contacts which took place. The next EUROPARTENARIAT event will take place in APELDOORN, the Netherlands on 11-12 June 1998.

**For further information:** DG XXIII/B2 - Development of Cooperation between Enterprise at the European and International Level and Promotion of Internationalisation  
EUROPARTENARIAT  
rue de la Loi 200 (AN80) - B-1049 Brussels  
Fax: +32-2/295.17.40

## PARTENARIAT EUROPEAN UNION - MERCOSUR: in MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY - 2-5 December 1997

During this event modeled after the EUROPARTENARIAT programme, more than 300 companies from Mercosur (Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina), Bolivia and Chili, will meet with 270 enterprises from the 15 Member States of the European Union to discuss possibilities of commercial, technical or financial cooperation in the following sectors: agro-food stuffs, metallurgy, textile and clothing, chemical products and plastics. A catalogue with the profiles and offers and demands for cooperation has been distributed widely by the EUROCENTRES and the TIPS network in the countries of Latin America.

**For further information:** EUROCHAMBERS  
Fax: +32-2/230.00.38

## INTERPRISE: Initiative to Encourage Partnerships in Europe

The INTERPRISE programme (Initiative to Encourage Partnership between Industries and/or Services in Europe) is designed to support local, regional and national actions aimed at stimulating cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises in Europe. Within this context, the programme is designed to support the actions (distribution of a catalogue containing the desired cooperation profiles, organisation of meeting days with pre-arranged bilateral rendez-vous) aimed at putting heads of enterprises into direct contact with each other in order to facilitate their cooperation efforts.

This programme is conceived on the model of the Europartenariat programme and is directed at all regions, whether eligible for structural funds or not, and provides for the organisation of small-scale events. The projects must include at least three regions from three European Union countries and may, in certain instances, also be extended to regions from non-member countries.

The following events will take place in the coming months:

### INTERPRISE SOUTHERN FINLAND

Meetings: 29-30 January 1998 in TURKU, Finland

Countries involved: Finland, Denmark, Sweden

Sectors: electronics and metallurgical industries

Organisation: The Confederation of Finnish entrepreneurs/Region South-West - Henri WIBOM - Brahenkatu, 2 - FIN-20100 TURKU - Tel.: +358-2-2519.100 - Fax: +358-2-2328.272 \* TURKU Chamber of Commerce - EIC - Syri ARPONEN - Puolankatu, 1 - FIN-20100 TURKU - Tel.: +358-2-251.0051 - Fax: +358-2-231.06.67.

### EUROPARTNER NRW '98

Meetings: 6-7 February 1998 in DORTMUND, Germany

Countries involved: Germany, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands

Sectors: multi-sectoral

Organisation: Gesellschaft für Wirtschaftsförderung NRW - Klaus Peter DIETZEL - Kavalleriestrasse 8-10 - D-40123 DÜSSELDORF - Tel.: +49-211-1300069 - Fax: +49-211-1300082

- *For further information on a specific INTERPRISE event, please contact the organiser.*
- *For information on the INTERPRISE programme itself: European Commission - DG XXIII/B2 - INTERPRISE - rue de la Loi, 200 (AN80) - B-1049 Brussels - Fax: +32-2/295.17.40*

## FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- **EURO INFO CENTRES:** A training session brought together more than 130 EURO INFO CENTRES in Brussels on 22-23 October 1997 within the Economic and Social Committee. This meeting took place one month after the adoption by the article 4 committee (which represents the Member States before Directorate-General XXIII) of a note establishing the strategic objectives of the Euro Info Centre network. Mr Ranieri BOMBASSEI (Director of DG XXIII/B) highlighted the major points of the note, placing particular emphasis on the current redeployment of the network, on the numerous implications entailed in the designation of the Euro Info Centres as first stop shops for access to European information, on the exceptional capacity of the Euro Info Centres for offering effective, quality services to SMEs and the efforts which must be made to keep responding to the new demands of enterprises. Mr Henri MALOSSE, member of the EcoSoc, underscored the pioneering and dynamic role of the Euro Info Centres in encouraging SMEs and helping them become more European. In addition to the dissemination of information, these two days of meetings also served to remind all those present of the place held by the Euro Info Centres in the Community's policy of aid to SMEs whose priority character was recently emphasised by the announcement of the forthcoming creation, at the request of Commissioner PAPOUTSIS, of a group of Commissioners for SMEs. **For further information:** DG XXIII/B - EURO INFO CENTRES - Jean-Pierre HABER - Tel: +32-2/295.05.38 - Fax: +32.2/295.73.35.
- **PARTENARIAT ITALIE-ARGENTINE:** Under the programme AL-INVEST, a meeting between enterprises of MERCOSUR and between enterprises from France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Spain was organised last June in the agro-food stuffs sector. The participation of the Italian delegation was coordinated by the BCC ARCHIMEDE (BCC 636) of Salerno, Italy. The activities and future initiatives of this office can be found on the WEB Site of the BCC/ARCHIMEDE/SALERNO at: [www.peoples.it/bre636](http://www.peoples.it/bre636) and in its newsletter. **For information:** Fax: +39-89.75.14.97 - e-mail: [achille@peoples.it](mailto:achille@peoples.it).
- **Guidelines for Partnership in Industrial Subcontracting:** The Union of Confederation of Industry and Employers of Europe (UNICE) have recently published in collaboration with the European Commission (DG XXIII) a guide which proposes to the actors in sub-contracting some rules of the game and principles which have proven constructive in building solid and dynamic partnerships. This guide is based on best practice as observed particularly in matters of payment conditions, quality, industrial property. **GUIDELINES FOR PARTNERSHIP IN INDUSTRIAL SUBCONTRACTING** - Office for Official Publications of the European Communities - L-2985 Luxembourg - 1997 - 62 p. - ISBN 92-828-1504-8 or UNICE, rue Joseph II, 40 - B-1040 Brussels - Tel: +32-2/237.65.40 - Fax: +32-2/231.14.45.

## **INNOVATION: CALL FOR PROPOSALS FOR PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF EUROPEAN NETWORKS AND SERVICES.**

The Commission of the European Communities is issuing a call for proposals for projects in the field of transnational transfer, promotion and dissemination of schemes, measures and best practice developed to promote and support innovation. Proposals must be sent to the Commission before 4 p.m. local time on 15 December 1997. All correspondence concerning this call for proposals must be marked "European networks and services" and sent to the following address: European Commission, Directorate-General XIII - (Telecommunications, Information Market and Exploitation of Research) - DG XIII/D/4, Euroforum 2264 - Bâtiment Jean Monnet - L-2920 Luxembourg - Fax: +352/4301-34544 or 32100.

*EURO-INFO and many other sources of information are available on the INTERNET via the EUROPA server:*

**<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg23/index.htm>**

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