

EURO INFO CENTRES

ANNUAL REPORT

1991 -92



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL XXIII

Commission of the European Communities

**EURO INFO CENTRES
ANNUAL REPORT
1991 -92**

Directorate-General for Enterprise Policy,
Distributive Trades, Tourism and Cooperatives

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Introduction – 1991-92: Consolidation and opening-up phase

The year 1991 and the beginning of 1992 were marked by the consolidation of the 'enterprise dimension' in the development of European integration, and especially in the implementation of the internal market.

Initiated by the Council Decision of 18 June 1991,¹ this dimension was recognized in Article 130 of the EEC Treaty as amended by the Treaty of Maastricht, which notes the intention of the Commission and the Member States to encourage 'an environment favourable to initiative and to the development of enterprises throughout the Community, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises'.

The Council Resolution of 17 June 1992² confirms the Community's commitment to supporting horizontal actions for SMEs, with a view to preparing enterprises for and encouraging their participation in the implementation of the single market. The Resolution invites the Commission to propose, by the end of 1992, a new general programme concerning enterprise policy for the years 1993-97.

Lastly, the European Council, meeting in Lisbon on 26 and 27 June 1992, asked the Council 'to encourage increased participation of small and medium-sized enterprises in Community programmes'³ in an attempt to stimulate the competitiveness of European enterprises

¹ OJ L 175, 4.7.1991, p. 32, Council Decision of 18 June 1991, revising the programme for the improvement of the business environment and the promotion of the development of enterprises, and in particular small and medium-sized enterprises in the Community.

² OJ C 178, 15.7.1992, p. 8, Council Resolution of 17 June 1992, concerning Community action to support enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, including craft enterprises.

³ Conclusions of the Presidency, point I.3.4.

through cooperation and the adaptation of actions involving research and innovation.

In the context of this accelerated construction of Europe, the Euro Info Centres are increasingly emerging as essential vehicles for confirming the central role played by small and medium-sized enterprises in the economic development of Europe.

Often anticipating the changes affecting our continent, many SMEs have already gradually integrated moves towards transnational partnership and cooperation into their strategies. This attitude needs to be consolidated, however, at operational level. Europeanization, in all its various forms – at the levels of production, management, financing, training or marketing – undoubtedly represents one of the major factors in the success of tomorrow's SMEs. And it is this Europeanization which will enable them to face up both to the increase in trade brought about by the actual implementation of the internal market and to the challenge of competitiveness in so far as it is associated with the process of internationalization.

Since information is a fundamental condition for the implementation of this process, it is here that the Euro Info Centres will make their basic contribution towards the response of enterprises to this challenge.

Created in 1987, the Euro Info Centre network underwent both a consolidation and an opening-up phase in 1991: consolidation thanks to both the growing professionalism of the services provided by the EICs and the specific recognition of the role of the networks in the context of the Treaty of Maastricht; an opening-up phase, with the extension of the network to non-member countries by the creation of Correspondence Centres.

This report takes stock of the activities of the Euro Info Centre network for the period from 1 January 1991 to 30 June 1992.¹

¹ For practical reasons, the quantitative data concerning the matters and dossiers processed only concern the year 1991. Data for the first half of 1992 will be included in the 1993 annual report.

I – The EIC project in 1991-92

The major event of 1991 with respect to policy aimed at assisting enterprises – and which consequently had a direct effect on the role and activities of EICs – was the adoption by the Council on 18 June 1991 of the document 'Enterprise policy: a new dimension for small and medium-sized enterprises'.¹ These new Commission guidelines on enterprise policy provided a major qualitative impetus for all of the instruments created to serve SMEs.

Directorate-General XXIII, in charge of enterprise policy, consequently pursued the strengthening of these instruments, which included the EICs, while endeavouring to increase the integration of their actions. DG XXIII was anxious to highlight this principle by launching a major communications campaign aimed at enhancing their reputation.

In March 1992, the European Week for Business was devoted to mobilizing tens of thousands of entrepreneurs throughout Europe, as well as national or regional authorities in all the Member States. This bore witness to the reality of the 'enterprise dimension' – as acknowledged at Maastricht – as an integral part of industrial development within the Community.

Although the network was consolidated during this period, it also opened itself to the outside world in response to requests from non-member countries, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe.² In 1991, EIC network Correspondence Centres opened in Prague, Warsaw and Vienna. The year 1992 will see the opening of other Centres in the EFTA countries.

¹ COM(90) 528 final, of 18 December 1990.

² SEC(90) 2233, of 12 November 1990, Communication to the Commission by Mr Cardoso e Cunha, in agreement with Messrs Andriessen and Matutes, concerning the creation of Correspondence Centres in certain third countries which request them.

Consequently, the main actions of the network have unfolded within this dual context. The number and quantity of these actions provide an indication of the fundamental importance which businesses attach to the 1993 deadline.

1. CONFIGURATION OF THE NETWORK

A – 1991-92: consolidation and opening-up phase

(a) Consolidation

Consolidation of the network, which was begun in 1990, was continued and brought to a conclusion in 1991, bringing the total number of EICs to 210.

The current distribution of EICs is as follows:

Belgium	12 EICs and 2 satellites
Denmark	8 EICs
Germany	32 EICs and 3 satellites
Greece	13 EICs
Spain	26 EICs and 1 satellite
France	28 EICs and 4 satellites
Ireland	6 EICs
Italy	29 EICs
Luxembourg	2 EICs
The Netherlands	8 EICs
Portugal	10 EICs and 2 satellites
United Kingdom	21 EICs and 2 satellites

This makes a total of 195 EICs (196 including the extension of the Berlin EIC) and 14 regional satellites.

The new German *Länder* now have seven new EICs (Erfurt, Dresden, Leipzig, Rostock, Magdeburg, Frankfurt/Oder and Potsdam), along with the extension of the Berlin EIC.

The Ioannina Chamber of Commerce and Industry, opened in September 1991, accommodated the 13th Greek EIC, while the London

Chamber of Commerce and Industry also joined the network in 1991.

Lastly, a temporary EIC was set up in Sevilla on the site of the 1992 Universal Exposition.

(b) Opening-up phase

The distinctive feature of 1991 was the opening-up phase of the network to include non-member countries. This principle was voiced in the communication to the Commission of 12 November 1990 by Mr Cardoso e Cunha, in agreement with Messrs Andriessen and Matutes. The extra-Community development of the EIC network is perfectly consistent with the spirit of the Delors II Package, which confirms both the need to consolidate the international role of the Community – especially through the development of industrial cooperation with its partners – and the will 'to emphasize the role of measures aimed at improving the provision of information for and cooperation of enterprises, in particular SMEs'.¹

This initiative should also lead to the opening-up of new markets, both for European industry (strengthening its competitiveness) and for its preferred partners.

Thus, the Federal Chamber of Commerce in Vienna, the Cooperation Fund in Warsaw and the Federal Ministry of Economics in Prague have each accommodated a Correspondence Centre since mid-1991.

On 30 June 1992, the list of priority countries which had been given the go-ahead by the Commission with respect to the choice of accommodation structure proposed for the opening of new Correspondence Centres included Norway (the Community Information Bureau for Business and Industry in Oslo), Finland (the Finnish Association for Foreign Trade in Helsinki) and Switzerland (the Swiss Trade Promotion Board (OSEC) in Zurich). Sweden and Hungary will follow shortly.

