



HEADLINES

EU/ Convention: First draft of future EU constitution raises controversy

The first partial draft of future constitution was submitted by the 13-members Praesidium of the Convention on 6 February. The draft includes 16 articles dealing with definition, values and objectives of the Union, fundamental rights and citizenship, and the Union's competences. The debate on the draft was driven by the claim made by several representatives (UK representative Peter Hain for example) that there is an obvious gap between the conclusions of the working groups and the submitted text. The UK is contesting the use of the concept “federal basis” in article 1, as well as other provisions related to economic policy coordination and the CFSP.

See the full draft:

<http://european-convention.eu.int/docs/Treaty/cv00528.en03.pdf>

EU / Lisbon Strategy : letter by Blair, Chirac and Schröder ‘A message of confidence in the future of Europe’

With a view to prepare the Spring summit on 21 March, the leaders of Germany, France and the UK submitted a common letter to European Council President Costas Simitis enhancing the need for adopting an accelerated path of structural reforms and modernisations of labour markets. In their letter, the three leaders asked for more support to be given to European business, especially to the industrial sector; red tape for SMEs to be cut; and strong measures to be taken at the Spring Summit on 21 March, including lifting barriers for trade, liberalising energy market, and developing a Community patent. Anna Diamantopoulou, EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, welcomed the letter, and shared the concern expressed on red tape “killing SMEs”.

See the letter:

<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7145.asp>

EU/ Simplification: Cut of quarter of rules expected

Romano Prodi, European Commission President will this week present his plan to repeal, reorganise and simplify EU law. The idea is to reduce the amount of EU law by at least 25% within the next three years, in order to make it more understandable for European businesses and raise competitiveness. At least 1000 pages of law are said to be completely outdated and could be immediately repealed, and further 25 000 could be repealed by 2005. The initiative is part of the Better Regulation Action Plan submitted by the Commission in June 2002. In March 2003, the Commission is expected to issue a follow up communication to its Action Plan on simplifying and reducing the volume of existing Community legislation.

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The initiative clearly demonstrates the Commission's willingness to respond to the blame that EU law is too complicated and in some case contra-productive. However it is questionable whether this simplification and codification process will bear fruits in reasonable time.

Read more on the Simplification Action Plan:

http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2002/com2002_0278en01.pdf

EU/ EP: Spring Summit and e-Europe on the agenda of Strasbourg session

The plenary session in Strasbourg (10-14 February) will deal with the Commission's Spring report and eEurope 2005, in addition to the WTO debates on agriculture and generic medicines. The Commission will present its progress report at the EU's annual Spring Summit on 21 March. Several reports on the Information society are expected to be discussed, including report Paasilinna on the e-Europe Action Plan, report Kanbhai on the impact of e-economy on Companies, and report Auroi on the third Generation 3G .

IN BRIEF

EU / Enlargement: SMEs supportive of "Second Round" of enlargement

A conference hold on January 30 by SME Union focused on the second round of EU enlargement. During the conference, Dr Paul Ruebig MEP (EPP-ED, Austria), President of SME Union, stressed that SMEs strongly favour this second round, at the end of which the five countries of the Western Balkans Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Yugoslavia), as well as Bulgaria and Romania and Moldova and Ukraine, should become Members of the EU.

Whereas the representents from the candidate countries emphasised the need for a clear perspective on EU membership, Michel Peretti, of the Western Balkans directorate of the Commission's External Relations DG, put the accent on the need for these country to "understand the rules of the game before they play".

EU / Education: e-Learning portal to be launched

A new eLearning web portal has been launched by the Commission, with the aims of providing information and help to citizens, business organisations and businesses on a wide range of EU funded projects. It also provides links to various contributions from experts.

See more: <http://www.elearningeuropa.info/>