



Quote of the Week

"Europe does not entertain its citizen"

Pascal Lamy (19th February 2004, "EU 25 Making It Work", Opening dinner International Advisory Council Centre for European Policy Studies)

HEADLINES

- EU/ Spring Summit: Various calls for mobilisation on jobs, innovation and competitiveness
- EU/Environment Liability: Conciliation agreement on Environmental Liability

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HEADLINES

EU/ Spring Summit: Various calls for mobilisation on jobs, innovation and competitiveness

In their "Joint Contribution" submitted to the Irish Presidency and the Commission, six EU Prime Ministers (Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Estonia) underline the need for bringing back the dynamics in the Lisbon Strategy. Particular attention should be paid to promoting research and innovation; finding new mechanisms for creating more jobs; seeking a better "balance between the legitimate goals of regulation and their impact on competitiveness". This letter was seen as a "counter-initiative " to the Franco-German-British Summit on 18th February in Berlin, which called for "super commissioner" for economic issues. This new post would covers the fields of trade, industry and environment. Also, the tripartite letter insisted on EU budget ceiling of 1% GDP.

More info on the Spring Summit :

<http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/standard.asp?sNavlocator=5,11,240>

EU /Environment Liability: Conciliation agreement on Environmental Liability

An agreement has been reached on the Directive on Environmental Liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage. The Directive will put in practice the principle of “polluteur pays”. The agreement reached on 20th February after negotiations between the Council and Parliament leaves it in the Commission’s hands to propose a compulsory insurance scheme 6 years after the directive enters into force. The Commission could then submit a proposal on a harmonised system of financial security that would set a ceiling for compensation and exclude low risk activities. The issue of mandatory insurance scheme was one of the most controversial aspects of the proposal, on which Parliament and Council widely diverged. The agreement will be formally adopted by the Parliament and Council in the coming weeks. Once ratified and published in the Official Journal, Member States will have three years to implement the Directive.

More info: http://www.eu2004.ie/content/index.asp?sNavlocator=66&list_id=289&language_id=1

IN BRIEF

EU / Trade & WTO : “The window of opportunity for negotiations will close with the summer” (Lamy)

Commissioner for Trade Pascal Lamy calls for redoubled efforts on the multilateral negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda, which have already started again, even if not very noticeably. The 146 countries participating set the deadline for completing the round on 1 January 2005, a target that will be difficult to achieve.

More info: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/trade/index_en.htm

EU / Enlargement : Fear of inflation mixed with hopes of better jobs

According to a recent survey carried out by GfK, inflation comes first amongst the fear linked to enlargement. On average, prices are expected to go up by 30%, with higher percentage in Slovakia and Cyprus. People expects however that membership to EU will improve opportunities in term of work and training.

More info: <http://www.gfk.com/index.php?lang=en>

EU / Budget : Increase in research spending in the pipeline

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The Commission's communication on the financial perspectives 2007-2013 gives research and innovation in first place, in suggesting rising significantly the budget for research funding (currently at 0.04 GDP). The Commission hopes it will help Member States in their effort to reach the Lisbon's Perspectives. The Commission outlines five priorities for spending the money, which include providing grants to research teams, strengthening research infrastructure, setting up public-private partnerships in key research areas such as hydrogen & fuel cells, nanotechnology, etc.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/189|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

EU / Enlargement : “Twinning arrangements for new Commissioners “

The Commission has announced “twinning arrangements” between new and “old” commissioners in the period 1 May to 31 October 2004. The Commissioner nominees will only have an associate portfolio for this period. However they will have full voting rights.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/233|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

EU / Company law : Consultation on cross border transfer of companies' registered offices

The Commission has launched an Internet consultation on the main points of the planned proposal for a Directive on the right of limited companies to transfer their registered office from one Member State to another. The consultation is opened until 15th April.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/270|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

EU / Internal Market : Consultation on how to improve mutual recognition

An internet consultation has been launched on 19th February on how to improve the principle of mutual recognition for goods. The deadline for responding is 30th April. This principle is key to the functioning of the Internal Market as it ensures that goods that are legally sold in one Member State can be sold in another one without having to comply with further rules, administrative or technical burden. ESBA encourages you to respond to this consultation as well functioning mutual recognition principle is key to cutting red tapes. This is crucial for all SMEs expanding within the EU.

More info:

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http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/242|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

EU / Taxation: German support for lower VAT rates on catering services

France has won Germany's support for cutting VAT on restaurant and catering and hopes to be able to lower VAT rates on restaurants and catering services from 19,6% to 5,5% in 2006. The current system of reduced VAT will come to an end in 2005. Germany, together with Denmark, Sweden, and Austria, has previously opposed the idea of adopting a new list of goods and services that could benefit from such a system.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/taxation_customs/taxation/labour_intensive/labour_intensive_en.htm

EU / Services of General Interest: Overhaul of current system started

On 18th February the Commission launched the widely anticipated overhaul of the regulatory framework applicable for so-called "services of general interest", i.e. when Member States compensate undertakings which provide services that are considered to be in the general economic interest. The draft will now be transmitted to the European Parliament, the Member States, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions for further consultation, and will be published for public consultation. DG Competition will also start discussing with national experts draft Commission framework for larger public service compensations.

More info :

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/235|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

EU / Social Affairs : First Commission Annual Report on gender inequality

Commission has unveiled its first Report on Gender Equality, which outline some progress on narrowing the gender gap in the EU. However disparities remain high in paid labour, where the gender gap is 17.2%; in unemployment (gender gap 1.8%), or in pay (the gender pay gap is 16% in the EU). Also women remain the majority of those working part-time (34% of women employees work part-time in the EU15).

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/04/245|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

EU/ Social Affairs: Report of the European Employment Taskforce

The Taoiseach and President of the European Council, Mr. Bertie Ahern, discussed on 26th February with Mr. Wim Kok, Chairman of the European Employment Taskforce the Report of the Taskforce,

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which was established last year to review Europe's employment performance and to identify practical reform measures to boost employment in Europe in line with the Jobs and Competitiveness (Lisbon) Agenda.

More info:

http://www.eu2004.ie/content/index.asp?sNavlocator=66&list_id=329&language_id=1