¹ COM(92) 2000 final, of 11 February 1992, 'From the Single Act to Maastricht and beyond – the means to match our ambitions', p. 26.

B. Inaugurations: the state of play

(a) EICs

By 30 June 1992, 178 EICs had been officially inaugurated, leaving 31 EICs remaining to be opened.

Eleven EICs were inaugurated in 1991:

1 in February: Leipzig (D)

1 in March: Piraeus (GR)

3 in April: Firenze/Promofirenze (I), Udine (I), Nijmegen (NL)

1 in June: Sevilla/Expo (E)

2 in September: Frankfurt/Oder (D), Ioannina (GR)

2 in October: Luxembourg/Guild Chamber (L), Telford (UK)

1 in December: Erfurt (D).

The first half of 1992 saw the inauguration of an additional EIC:

1 in March: Maidstone (UK).

The 31 EICs still to be inaugurated include:

One in Belgium, eight in Germany (four of which are located in the new *Länder*), one in Greece, one in Spain, eight in France, two in Ireland, seven in Italy, two in the Netherlands, and two in the United Kingdom.

(b) Correspondence Centres

Although no Centre is officially 'inaugurated' as such, an exchange of official letters between the non-member country concerned and the Commission has enabled them to be recognized as one of the network's Correspondence Centres.

The existing Centres were recognized on the following dates:

July 1991: Warsaw and Prague

November 1991: Vienna

May 1992: Helsinki, Oslo and Zurich

In June 1992, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed that Nutek, the Swedish National Council for Industrial and Technical Development, should serve as the host structure of the future Correspondence Centre in Stockholm.

The Hungarian Ministry of Industry and Commerce is leading an interministerial working party (with Community observers) which, in the second half of 1992, will launch a call for tenders with a view to selecting prospective organizations to serve as the Correspondence Centre. The Hungarian Foundation for the Promotion of Enterprise is playing a very active role in this work.

2. CORRESPONDENCE CENTRES: PRINCIPLES AND REALITIES

The opening of a Correspondence Centre in an applicant non-member country is subject to the agreement of the Commission, which assesses the application submitted by the official authorities of the non-member country (first principle) with respect to the Community's priorities and objectives concerning external policy.

Each non-member country may have only one Correspondence Centre recognized by the Commission (second principle). The newly created Centre may set up its own network, so as to ensure an adequate dissemination of information, due consideration being given to national requirements.

The third principle attached to the opening of a Correspondence Centre is reciprocity. Each Centre undertakes not only to disseminate Community information to national enterprises, but also to collect and redistribute to the EIC network any information from the non-member country which may be useful to Community SMEs.

In concrete terms, the Correspondence Centre will therefore have to answer questions asked by companies within the non-member country itself, as well as those within the Community.

Having set out these principles, the Correspondence Centre will have access to the know-how of the EIC network. Although it will have access to the network's information, documentation, Community databases and electronic mail, as well as to training in Community matters, this will not be paid for out of the Community budget.

Potential contributions by the Community to fund a Centre must be borne by the available resources earmarked for existing agreements with the non-member country in question.

For example, the Correspondence Centre in Prague plans to set up a sub-network by using structures receiving support from the Phare programme, such as Business Innovation Centres (BICs) or Regional Advisory and Innovation Centres (RAICs). Similarly, the Phare-SME team in Warsaw is actively cooperating in the launching of a sub-network of the Polish Correspondence Centre. The opening-up phase of the Budapest Correspondence Centre will also be handled by Phare-SME.

3. THE FUNCTIONING OF THE NETWORK AND DEVELOPMENTS IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The developments and achievements of the Euro Info Centre Project in the area of information technology for 1991 can be grouped under five headings :

- (i) Continuation of technical installation
- (ii) EuroKom
- (iii) Switch to the new workstation (WS4.0)
- (iv) VANS project – value-added network service
- (v) Back Office

In addition, the technical team has put the finishing touches to the development of the EIC central file (Geseic), which constitutes an extremely precise and meticulous tool for monitoring the administrative data of all the EICs. Geseic amongst other things, has enabled the production of the 'Yellow Pages', a computerized version of the *Who's*

Who, which also comprises the EIC specializations, updates of which are regularly sent to the network and its partners.

(a) Extension of technical installations

The extension of EIC technical installations focused on eastern Europe, and in particular on the new German *Länder*: the Rostock EIC (DE-134) and the Leipzig EIC (DE-133) were set up in November 1991 and March 1992, respectively.

The Eupen satellite (BE-013) of the Liège EIC, as well as the EICs in London (UK-573), Sligo (IR-301) and Ioannina (GR-163) had also been added to the 191 technically operational EICs by the end of 1991.

(b) EuroKom

In order to optimize the efficiency of the EuroKom electronic mail service, numerous 'conferences' designed to facilitate multiple electronic communication between EICs were organized, both by the EICs themselves and by DG XXIII. For the most part, 'conferences' of this kind mainly cover the following areas:

cooperation between companies

communications between national and regional EICs

handicrafts

high technology

the Universal Exposition in Sevilla

the Eurometropoles Club

medium-sized cities

relations with the countries of Eastern Europe

requests for various lists

messages of general interest for the entire network

(c) Transition to the new workstation (WS4.0)

The summer of 1991 saw more than 190 EICs arrive in Brussels to be trained in the use of the new workstation. They received the programme 'ERIC', version 4.0.

This programme:

enables an EIC, with the help of a multilingual thesaurus, to record and describe the questions sent in by companies, as well as the corresponding answers;

also enables a list to be made of businesses requiring the services of the EIC, as well as the contacts made by the EIC with a view to finding certain answers;

contains document management software offering access to a word-processing package; this programme also enables connections to be made to databases and to the EuroKom electronic mail service.

Lastly, the system enables the EIC to prepare its monthly activity report for DG XXIII and to send it electronically or on diskette.

The EIC's questions/answers are attached to the report and are fed into a central database for capitalization on the ECHO database server in Luxembourg. This makes the information and research work performed by one EIC accessible to other EICs.

The ERIC 4.0 software is accompanied by a 'tutorial', i.e. an individualized training programme offering guidance on how to use the workstation.

(d) VANS project (value-added network service)

The VANS project was launched (and has since been adopted) by DG XXIII to offer an integrated value-added telecommunications infrastructure to benefit:

all correspondents of DG XXIII in the marketplace

its own internal departments

in order to facilitate and therefore encourage dialogue among all the participants with a view to achieving greater unity and mutual benefit.

During 1991, while negotiations with the bidders were under way, surveys were conducted among the users in order to:

gauge their involvement with the project, and
assess the financial impact of the use of VANS.

DG XXIII chose VANS Infonet.

During the first half of 1992, regular consultations with the future users of VANS were held through the VANS Users Consultative Committee (bringing together one or two EICs from each of the 12 Member States). The objectives were as follows:

to inform users better,

to collect remarks and suggestions from these users in order to take into account the implementation of VANS-DG XXIII, thereby giving them maximum ease of use.

(e) Back Office

A Back Office was set up with a view to implementing the above-mentioned developments in information technology.

The Back Office serves the following functions:

to manage the central documentation of the EICs; this 'indexed' documentation is then transferred to the workstations of the EICs;

to manage questions/answers from EICs with a view to categorizing them on ECHO;

to transfer and format question/answer dossiers from the Information Officers;

to make suggestions on how to enrich the thesaurus used in the EIC workstations on the basis of free words used by the EICs to index their dossiers;

to produce statistics based on the dossiers received;

and lastly, to receive – via telecommunications or on diskette – monthly reports and dossiers from the EICs with a view to fully exploiting them (statistics and capitalization).

