



HEADLINES

EU / INTERNAL MARKET Brussels 13/07/2001: EU-wide contract law ?

The European Commission launched a Green Paper to explore the possibilities in introducing an EU-wide contract law. The consultation should start a debate on the problems that result from divergence between national contract laws impeding free trade within the internal market. For example, a lack of knowledge of other contract law regimes might be a disincentive against cross-border transactions for SMEs and consumers. The Green Paper suggests four options to be discussed further in detail: - to let market forces deal with any problems that may exist; - guidelines for national legislators based on common elements in national contract law rules; - to review, simplify and improve all relevant legislation; and - to create a new legal instrument at EU level which could be an voluntary model chosen by the contractual parties or a safety net of fallback provisions in case parties have not foreseen a possible problem in the contract. The public consultation lasts until 15 October 2001. The European Council in Laeken is expected to take a decision as to the follow-up of the Green Paper.

More info (copy/paste full link):

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/policy/developments/contract_law/index_en.html

EU / COMPETITION Brussels 18/07/2001: European Commission to increase pressure on cartels

As no company so far came forward to the Commission with information on undetected cartels, the European Commission has proposed a complete immunity from fines on a party that co-operates in the prosecution of a cartel. The proposed rules, which will replace the so-called Leniency Notice of 1996 (reduced fines for co-operating parties), should improve the detection and eradication of price-fixing and other cartels, harming consumer and business interests. Comments on the draft notice can be made until 20 September 2001, after which a final version of the notice should be adopted before the end of 2001.

More info: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/antitrust/leniency>

EU / CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY Brussels 18/07/2001: Green Paper launched

The Green Paper should promote the debate to create a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), whereby companies combine business profitability with sustainability and accountability. The European framework should compliment existing CSR programmes in the business community and the Member States. Enterprises would voluntarily take on board social and environmental concerns besides their economic ones, leading to more productive and profitable business according the Green Paper. It does not plan to call for any binding CSR rules in Europe. Several topics, issues and situations are referred to as being relevant in the context of the Green Paper on CSR: - management of change, e.g. responsible downsizing in corporate restructuring and mergers and acquisitions - human resource management, optimising the relations with employees via lifelong learning, health and safety, diversity, balance between work and private life, profit-sharing, etceteras. - relationship management and social responsibility, optimising relations with third parties via networks (e.g. coaching start-ups and SMEs), lasting relationships with consumers (e.g. providing products efficiently and ethically), and codes of conduct in the supply chain

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management covering working conditions, human rights and environmental aspects. - social accounting, reporting and auditing - more effective ethical labelling - sustainable development, integrating and balancing economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. The aim of the Green Paper is to trigger debate on all these aspects of CSR. The consultation is open until December 31st 2001.

More info: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/csr_index.htm

EU / STATE AID Brussels 19/07/2001: Overall level of state aid decreased The Commission made available the state aid register on the web, indicating all Commission's state aid decisions. It shows that the overall level of aid has decreased to an annual average of 90 billion Euro for the period 1997-1999 compared with 102 billion Euro in the previous reporting period 1995-1997. Other elements of the scoreboard include: an overview of state aid in the EU over the last ten years, a forum for Member States to present their own state aid policy, the Member States' compliance with state aid rules, trends in current state aid policy and the effects of State aid on the Internal Market. The register follows previous initiatives by the Commission in the field of state aid related matters (scoreboard, exemptions to SMEs). The Stockholm European Council has asked Member States to demonstrate a downward trend of State aid in relation to GDP by 2003 and to redirect aid to horizontal objectives. The scoreboard should contribute to further reach these objectives.

More info (copy/paste full link):

http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&do_c=IP/01/1033|0|RAPID&lg=EN http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/scoreboard/