



HEADLINES

EU/ Patent law: Community Patent agreed at Competitiveness Council

The EU ministers managed to reach a significant agreement on the complicated issue of a common community patent. The "common political approach" reached on 3rd March entails an agreement on a centralised Community Court, on the language regime, as well as on the role of national patents offices and allocation of fees. Bearing in mind that the current system of patent protection in the EU costs around euros 50.000, that is five times as much as in the US or in Japan, the adoption of a Community Patent is meant to have a significant impact on innovation and competitiveness. It will indeed halve these costs to around euros 25,000 for 25 Member States. The next steps will be the formal agreement and adoption of the text of the Proposed Regulation on the Community Patent. The Commission is expected to issue proposals for Council Decisions to confer jurisdiction on the European Court of Justice to rule on issues arising from Community Patents.

More info:

[http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?
p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=MEMO/03/47|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=](http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=MEMO/03/47|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=)

EU/ Competitiveness: Commission requested to draft an SME action plan

During a public debate held on 3rd March at the Competitiveness Council, the EU Ministers asked the Commission to act rapidly to improve the framework for small businesses. Whilst the Green Paper on Entrepreneurship was unanimously welcomed by the ministers, the need for more coherence in entrepreneurship policy was also stressed. In particular A. Nikolaï, Dutch Secretary of State for European Affairs, advised to divide the objectives of the Green Paper into short and long terms measures in order to make their implementation more efficient. The role of SMEs in innovation was emphasized by Patricia Hewitt, UK Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Ms Hewitt also made an explicit reference to the recent joint paper drafted by the UK and France, which draws outlines of an entrepreneurship action plan.

More info:

[http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?
p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=MEMO/03/47|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=](http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=MEMO/03/47|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=)

EU/ Environmental Liability: Division remains on definition and insurance

EU Environment Ministers failed to reach an agreement over the outstanding issues of the scope and insurance scheme of the environmental liability Proposal during their meeting on 4th March. Regarding the scope of the proposal, although there is an agreement that the term "biodiversity" should be replaced by "protected species and natural habitats", no consensus was found on what this concept covers. Regarding insurance, the stepwise approach suggested by the Presidency, according to which there would be no mandatory insurance for an initial period of 3 years, did not produce a consensus either. The Presidency however reiterated its wish to achieve a political agreement on this issue by the end of the Presidency in June 2003. The vote in the Legal Affairs

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Committee (Responsible T. Manders, Netherlands, ELDR) has been postponed until 25 April due to a large number of amendments. The Industry Committee will adopt its opinion on 21 March.

See the results of the Council of 4th March: <http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/newmain.asp?lang=1>

EU/ Tax reform: Public Consultation launched on company tax reform

Two open consultations on two projects related to EU company taxation have been recently launched by the Commission. The first one focuses on the opportunity of using International Accounting Standards (IAS) as a starting point to develop an EU-wide consolidated tax base for companies. The closing date is 4 April 2003.

The second consultation concerns a "Home State Taxation" pilot project for SMEs, which would authorise an SME to account for its EU-wide profits in one tax declaration to be submitted to the Member State where its main seat is located. The target groups for this consultation are SME and industry federations; companies, tax administrations, tax and accounting professionals; tax academics. The closing date is 31 March.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/taxation_customs/taxation/consultations_en.htm

EU/ Environment: Communication expected on Integrated Product Policy

Two years after the adoption of the Green Paper on Integrated Product Policy (IPP), the Commission is expected to adopt a draft Communication on IPP in April 2003. The Green Paper on IPP of February 2001, set the outline of a future policy to diminish the environmental effect caused by products, over the whole product life cycle. The Communication focuses on two main aspects of IPP: the "framework conditions" (e.g. voluntary agreements, green procurements, ecolabel) and a "product specific approach" aimed at identifying the most dangerous products and developing adequate pilot projects.

More info:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/ipp/home.htm>

IN BRIEF

EU/ Commission: Priorities for 2004 unveiled - Enlargement, Stability and Sustainable growth

Adopted on 5 March, the Commission's Annual Policy Strategy Decision for 2004 identifies 3 priorities:

1. Managing the enlargement process (essentially in its financial and administrative aspects);
2. Promoting stability at the EU borders and beyond;
3. Enhancing measures to improve sustainable growth.

The Communication also mentions 31 legislative proposals to undergo "impact assessments". The annual policy strategy will be presented at the Strasbourg plenary session on 11 March.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/03/321|0|RAPID&lg=EN&display=

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EU/ Supports services: Access to business support services

The Commission adopted on 5 March a Communication on "B2 Europe", aimed at pooling the resources of Europe's major business support networks. 2003 will see the introduction of new tools giving better access to EU business support services, including a common pan-European web portal, a so-called "Multiple Entry Point". The most used networks are the following: Euro Info Centres, Innovation Relay Centres, Business and Innovation Centres, COOPECO and EUROCENTRES.

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/03/317|0|RAPID&lg=ENEU/

Enlargement: Labour Costs in candidate countries lower than in EU

According to a recent study released by Eurostat, the average labour cost per hour in the candidate countries is about five times lower than the EU average. Whereas an employee in industry and services earns an average salary of 4.21 euro, the same employee would earn 22.70 euros in the 15 Member States.

More Info:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/datashop/print-product/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&product=3-03032003-en-ap-EN&mode=download>

EU/ Enlargement: Business in candidate countries - New publication

Eurostat recently published the first edition of "Business in candidate countries", a new and comprehensive publication on structural business statistics in the candidates countries. This publication provides a wide range of information on the economies, the development patterns and the state of the different economic sectors of the countries covered. These are Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia

More info:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/datashop/print-catalogue/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&theme=4-Industry%20and%20Commerce&product=KS-45-02-975-__-N-EN_