The initial loading of the capitalization database on to ECHO took place in January 1992 with question/answer dossiers from the Information Officers in DG XXIII. The EICs can consult these dossiers from their workstations and may perform searches, on the basis of either the same multilingual thesaurus, or on their local workstation.

4. THE DEVELOPING ROLES OF THE EURO INFO CENTRES

Although, contractually speaking, the roles of the EICs (as described in the 1990 Annual Report) consist in providing information for enterprises, giving assistance and advice to SMEs, disseminating Community information, providing the Commission with feedback and developing the 'network effect' through close inter-EIC cooperation, all of these roles underwent a qualitative leap following the adoption by the Council of Ministers on 18 June 1991 of the 'new dimension for small and medium-sized enterprises', as advocated by the Commission in its 'New guidelines for enterprise policy'.

This new dimension takes into account the positive assessment of the pilot phase of the enterprise policy (1986-90). It aims to strengthen the integration of the instruments and enhance their interaction (intensification of the 'network effect') for the benefit of SMEs. It is especially aimed at supporting SME activities and encouraging inter-enterprise cooperation between businesses, thus enabling them to respond usefully to the challenges which are posed by the creation of the internal market.

To do this, an extra sum of ECU 25 million has been earmarked by the Council, which has just been added to the ECU 110 million allocated to the Community Action Programme for SMEs over the period 1990-93.

In concrete terms, the qualitative strengthening of these roles means that the EICs will be increasingly likely to extend beyond the strict 'question and answer' framework and will be called upon to play a multiplying role for operational information aimed at companies. Given the growing complexity of markets and the increasingly competitive framework in which SMEs must develop in view of the imminent opening-up of frontiers, it is vital that Euro Info Centres take part in an operational process by adapting the qualitative nature of the information disseminated. EICs are thus encouraged to ensure according to their specific environment and to disseminate information (sectoral, regional and functional) selected within the framework of an active dialogue with companies but also with the network's central administration and national authorities. They will also undertake an active role with respect to the local economy, primarily by setting up and running sub-networks, targeting activities for small and medium-sized enterprises and, lastly, encouraging the spirit of enterprise within the framework of European initiatives.

EICs are vehicles and operators whose aim is to amplify the impact of various Community actions within the regions. They are receivers, identifiers and advisers to enterprises confronted with the increased competition that the internal market is bound to bring in its wake.

This massive task, which brings together the network and the central administration, calls for an almost constant monitoring of the product, linked to the development of the European economy. It was to highlight this demand that the central administration of the network in Brussels set up a Monitoring Group in June 1991. The group comprises EIC representatives from each Member State whose role is to identify and assess the needs of the network with representatives from DG XXIII and to analyse with them the impetus to be given to the EICs in the 12 Member States, in cooperation with their host structures.

Indeed, greater involvement by these structures is required, in terms of support and action on behalf of their EIC, by offering them the best conditions to become genuine relay stations and the preferential experimental field stations ('laboratories') for Community initiatives and programmes (training in Community affairs, seed capital and risk

capital, Euromarketing, Interprise, etc.). This would benefit the entire project and its aims.

Lastly, the 'new dimension' has confirmed the switch – with respect to Community funding of EICs – from the concept of subsidy (valid for the first three years of existence) to the concept of service rendered, as from the fourth year of the EIC's existence.

5. THE CODE OF ETHICS

In 1991 the Euro Info Centres created a 'Code of Ethics' to underline their identity – despite the differing socio-economic situations within which they operate – and highlight their membership within a professional network which provides high value-added services.

While not a contractual document, the Code aims to express a common code of practice which all the members of the network will use as a reference when approaching their main partners. Membership of a club implies guidelines to be followed when executing actions.

This multilingual document is divided into 10 concise, individually commented chapters setting forth, article by article, the rules of behaviour to be applied in the relations which EICs have with:

- SMEs;
- trade organizations, intermediaries and consultants;
- the Correspondence Centres;
- the public and the press;
- DG XXIII;
- the Community institutions (apart from DG XXIII);
- the other EICs;
- their host structure;
- their sub-network;
- their own staff.

After amendments made in Berlin, the final document – extracts of which are annexed to this Annual Report – was adopted and disseminated to the entire network at the Third Annual Conference in Funchal.

* * *

The period from 1 January 1991 to 30 June 1992 saw a considerable expansion of EIC activities. The EICs developed 'value-added' and enhanced their professionalism in the services rendered both to businesses and to DG XXIII. This is treated in a later chapter.

The following chapter reviews Commission action taken on behalf of the network.

II – The Commission at the service of the EICs

The 18 months covered by this report provide a clear picture of the qualitative and quantitative leap achieved by the Commission's efforts to promote the EICs.

1. INFORMATION SERVICES

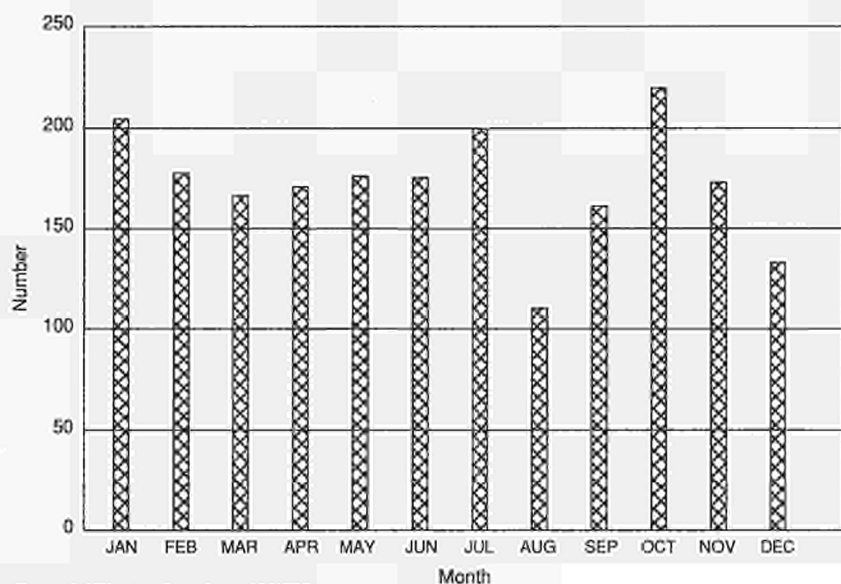
A. Questions/Answers

The Information Officers department, which currently comprises seven people in charge of answering questions submitted by EICs, processed

Graph 1

EIC project – January to December 1991

Number of questions sent per month by the EICs to the central administration



Base: 2 070 questions from 169 EICs

no less than 2 070 dossiers in 1991. Compared with the 1 644 questions answered in 1990 and the 723 questions answered in 1989, this figure represents an increase of 26 and 186%, respectively.

The 2 070 questions came from 169 different EICs, which means that forty EICs sent no questions to the central administration in 1991.

