



Quote of the Week

Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.

Malcolm Forbes (1919 - 1990), in Forbes Magazine

HEADLINES

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- EU / Intellectual Property : Commission's Proposal for a Community Patent Court

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- EU / Public Procurement : Adoption of modernising legislation by the Council
- EU / SMEs: Bankruptcy, Restructuring and Fresh Start – Best project's final report available
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- EU / E-business & standardisation : First Meeting of the European e-Business Interoperability Forum (eBIF) on 18th February EU / Standardisation : Seminar on Standardisation in services , Brussels 9 March 2004

HEADLINES

EU / Internal Market: First Report on the implementation of the Internal Market Strategy 2003-2006

The Commission recently presented its first Report on the implementation of the Internal Market Strategy 2003-2006. This report, together with Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the Employment Guidelines, will be part of the Commission's report to the 2004 European Spring Council. The main conclusion of the report is that, whilst the EU economic growth has been boosted of about 1.8% over the last ten years by the Internal Market, fragmented markets across the EU are still a big obstacle to productivity and innovation.

The report draws the attention on some indicators, such as the growth of manufacturing trade, price convergences, and foreign investment in the EU, suggesting that the Internal Market's impact on competition has recently slowed down. Also, the report outlines the main action fields where progresses need to be speeded up. These include efforts in creating an Internal Market in Services, in financial Markets, and in adopting the Community patent to boost innovation. Not least, the report

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also tackles the challenge of enlargement, as well as the issues of cross-border trade within the EU, network industries, public procurement, industrial and intellectual property.

Of the 45 measures due before the end of 2003 (according to the Internal Market Strategy 2003-2006) only 27 have been delivered on time; and many important initiatives belong to the 18 that are still expected.

The Internal Market is vital to the survival and growth of SMEs, therefore to the EU economy. A bad functioning Internal Market damages not only SMEs, but also job creation (SMEs provided most of the estimated 2.5 million jobs that the Internal Market helped to create over the last ten years). From a global standpoint, it is more than urgent to revert the trend of declining foreign investment in the EU. This indicator could have severe long term consequences and should not be neglected.

In this perspective, ESBA fully supports reforms of the EU's regulatory environment that will encourage regulatory simplification, innovation and competition within the Internal Market.

[More info:](#)

EU / Intellectual Property: Commission's Proposal for a Community Patent Court

The European Commission presented on the 3rd February two proposals on establishing a Community Patent Court. The first proposal would grant the Court of Justice (ECJ) formal jurisdiction concerning certain disputes over Community Patents. The second proposal would establish a Community Patent Court, comprising seven judges, appointed by the Council of Ministers, who would exercise the ECJ's jurisdiction on its behalf. Internal Market Commissioner Bolkestein stressed the added value of a Community Patent Court, in order to maximise the Benefits of a the Community Patent.

The justification for a Community Patent Court is to put an end to such inconsistencies with the introduction of a single set of procedural rules, and to make the process more affordable, particularly for SMEs.

The Competitiveness Council was very close to reaching an agreement on the creation of a Community Patent in November 2003. However it failed to reach consensus on the period of time during which translations of claims can be filed proved unattainable. The Irish Presidency seeks to bring closure to the matter, tabling the proposal for agreement by the Council as soon as possible.

[More info:](#)

IN BRIEF

EU / Budget: Budget expenditure for the 10 new Member States around euro 11,8 billion

Responding to the calls of the European Parliament and the Council, the Commission adopted on 4th February the proposal for amending the 2004 Budget (adopted in December 2003), which foresees around € 11.8 billion for the 10 new Members States in commitments. This Preliminary Draft Amending Budget will make the EU budget ready for enlargement. The budget currently stands at

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less than 1% of EU Gross National Income (€ 99.724 billion in payments and € 111.3 billion in commitment)

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EU / Environment: Environment Action Plan adopted

The European Commission adopted on 28th January an Action Plan to boost Environmental Technologies for innovation, growth and sustainable development. The Action Plan aims to maximise the use of environmental technologies and overcome barriers hindering this wider use, such as the complexity of switching from traditional to new technologies or insufficient access to capital.

Key actions will include the launch of technology platforms in areas such as hydrogen and fuel cells, photovoltaics, and water supply and sanitation; and establishing environmental performance targets for products and services.

[More info:](#)

EU / Public Procurement: Adoption of modernising legislation by the Council

The EU's Council of Ministers has formally endorsed on 3rd February 2004 the text agreed in December 2003 in a conciliation procedure on the legislative package simplifying and modernising the public procurement Directives and adapting them to modern administrative needs. The text has been endorsed by the Parliament at its plenary session in Brussels on 29th January. The Directives impose EU-wide competitive tendering for public contracts above a certain value, transparency and equal treatment for all tenderers to ensure that the contract is awarded to the tender offering best value for money.

[More info:](#)

EU / SMEs: Bankruptcy, Restructuring and Fresh Start – Best project's final report available

The Best project's final report on "Restructuring, Bankruptcy and a Fresh Start" is now available in Spanish, German, English, French and Italian. Produced by experts from EU Member States, Norway and the EU accession countries, the report assesses how far national bankruptcy laws act as a deterrent to business survival and a fresh start. It also looks at the effects of social stigma on the potential of entrepreneurs who have tried and failed to try again. One of the main conclusions is that prevention is crucial to improving business survival rates.

[More info:](#)

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EU / Ebusiness: Two portals for more information on e-business for SMEs

Small businesses in Europe can access legal information on e-commerce at two online portals, both of which are currently expanding their offering. The most recent European information service, ELEAS or E-commerce Legislation Easily Accessible to SMEs, was established in April 2003. Operated under the guidance of the Euro Info Centre Milan by a network of 18 Euro Info Centres (EICs) in 15 Member States and Norway, this service is now being extended to four new countries: Slovenia, Lithuania, Malta and Bulgaria.

More info : <http://www.ebusinesslex.net>

EU / Environment and SMEs: Conference on Environmental Management System – 10/02/2004

A conference “Towards sustainable production in SMEs: the role of Environmental management systems and what public authorities can do to encourage their uptake”; focusing on the uptake of Environmental management systems (EMS) in SMEs will be held in Brussels on 10 February 2004. Organised by DG Enterprise, the event will to address the specific barriers that SMEs face in this area and ways of improving the use of EMS.

More info: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/environment/index.htm>

EU / E-business & standardisation: First Meeting of the European e-Business Interoperability Forum (eBIF) on 18th February

The first meeting of the European e-Business Interoperability Forum (eBIF) will be organised on 18th February 2004 in Brussels. Set up by the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) and supported by the European Commission, the eBIF will bring together relevant stakeholders from industry and society to agree on a roadmap for e-business interoperability and to assess ongoing and planned standardisation activities in this field.

More info:

EU / Standardisation: Seminar on Standardisation in services , Brussels 9 March 2004

Whereas Business services account for some 70% of EU jobs, businesses can often find comparing service providers a struggle, due to a lack of European standards. In order to raise awareness of the potential of European standardisation for the service sector, a workshop will be organised by DG Enterprise in Brussels on 9 March 2004. The discussion will focus on how European standards can help create a real internal market for services.

More info: