



HEADLINES

EU / BIOTECHNOLOGY Milan 06/11/2001: Future SMEs action outlined In a speech at a conference on biotechnology

Mr. Liikanen, European Commissioner for enterprise and the information society, outlined the current situation of the biotechnology industry (mostly SMEs) and indicated future action lines, in advance of the future biotechnology strategy, to be presented by the EC before the end of the year still.

More info:

http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/start/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=SPEECH/01/510|0|R APID&lg=EN

EU / HEALTH & SAFETY Bilbao 07/11/2001: New OSHA campaign for 2002

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) has approved the Agency's work programme for 2002: Stress at work. Occupational stress, developing a 'preventive culture' and the fishing sector will be amongst the programme's priorities. More than 41 million EU workers are affected by work-related stress each year, according to OSHA. The European Week for Safety and Health at Work 2002 will aim at tackling this growing problem by increasing awareness of these and other psychosocial risks as well as promoting and developing preventive measures.

EU / TRADE Doha 14/11/2001: WTO agrees on new trade round negotiations

World Trade Organisation (WTO) members reached a final agreement on launching a new round of trade negotiations after their six-day meeting in Doha. The agreement is presented in a work programme. The work programme, consists of two declarations (a main declaration and one on intellectual property (TRIPS) and public health) and one decision on implementation (i.e. developing countries' difficulties in implementing current WTO agreements). The main ministerial declaration includes elaboration of objectives and timetables for the current negotiations in, agriculture and services, negotiations or possible negotiations in a range of issues such as industrial tariffs, trade and investment, trade and competition policy, some aspects of trade and the environment, implementation, and so on. WTO members have included the issue of trade facilitation, the most important issue for (international trading) SMEs (see also ESBA Weekly - Vol 3 - N 28), on the next trade round negotiations agenda. The negotiating mandate reflects the objective of simplifying customs and related trade procedures, including capacity building measures for the development countries. However, negotiations will only be opened by the next Ministerial Conference and by agreement of all WTO members at that time (the next conference will have to take place within the next two years). Negotiations under the work programme are to be concluded not later than 1 January 2005. The WTO's Ministerial Conference approved also by consensus the text of the agreement for China's (and Taiwan) entry into the WTO. China will become legally a member 30 days after the WTO receives notification of the ratification of the agreement by China's Parliament (see also ESBA Weekly - Vol 3 - N 38).

More info: - Ministerial Declaration:

http://www-chil.wto-ministerial.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/mindecl_e.pdf

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- Implementation-related issues and concerns - Decision (copy/paste full link): http://www-chil.wto-ministerial.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/mindecl_implementation_e.pdf
- EU info: http://europa.eu.int/comm/press_room/presspacks/doha/pp_doha_en.htm and <http://trade-info.cec.eu.int/europa/2001newround/pl4.php>

EU / SINGLE MARKET Strasbourg 15/11/2001: EP adopts cross-border payment regulation

The European Parliament approved with few amendments the EC proposal designed to oblige banks to charge the same for a cross-border transfer in euros as would apply to a domestic transfer. The EP wants cheques to be excluded from the proposed regulation and requested for a short delay in the application of the regulation, in order to allow banks to concentrate on the introduction of the euro coins and notes (1 March instead of 1 January). The European Parliament rejected the proposals as launched by the European Banking Federation (see ESBA Weekly - Vol 3 - N 44) as it considered the 2006 deadline, as proposed in the voluntary banking code, as too long and due to the fact that the European Banking Federation only covers a third of all European banks. The Internal Market Council is expected to adopt the proposed Regulation and European Parliament amendments on 26 November.

EU / CHEMICALS Strasbourg 15/11/2001: EP takes SME concerns into account

In its first reading, the European Parliament indicated that it supports the Commission's plan (see ESBA Weekly - Vol 3 - N 11) to establish a single system for the registration, evaluation and authorisation of both existing and new chemicals (REACH), to replace the existing cumbersome and ineffective legislation, but wants to go a bit further. The European Parliament supports the view that the needs of industry, especially SMEs, have to be taken on board under the new chemicals strategy (96% of all companies operating in the chemical industry are SMEs). In its report it stresses/calls that:

- excessive red tape should be avoided;
- new legislation should be as practical and transparent as possible, so that implementation to improve the protection of consumers, the environment, workers and all parties concerned, especially SMEs, can be undertaken swiftly;
- SMEs need concrete support to be able to participate effectively in the upcoming R&D framework programme;
- commercial confidentiality and property rights to be protected appropriately.
- a business impact assessment should be undertaken, taking into account especially SMEs interest, so that no disproportionate, adverse effects are to be expected;
- the EC should encourage and support SMEs working on alternative solutions and advise and assist SMEs with registration and assessment procedures; and
- SMEs need financial support to help them cope with the technical and organisational burdens stemming from REACH.

EU / SINGLE MARKET Brussels 20/11/2001: Scoreboard 2001 and business survey

The aim of the Single market scoreboard is to keep up the pressure on Member States by showing their relative performance in implementing this legislation. Some impressions:

- Implementation of adopted legislation: the scoreboard shows that EU Member States have slightly improved the implementation of EU single market legislation. However, their overall implementation deficit is still 2.0% (from 6.3% in 1997 and 2.5% in 1999) and some Member States are lagging behind further. The Member States have set their own target of 1.5% for March 2002 (0% means another 822 national implementing measures to be communicated by the Member States to the European Commission).
- Legislation in the pipeline: only 63% of target EU actions to improve the functioning of the internal market and planned to be adopted before the end of 2001 are expected to be achieved on time.
- The scoreboard counted around 1500 pending infringement proceedings.
- Standardisation is a problem in several sectors (e.g. only 10% standards adopted in the construction sector) and the average time for adopting a harmonised standard now approaches 8 years.