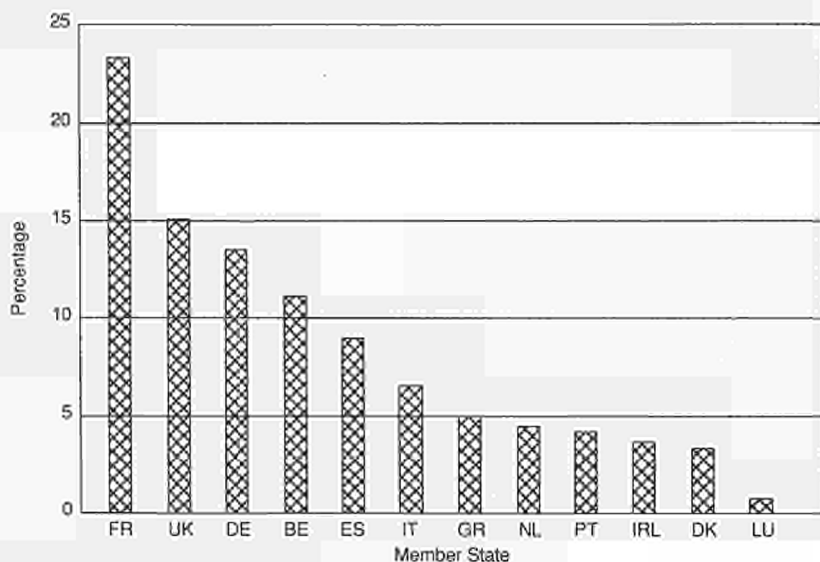
Breakdown by country

The total number of questions submitted to the Information Officers (IOs) by the EICs in each country breaks down as follows:

Graph 2

EIC project – January to December 1991

Percentage by country of the number of questions sent to the central administration



Base: 2 070 questions from 169 EICs

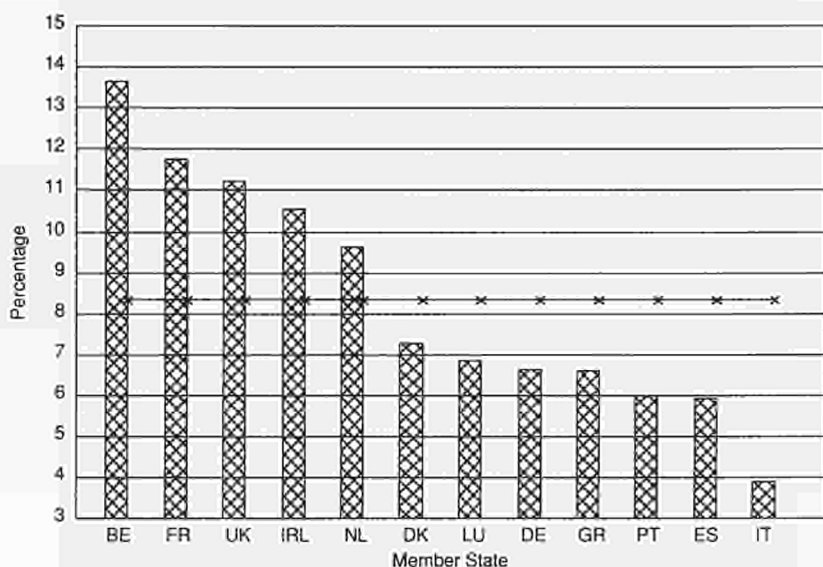
It is also interesting to compare the number of questions recorded per country in comparison with the number of EICs in that country.

The average per country taken as a proportion of the number of EICs per country gives the following picture:

Graph 3

EIC project – January to December 1991

Average number of questions sent to the central administration, by country



Base: 2 070 questions from 169 EICs

In comparison with their respective number of EICs, it can be seen that Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Luxembourg make considerable use of the service. On the other hand, for Spain and Italy the average is low in relation to the number of EICs.

Analysis by subject

An analysis of the 2 070 questions reveals only slight differences with respect to the types of question asked, compared with those submitted by EICs in 1990.

The comparative table below presents a classification by subject (Celex code) of all the questions processed by the central administration in 1991 and 1990.

Table 1
Questions from EICs to the central administration from January to December 1991 and 1990
 Classification by subject (Celex code)

Celex code	Sector	% 1991	% 1990
01.	General, financial and institutional matters	3.8	1.4
02.	Customs union and free movement of goods	1.5	2.9
03.	Agriculture	5.6	3.4
04.	Fisheries	0.4	0.7
05.	Freedom of movement for workers and social policy	5.2	9.2
06.	Right of establishment and freedom to provide services	3.9	3.5
07.	Transport policy	2.9	2.1
08.	Competition policy	2.5	2.3
09.	Taxation	2.4	2.0
10.	Economic and monetary policy and free movement of capital	0.3	0.8
11.	External relations (including development policy)	12.5	15.0
12.	Energy	0.8	1.7
13.	Industrial policy and internal market	22.5	19.2
14.	Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments	9.8	4.8
15.	Environment, consumers and health protection	9.8	8.6
16.	Research, information, education and statistics	13.2	18.2
17.	Law relating to undertakings	2.8	3.8
Total number of questions submitted to the central administration		2 070	1 644

Thus, questions on industrial policy and the internal market, which have increased in number in comparison with 1990, still account for about a quarter of the dossiers handled by the Information Officers.

Next come questions on research, which, from the point of view of the dossiers handled by the EICs themselves (see Chapter III, Part 1(a)), clearly belong to the next most important sector from the point of view of businesses.

Another aspect which should be pointed out here is that, in comparison with 1990, the number of questions on regional policy has more than doubled.

On the other hand, questions concerning specific sectors such as law relating to undertakings, the free movement of goods, energy, monetary policy and fisheries seem to be decreasing.

The box below presents a sample by topic of questions handled recently by the Information Officers:

Customs union and free movement of goods

A small French jewellery manufacturer opened a production unit in Portugal and set up inward and outward processing arrangements with the French customs authorities. Is it not a violation of Community law for the Portuguese customs authorities to demand that a bank guarantee be provided equivalent to 17% of the value of the goods, while the French authorities ask for 5% of the value of the VAT on the goods?

Are there obstacles to the exportation of sparkling wines to the Netherlands?

Free movement of workers

The British authorities do not recognize the Dutch First Aid Certificate, which is officially recognized by the Dutch Government, for persons engaging in professional activities in British territorial waters in the offshore sector. In view of the fact that the British authorities require Dutch workers to obtain a British 'First Aid Diploma', does this not constitute a barrier to the free movement of workers?

Taxation

In which Community countries does the profession of 'head VAT controller' exist? In those Member States which do not require the services of such a person, how can a company which has no registered office organize itself to sell its goods? What are the prospects for this profession after 1993?

External relations

A Greek company wants to engage in a joint venture for the production and marketing of cheeses in Bulgaria. Can the Commission help it to find a Bulgarian partner?

To whom in the Phare programme should a German enterprise wishing to set up a joint venture or cooperation project send its proposal? Which partner is in charge? Who obtains the financial support, and to what extent? Are there contact points in the various Member States?

Internal market

In view of a Greek regulation obliging foreign businesses to prove that they have been present in Greece for more than five years, can this prevent a Grenoble-based firm specializing in hydraulic studies from participating in a call for tender to carry out a development study on the port of Iraklion?

Regional policy

What measures is the Commission planning, under the Retex programme, for the restructuring of the textile industry sector?

Environment – consumer protection

A German packaging manufacturer wants to know whether the Commission intends to adopt the principles contained in the new

German legislation on waste management. Does the Commission plan any other measures in the field of reducing the amount of packaging or recycling such products?

Is there a Community regulation banning the export of food-stuffs in wooden packaging?

Does the Commission plan in 1993 to regulate health conditions for bakeries/pâtisseries, especially as regards: the fitting-out of premises, refrigeration processes (cold-rooms, freezers and refrigerators) and special vehicle equipment?

Research and development

Is there a R&D programme in which a British firm wishing to make a contribution towards research in the area of new, rapidly biodegradable materials for the manufacture of babies' nappies can participate?

Company law

Is the Commission planning to harmonize the articles of association of the Société d'intérêt collectif agricole (SICA)?

Commercial law

Which decisions arising from the Uruguay Round are applicable to the Member States, especially those concerning anti-dumping measures and subsidies or financial aid?

Cooperation in development

A firm of British civil engineering consultants wants to develop its activities in non-member countries. Are there any projects, such as project evaluation or opportunities for consulting, which can be financed by the European Development Fund (EDF)? Is it possible to obtain further details on the progress of projects in

these countries, especially through Commission officials who have on-site access?

Which private institutions, foundations or associations are concerned with cooperation – to varying extents – with African countries and other developing countries?

B. Information products

The central administration continues to provide the EICs with constantly updated documentary sources. This enables them to play their information broker role with maximum efficiency, while listening to the needs of SMEs. It is precisely with a view to responding to the changing information needs of companies that the central administration has revamped these products to create new ones, while at the same time attempting to limit the vast amount of general information which is often difficult to process and is of very little practical use.

(a) The daily bulletin (Info Flash)

The bulletin, a daily selection of information on Community current events, informs EICs of new decisions (directives, regulations, opinions, etc.), proposals, initiatives or orientations issued by the various European institutions which may be of direct concern to companies. Initially produced by an external press service specializing in Community affairs, this selection is increasingly being made 'in-house', as since October 1991 the central administration has been linked to Reuters press agency and its database Agence Europe, as well as to the Euroscope database, which provides a daily information bulletin drawn up by Europe Information Service (EIS).

In 1991, 220 *Info Flash* bulletins in English and French were disseminated to the EICs via the electronic mail system.

(b) The monthly newsletter (Euro Info Centre News) and the bi-monthly bulletin (EuroKom Bulletin)

Euro Info Centre News was relaunched in May 1991. This monthly publication, which is produced with the active cooperation of the EICs themselves, offers a digest of EIC and DG XXIII activities, a summary of initiatives at the service of Central and Eastern Europe, news on EFTA or the European Economic Area, and a selection of questions/answers from EICs which may be of general interest to the network. The newsletter is supplemented by a list of publications which are available to EICs and have been produced by Community institutions or by other EICs. It also includes calls for tender/deadlines in the Official Journal, as well as a list of seminars, conferences and workshops of direct concern to the business sector.

Six issues were published in 1991 and four in the first half of 1992.

The *EuroKom Bulletin* is an update of the *Euro Info Centre News*. It is sent out to the EICs once a fortnight and contains the latest news on seminars, conferences and workshops, as well as calls for tender/deadlines in the Official Journal.

Sixteen issues were published in 1991 and 10 in the first half of 1992.

(c) Info Business

This is the network's contact magazine. It, too, offers news of activities involving other DG XXIII initiatives, and reflects the spirit of friendliness and efficiency that is a feature of network members. In 1991, six issues were devoted, to the following subjects:

the EIC 'network effect' (March)

the extension of BC-NET to EFTA (May)

the new dimension of enterprise policy (July)

the annual meeting of BC-NET in Paris (September)

the Second Annual Conference of EICs in Berlin (October)

international technological cooperation; the European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work (December)

During the first half of 1992, the central administration published a double issue devoted to:

European Week for Business (May)

as well as a special edition on the Third Annual EIC Conference in Funchal.

The *Info Business* magazine currently has a circulation of 8 000 and is published in English and French.

(d) Fact sheets

The 17 fact sheets existing at the end of 1990 were fully updated and disseminated to the members of the network. These sheets cover product liability, franchising, liquid containers, standardization, know-how licences, machine safety, seed capital, construction products, the audiovisual sector, Eurotech Capital, the European Community export promotion programmes, Venture Consort, anti-dumping and counter-vailing legislation, the structural Funds, environmental impact assessment, the recognition of higher-education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education, and the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG).

Nine further sheets were also disseminated by the EICs to companies. These covered legislative acts (directives or regulations) or Community initiatives of concern to them. The new subjects concern the following topics:

public supply contracts (Council Directive 88/295/EEC of 22 March 1988, amending Directive 77/62/EEC relating to the coordination of procedures on the award of public supply contracts and repealing certain provisions of Directive 80/67/EEC);

the Community and German unification;

company taxation;

public works contracts (Council Directive 89/440 of 18 July 1989, amending Directive 71/305 coordinating the procedures for awarding public works contracts);

procurement procedures in the water, energy, transport and telecommunications sectors (Council Directive of 17 September 1990 on the procurement procedures of entities operating in the water, energy, transport and telecommunications sectors);

Community programmes and networks in favour of women;

the Schengen Agreements;

standardization;

the Maastricht Agreements.

It should be noted that these fact sheets are disseminated in the nine Community languages and are available upon request from the network's central administration in Brussels.

(e) Self-training packs

These are information and training products for use within the network. They take the form of 12 individual dossiers compiled by the Information Officers and containing the basic training received by all EIC personnel. The courses help to weaken the impact of the high staff turnover.

The first seven dossiers were sent to the EICs, namely:

- (i) the Community institutions
- (ii) the internal market and the four freedoms
- (iii) company law
- (iv) sources of financing
- (v) standardization
- (vi) taxation
- (vii) commercial policy

Five other dossiers will soon supplement the series. They will cover:

- (i) the structural Funds
- (ii) competition law
- (iii) research and development
- (iv) transport policy
- (v) social policy

(f) Information dossier on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

First drawn up in the autumn of 1990, for each country in the region, the dossier reviews political and economic trends, relations with the Community and, above all, national legislation of direct concern to enterprises (joint ventures, company law, investments, banking law, etc.). This dossier is regularly updated.

New sections on the Baltic States, Albania, Croatia and Slovenia will be included in the next edition.

(g) The Monitor

This is the Euro Info Centre reference work. It offers an analytical interpretation of all Community legislation, divided up into 17 sectors. It was completely redesigned in 1991 to make it easier to use, and each section – which has its own index – is updated monthly to include the latest developments in the sector concerned, and published in both English and French. From this point of view, it complements the Community databases to which the EICs are linked.

(h) Euroscope

The central administration was recently linked up to the Euroscope database, which, like *The Monitor*, provides an analytical interpretation of Community policies and legislation. The information, which comes from Community sources, is analysed, evaluated and presented in the form of 35 individual reports entitled 'EC comments'. They cover the

general business issues, EC trade relations, and industrial policy. Three other supplements, entitled 'Sources of finance', 'Euro audit' and 'Business and investments guides for Eastern Europe', complete these comments.

Euroscope also provides an analysis of European current events produced by Europe Information Service (EIS), a press agency specializing in the production of news bulletins on the activities of the Commission and other Community and European institutions.

The main advantage for the EICs will be to have at their disposal both a database on Community policies which is updated weekly and a list of more than 600 legal acts which are analysed and updated.

C. Documentation

In 1991, the documentation service answered more than 525 questions specifically related to the search for written information sources and requests for documentation from the EICs.