Main conclusions of the business survey (held among 4.000 businesses, employing over 10 employees, cross-sectoral):

- At

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least 50 billion euro could be saved in the EU with better quality regulation (compliance costs of a company is on average 15%, totalling up to 4% to 6% of EU GDP). This does not account for additional gains flowing from a more dynamic business environment for companies. These results are in line with the recent OCED study on SMEs views on red tape (see ESBA Weekly - Vol 3- N 43). - A large share of companies are dissatisfied with the quality of their regulatory environment. - Product conformity requirements, employment and working conditions obligations, and tax formalities are overall the major regulatory concern for companies. - Most companies still fail to see any discernible effect on their daily operations of efforts made so far to simplify regulation. The EC agrees that the results of the survey underline the urgent need for a coherent and radical strategy to create a better regulatory environment for businesses across the EU. To this end, the Commission will present its Action Plan on Better Regulation together with proposals from Member States' experts, as requested by the Lisbon summit (see also ESBA Weekly - Vol 3 - N 14).

More info:

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/score/busisum9.htm

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/solvit/monsurvey.pdf

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/score/score9en.pdf

EU / EDUCATION & TRAINING Brussels 21/11/2001: EC adopts lifelong learning communication

Following the Lisbon Council, the Memorandum on lifelong learning (October 2000) and an extensive consultation period with all stakeholders over 2001, the Commission has finally issued its communication on lifelong learning (see also ESBA Weekly Vol 3 - N 11). Lifelong learning focuses on the need for increased investment in human capital and in raising participation in education and training throughout working life in order to empower Europeans in the knowledge-based economy and society. The EC proposed six elements, allowing Member States to build their strategies, as well as a list of EC actions to further support these strategies. The six key elements of the communication are (in line with the Memorandum): developing partnerships, analysing new learning requirements, increased investment in education and training, increased access to education and training, promoting a learning culture, and introduce quality control and indicators to measure progress. The support actions include further improvements in the system of recognition of qualifications, development of a European CV, and financial instruments of the European Investment Bank, the European Investment Fund as well as regional and social Community. The overall proposed strategy as presented in the communication, supplements several actions in progress dealing with aspects of lifelong learning, such as the European employment strategy, the European social agenda, the action plan on skills and mobility (as part of the new European Labour market strategy), and the e-Learning action plan. A joint Commission and Council report will be submitted to the European Council in Barcelona in March 2002 and the Commission will report in 2003 on progress made with lifelong learning in the Member States and at EU level.

More info:

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/life/index.html>

EU / HEALTH AND SAFETY Brussels 23/11/2001: Awards and publications on accident prevention

According new Eurostat figures, about 5 500 people are still killed in workplace accidents. The total EU working days lost due to accidents amounts to around 146 million, resulting in high costs for enterprises (e.g. sick pay, overtime payments, recruiting new labour, retraining, lost production time and business damage, increased insurance premiums, lower worker morale, etceteras). Accident risks are higher for those employed in SMEs. The incidence rate for fatal accidents to workers in enterprises of fewer than 50 employees is around double that of larger units. In this perspective, OSHA has published several reports on accident prevention, in parallel to the conference "Prevention

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of work-related accidents: a different strategy in a changing world of work", (closing event of the 2001 European Week for Safety and Health at Work), which was the European theme of 2001 - Award-winning companies and commended examples, showing how many of the problems can be prevented with good management, are published in a report called "Accident prevention in practice": <http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/howprevent> - The information report on accident prevention schemes from across Europe: "How to reduce workplace accidents", presents 22 cases of accident-prevention approaches from the 15 Member States, including implementation and experiences. It shows amongst other how deaths and injuries at work can be reduced if organisations systematically monitor accidents and carry out preventive programmes based on the involvement of all key stakeholders: <http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/workaccidents>.

- OSHA magazine "Preventing accidents at work":

http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/magazine/4/mag4_en.pdf

- OSHA factsheets on accident prevention:

<http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/factsheets/facts20>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Brussels (B) 27-28/11/2001: Corporate Social Responsibility on the European social policy agenda; Theme: CSR. Info: <http://www.socialresponsibility.be>

Munich (D) 27-28/11/2001: Second European Entrepreneurship Summit; Theme: Start-up, Business environment, innovation, finance, high tech. Info: <http://www.djconferences.dj.com/entrepreneur2001/index.html>

Brussels (B) 27-29/11/2001: Employment Week 2001: the New European labour market - Acting Locally; Theme: Employment Info: <http://www.employmentweek.com/>

Brussels (B) 29/11/2001: The future of the social market-economy; Theme: Social economy. Info: <http://www.sme-union.org/activities/sme29november.htm>

Liège (B) 29/11/2001: A Community Patent for Europe; Theme: IPRs. Info: http://www.mineco.fgov.be/redir.asp?loc=/Presidency/Conferences/patents_en.htm

Brussels (B) 07/12/2001: Public Hearing on the Green Paper on Consumer Protection; Theme: Consumer Protection, Business. More info: http://europa.eu.int/comm/consumers/policy/developments/fair_comm_pract/hearing_greenpaper_en.html