To do this, the Documentation Centre has a bibliographical collection composed of monographs, periodicals and microfiche. It is also linked to all the databases attached to the ECHO and Eurobases' servers, as well as to some internal Commission databases. The four people behind this service manage more than 300 subject-based dossiers which they place at the disposal of the network.

Their task also consists of seeking new sources of information on a daily basis, negotiating with the author services or those in charge of written information with a view to obtaining such information for the EICs, and also determining how these works will be disseminated.

Between January 1991 and January 1992, the Documentation Centre sent some 21 722 works to 210 EICs in response to requests for extra documentation. On its own initiative, it also sent 8 463 works, plus the usual mailings from the EC Publications Office and the Commission's Directorates-General.

Major activities during the period 1991-92

1. Consolidation and opening-up phase

As regards the extension phase of the network, and especially with respect to the EICs in the new German *Länder*, the documentation service successfully brought the necessary measures to a close with the publishing and dissemination services.

Negotiations were conducted with the EC Publications Office and certain Commission departments in order to provide the temporary Sevilla/Expo '92 EIC with basic documentation and updated information throughout the Universal Exposition.

A bibliography containing the main Community publications was prepared for the first three Correspondence Centres set up in 1991. It was updated in early 1992 for the three new Centres and various departments and Directorates-General of the Commission were contacted so that they could send them their own useful publications and documents.

2. Extension of the services offered to the network

The Documentation Centre continued its negotiations with the relevant publishing and dissemination services in order to make available to EICs any written information which might provide answers to the questions submitted by companies.

Talks were held with DG X (Directorate-General for Audiovisual Media, Information, Communication and Culture) with a view to providing EICs with more publications for dissemination, including maps useful at fairs, seminars, colloquia, etc. in which they participate.

In this respect, the Publications Office has demonstrated its willingness to assist the EICs during these events by proposing special agreements with them and offering to send representatives of this service.

The Publications Office has also suggested that it act as a broker for written information and databases managed by EICs.

New agreements were negotiated with the Statistical Office, Eurostat, during the first half of 1992 in order to improve its dissemination policy with respect to the EICs. This policy was modified in 1991 for budgetary reasons.

Thanks to the contacts maintained with the Commission Departments and Directorates-General, the documentation service is regularly consulted on network needs when a new publication or document is published.

3. Other specific duties

An indexed and classified bibliography (Celex classification plus SMEs, financing, tourism and information) of works published by the EICs and their host structures has been available at the Documentation Centre since June 1992. These works were compiled using the workstation in the documentation section and sent to the EICs on diskette. A hard-copy version of the bibliography is also available.

The documentation service concluded an agreement with the SCAD department to send it the works from the EICs and their host structures depending on whether the host structures wish to have their analysis and indexation in the SCAD database.

Finally, two documents prepared by the documentation service were updated. These are *Acronyms/sigles-Acronyms/abbreviations*, the second edition of which was published in November 1991 and was very successful among private associations and organizations, and the *Bibliographie/Bibliography publications DG XXIII*, the third edition of which was published on the same date. There was also great demand for this work, both by non-Community organizations and offices and the Commission's Departments. New, updated versions are planned for the second half of 1992.

2. TRAINING

While DG XXIII has perfected a series of tools aimed at EIC staff, it also provides training by organizing regular sessions in Brussels on Community affairs and the functioning of the network, databases, docu-

mentation, or even specific Community initiatives aimed at providing assistance for SMEs.

Each EIC undertakes, as part of its contract, to provide adequate staff to respond to the demands made on its knowledge and experience in its particular area of activity. The training provided by the central administration complements these skills. The training sessions also give EICs the opportunity to intensify their mutual contacts and increase their knowledge of the actual situation in individual countries.

This training is then passed on within the respective sub-networks (some 60 of them at the time of writing, for a total of more than 800 relay stations). Hence, the EICs themselves served as trainers for regional associations and applicant enterprises, among others. They thus became genuine catalysts for an overall Community strategy, with respect to both their host structure and entrepreneurs.

Within the framework of the goals set by DG XXIII, the definition of a 1991 and 1992 training programme takes account of the preference and wishes of the participants, as expressed in the evaluation questionnaires completed by them during previous training sessions.

Continuing training programmes 1 January 1991 to 30 June 1992

(a) 1991 sessions

basic training for the German EICs in the new *Länder*;

specialized training in sources of financing and taxation (July 1991) and on standards and patents (November 1991);

general training in the use of the new workstation and Thesaurus (15 sessions, organized from June to September 1991);

decentralized training on databases (15 sessions);

training for document researchers (two sessions, in March and October 1991).

(b) 1992 sessions

specialized workshops on Community affairs (session of 48 workshops, in May 1992);

decentralized training on databases, basic course (two sessions);

decentralized training on databases, advanced course (two sessions);

training for document researchers (February 1992).

Other sessions are also planned for the second half of 1992.

1. Specialized training in 'Sources of financing and taxation' and 'Standards and patents'

Apart from pure information, these sessions aimed to use case studies to provide concrete training in the abovementioned topics which resembled actual consultancy, mainly with the assistance of private consultants. At each three-day session, 120 participants had the chance to make a detailed examination of various aspects of the topics on the agenda.

From 1 to 3 July 1991, the experts dealt with, among other things: sources and forms of financing available to SMEs; national and international fiscal issues affecting the financing of SMEs; support mechanisms for joint venture initiatives between SMEs in Central and Eastern Europe and EEC partners (Phare); directives concerning company taxation; and the current state of VAT harmonization and its future implications for SMEs.

From 27 to 29 November 1991, the participants were given the opportunity to analyse, among other things: Community policy on standardization and its importance for the single market; European and national standardization organizations; the interaction between standards and regulations imposed on exporters; standardization and technical regulations in various sectors; the usefulness of patents,

trade marks and intellectual property; and lastly, the procedure for obtaining a patent.

2. Specialized workshops on Community affairs

Following on from the basic training in Community affairs given in 1990, and the specialized training in 'Sources of financing and taxation' and 'Standards and patents' given during 1991, 48 different workshops were set up for which the 100 participating EICs could create their own 'à la carte' menu. Half of the workshops dealt with specific topics (the environment, R&D, calls for tender, extension to third countries), while the other half covered current topics: Maastricht, the Delors II Package, GATT, etc.

Many specialists, Commission officials and outside experts took part in this session.

3. Basic training for the German EICs in the new Länder

From 18 to 22 February 1991, approximately 15 members from German EICs in the new *Länder* benefited from basic training on the European Community aimed at facilitating their integration into the network.

This training covered the following topics: DG XXIII and the EIC Project; how to manage a Euro Info Centre; the European Community; access to Community aid; and, lastly, the major objectives of Community policy.

4. Training in the use of the new workstation and Thesaurus

For three months, from June to September 1991, the EICs were trained for five consecutive days in Brussels – in small groups of 12 or so people – in the use of the new ERIC 4.0 workstation. Seven sessions in French and eight in English served to initiate the participants in both the theoretical and practical aspects of this new tool, which was designed to facilitate the electronic processing and management of dossiers (see Chapter I, Part 3(c)).

5. Decentralized training in databases

These training sessions aim either to improve staff's knowledge in already operational EICs, or to initiate new members in the use of databases (especially the databases of Eurobases – Celex, SCAD, Eclas, Rapid and INFO 92 – or those of ECHO – TED and Sesame) and the work tools (ERIC and EuroKom) placed at their disposal.

Training sessions during the first half of 1991 included:

Dijon (March), mixed session – both basic and advanced – for French EICs and one Belgian EIC;

Wiesbaden (March), basic session, especially for German EICs;

Toledo (April), basic session given in Spanish and French for Spanish EICs;

Padova (May), basic session in Italian and French for Italian EICs;

Maidstone (May), basic session for British EICs;

Viborg (May), basic session for Danish EICs;

Kavala (June), basic session in English for Greek EICs;

Faro (June), basic session in French for Portuguese EICs.

Training sessions during the second half of 1991 included:

Berlin (September), introductory training for EICs in the new German *Länder*, with in-depth explanation of the procedure for using computerized documentation and the principles of telecommunication;

Blagnac (October), advanced session given in French;

Berlin (November), basic session in German for the new *Länder*;

Galway and Cork (November), mini-session for Irish EICs;

Torino (December), basic session in French;

Mülheim (December), basic session in English;

Nijmegen (December), advanced session in English.

Training sessions during the first half of 1992 included:

Iraklion (May), advanced session in English for Greek EICs;

Herning (May), advanced session in English for Danish EICs and one British EIC;

Madrid (June), basic session in Spanish, English and French for Spanish EICs;

Dijon (June), basic session in French for French, Italian and Belgian EICs.

Other sessions were planned for July 1992 in Ponta Delgada and Lisbon, Newcastle and Telford, respectively.

6. Training for document researchers

Since the efficient processing of a question is largely dependent on the consultant's ability to find good information within a very short space of time, and thereby on having access to a correctly managed source of documentation, in early 1991 the central administration set up the first training courses for document researchers.

Two training sessions for EIC staff in charge of documentation were held in March and October 1991 (lasting four days, on the topic of documentation management, including one day spent visiting the documentation service of a Belgian EIC, the Commission's central library, the library of the College of Europe in Bruges and the Commission's Office in Belgium). A slightly altered third session was organized in February 1992 around the working groups (two in French, two in English). These sessions for document researchers were a great success.

3. PROMOTION

With the major qualitative impetus in enterprise policy, Directorate-General XXIII sought to heighten awareness of the policy and consequently launched a massive communications campaign to this end at the close of 1991.

Furthermore, DG XXIII demonstrated its support of SMEs by assisting individual promotional initiatives throughout 1991 (Europanorama in Lyon, the First Forum of the Regions of Europe; 'Centrinfo Entreprise' at the airports of Orly-Ouest and Roissy 2B, an exhibition on SMEs and Europe; the 1991 Young Entrepreneur Prize in Brussels, etc.).

As part of the communications campaign, the Commission called upon an advertising agency to undertake an awareness-creating campaign aimed at target groups for all DG XXIII instruments set up to assist SMEs and to help them prepare better for the realities of the single market.

Various approaches were used: an advertising campaign in the daily and specialized press, a public relations campaign undertaken in cooperation with the EICs in each Member State, a direct mailing to 600 000 SME entrepreneurs in the Community and an information-oriented pilot operation at Brussels airport.

(a) Advertising campaign

A series of publications was selected in each country. The theme chosen was the labyrinth, which was used for two waves of inserts (November-December 1991 and February-March 1992). A description of the three networks (EIC, BC-NET, BCC) created to assist SMEs and the telephone numbers of the national EICs was provided in reply to the question 'If you still find Europe 1992 a maze... Why do you not ask the right people the right questions?'. The message was repeated in February-March 1992 by encouraging the reader to participate actively in the European Week for Business.

The publications chosen as vehicles for the 1991 campaign were the following (by country):

for Belgium: *Knack Magazine, Le Vif l'Express, Trends, Trends/Tendances*

for Denmark: *Børsen, Børsens Nyheds Magasin, Berlingske Tidende*

for Germany: *Capital, Der Spiegel*

for Greece: *Naftemboriki, Kathimerini, Oikonomikos Tachydromos, To Vima*

for Spain: *Cambio 16, Tiempo, Epoca, Actualidad Económica*

for France: *Le Figaro Économie, Les Échos, L'Expansion*

for Ireland: *Management, Business & Finance, Aspect*

for Italy: *L'Espresso, Il Sole/24 Ore, Capital*

for Luxembourg: *Luxemburger Wort, Agefi Luxembourg*

for the Netherlands: *Elsevier, Management Team*

for Portugal: *Expresso, Semanário, Vida Económica, Exame*

for the United Kingdom: *Management Today, The Financial Times, The Times, The Sunday Times, The Economist.*

The second wave of inserts focused more specifically on the European Week for Business. Advertisements appeared in the following newspapers and periodicals concurrently with the massive media programme launched on this occasion:

Belgium: *Belgian Business Industrie F/N, Trends/Tendances, Trends, De Financieël Economische Tijd, L'Echo, Knack, Le Vif l'Express*

Denmark: *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten, Erhvervs-Bladet, Börsen*

Germany: *Capital, Impulse, Impulse/Unternehmerbrief, Handelsblatt, Wirtschaftswoche, Frankfurter Allgemeine, Die Zeit, Die Welt, Süddeutsche Zeitung*

Greece: *Vima (Sunday edition), Express, Oikonomikos Tachydromos, Naftemboriki, Kerdos, Kathimerini*

Spain: *Expansión, Tiempo, Economics, Actualidad Económica, Cinco Días, Cambio 16, El País, Epoca*

France: *L'Usine Nouvelle, Les Échos, L'Expansion, La Tribune de l'Expansion, L'Entreprise, Le Monde économie, Le Figaro Économie*

Ireland: *Business & Finance, The Irish Independent, The Irish Times*

Italy: *Espansione, Il Sole/24 Ore, Capital, Affari & Finanza, L'Espresso*

Luxembourg: *d'Letzeburger Land, Le Républicain Lorrain (Luxembourg edition), Luxemburger Wort*

The Netherlands: *Management Team, Het Financieele Dagblad, Financiën, Economie, Management, Elsevier*

Portugal: *Vida Económica, Semanário Económico, Expresso, Exame, Público, Semanário Económica*

United Kingdom: *Management Today, The Financial Times, The European Times, The Times, The Sunday Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Independent*

Comments from the EICs and the Monitoring Group were taken into account in the finalization of the media plan for the first half of 1992.

The EIC host structures were given the opportunity to reproduce the two advertisements in their own publications, thus ensuring a pickup at regional level and heightening awareness within the local economic context

(b) Public relations campaign

The public relations campaign was undertaken mainly with a view to the European Week for Business so as to mobilize economic decision-makers ahead of time. A subsidiary of the advertising agency collaborated with the EICs within the various Member States and offered its assistance to help the latter create, organize and manage their own local public relations.

The agency concentrated on background articles (in economics or business magazines or in the publications of SME organizations) on

Commission actions to assist SMEs, and press releases announcing the Week following the press conference in Brussels given by Commissioner Cardoso e Cunha. The agency also endeavoured to develop contacts with the regional press, especially the audiovisual press, ensuring coverage of the event by means of interviews with Commission officials and directors of EICs.

(c) Direct mailing

Under the title 'Eurobusiness', an information journal containing success stories of companies which had used one of the instruments made available by DG XXIII was sent to 600 000 entrepreneurs throughout the Community.

Many EICs emphasized the considerable impact of this form of direct marketing, which induced a large number of firms to contact their nearest EIC and participate in the events organized within the framework of European Week for Business.

(d) Information stand at Brussels Airport

An information-oriented pilot action targeting businessmen took place from 6 January to 30 March 1992 in the transit lounge of Brussels airport.

Members of Belgian EICs, coordinated by the EIC in Zaventem and the central administration, 'manned' the stand and disseminated more than 2 000 lists of addresses, more than 4 000 brochures and publications, and the programme of activities and specific leaflets for the European Week for Business.

The Information Officers present on the stand also answered visitors' questions about Community programmes and policies and especially R&D programmes, the free movement of workers and goods, taxation, requests for cooperation, etc.

(e) European Week for Business

From 23 to 27 March 1992, the EIC, BC-NET and BCC networks organized more than 2 000 events (press conferences, video-conferences, conferences, round tables, fairs, seminars, open days, etc.) for entrepreneurs in no less than 400 cities in the Community. These events allowed them to obtain information on all the Community instruments with a view to the 1993 deadline. The network's central administration in Brussels coordinated the programmes by putting Commission officials and experts at the disposal of the organizing networks for their events and meetings with businessmen, and by providing support in the form of promotional and information-oriented materials (videos, posters, brochures, stickers and pins created especially for the event).



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Meeting of the presidents of the host structures of Euro Info Centres[®] in Brussels on 17 March 1992.

Mr Jacques Delors, President of the Commission of the European Communities; on his right, Mr António Cardoso e Cunha, Member of the Commission of the European Communities; to his left, Mr Mira Amaral, Portuguese Minister for Industry and Energy, and Mr Heinrich von Moltke, Director-General of DG XXIII.



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Meeting of the presidents of the host structures of the Euro Info Centres, Brussels, 17 March 1992.

Mr Jacques Delors, President of the Commission.



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Meeting of the presidents of the host structures of the Euro Info Centres, Brussels, 17 March 1992.

The Week received the personal support of the President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, and the entire Commission. Many Commissioners also participated in certain events, including Messrs Cardoso e Cunha, Andriessen, Marin, Pandolfi, Van Miert and Mrs Scrivener.

President Delors officially launched the Week on 17 March 1992 during a meeting in Brussels of the presidents of the host structures of the Euro Info Centres in the presence of Commissioner Cardoso e Cunha and the Portuguese Minister for Industry and Energy, Mr Mira Amaral.

In his speech, Mr Delors emphasized the role of European firms, especially SMEs, in completing the single market. Touching on the post-Maastricht Community, President Delors said that companies have accompanied and often anticipated the accelerated motion being witnessed in Europe. They have done this by opening themselves up to the outside. He stressed that the emergence of a new form of sovereignty would have a greater chance of success if it were

confirmed to a single organized area, rather than scattering its potential about. To do this, he called on companies to become more European and thus to exploit the opportunities for cooperation offered by a frontier-free environment.

As a result of the awareness-creating efforts within the general promotion campaign organized by DG XXIII, the European Week for Business fully achieved the dual goal set for it by its promoters: to promote all the actions and instruments implemented by the Commission for the benefit of business, and to encourage the use of these instruments by companies – especially SMEs.

The geographical distribution of the events within the regions enabled a large number of companies to be reached in areas which are still barely affected by the actions taken by the networks. It also increased the awareness of Community instruments. A number of EICs have seen a considerable increase in the volume of questions from firms since the Week and many BC-NET advisers have seen a significant growth in the number of 'cooperation profiles'. Companies have therefore demonstrated a willingness to make commitments and a need to be kept informed, calling for a follow-up to actions and a deepening of relations thus established. Lastly, the wide range of specializations among the members of the network, which were in line with three of the various companies, made it possible to cover all topics of interest to SMEs in the run-up to 1993.

The combined action of these various instruments, which demonstrated the productivity of the network effect, received wide media coverage: 700 press articles (gathered together in a 'press book' distributed to the EICs at the Annual Conference in Funchal), dozens of radio and TV programmes, 150 press conferences, six video conferences, 250 speeches given by more than 90 Commission officials and experts interspersed with presentations by representatives from other Community institutions, including more than 50 members of the European Parliament.

The sheer scope of the results – more than 60 000 entrepreneurs actually took part in the events – proved that the European Week for

Business was undoubtedly one of the major events ever set up by the Commission for the benefit of firms.

4. FROM BERLIN TO FUNCHAL: TWO ANNUAL CONFERENCES FOR THE EURO INFO CENTRE NETWORK

After Sophia Antipolis in September 1990, Berlin and Funchal hosted all the network leaders in September 1991 and June 1992, respectively.

Berlin was a symbolic choice, both in the context of German unification followed by the entry of the five new *Länder* into the European Community, and the appointment of Berlin as the new Federal capital. The choice of Berlin was also meant to reflect the attention given by the entire network to the eight new EICs opened in Eastern Germany in late 1990 and early 1991.

Funchal was chosen during the Portuguese presidency of the Council in order to emphasize the interest shown by the Commission in the peripheral and ultra-peripheral regions of the Community.

Second Annual Conference in Berlin, concrete results

'A new information policy at the service of SMEs: consolidation and opening-up phase of the Euro Info Centre network' was the theme tackled in Berlin on 20 and 21 September 1991. The conference aimed to examine the future missions of the EICs from a functional point of view.

Four hundred and twenty people, including EIC leaders, representatives from the Commission, the European Parliament, professional associations and the press met at the Palast Hotel in the eastern part of the city. While Mr Heinrich von Moltke, Director-General of DG XXIII, chaired the proceedings, a number of personalities took turns at the rostrum: the European Commissioner in charge of enterprise policy, Mr António Cardoso e Cunha; Mrs Anne-Marie Lizin, Belgian State



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Second Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Berlin, 20 and 21 September 1991.

Centre, Mr António Cardoso e Cunha, Member of the Commission of the European Communities; to his left, Mr Heinrich von Moltke, Director-General of DG XXIII; to his right, Mr Ranieri Bombassei, Director of DG XXIII.

Secretary for Europe 92; Mr Egon Klepsch, then Chairman of the EPP group in the European Parliament; Mrs Birgit Breuel, President of the 'Treuhandanstalt'; Mr Eberhard Diepgen, Regierender Bürgermeister of Berlin; and Mr Andrzej Harasimowicz, Director-General of the Bureau of European Affairs for the Polish Government.

At a time when the network is expanding to include Eastern Europe, the speakers reiterated the situation in this part of the world:

Mrs Breuel, for example, clearly outlined the key role played by the 'Treuhandanstalt', a public holding company created specifically to transform the planned economy of former East Germany into a free-market economy, and, consequently, gradually to privatize the industrial plant of the former government.



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*Second Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Berlin, 20 and 21 September 1991.
Mrs Birgit Breuel, President of the 'Treuhandaanstalt'.*

Mrs Lizin informed the network of the positive results arising from the preferential links between certain Belgian EICs and their new partners in various East European countries, a preliminary step in their eventual recognition as Correspondence Centres in the network.

Mr Klepsch, who reiterated the political context in which the consolidation of the network was taking place (on the eve of the two intergovernmental conferences on the future Treaty of Economic and Monetary Union), outlined the future of the new democracies within a European Economic Area, which, at that time, largely remained to be defined.

Lastly, Mr Harasimowicz stressed the importance of sufficient economic information, which is essential not only to the economic development of a new democracy such as Poland but also to commercial links,



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ANNUELLE DES EIC

Second Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Berlin, 20 and 21 September 1991.

Left, Mr Heinrich von Moltke, Director-General of DG XXIII; right, Mr Haber, Head of the Euro Info Centre project.



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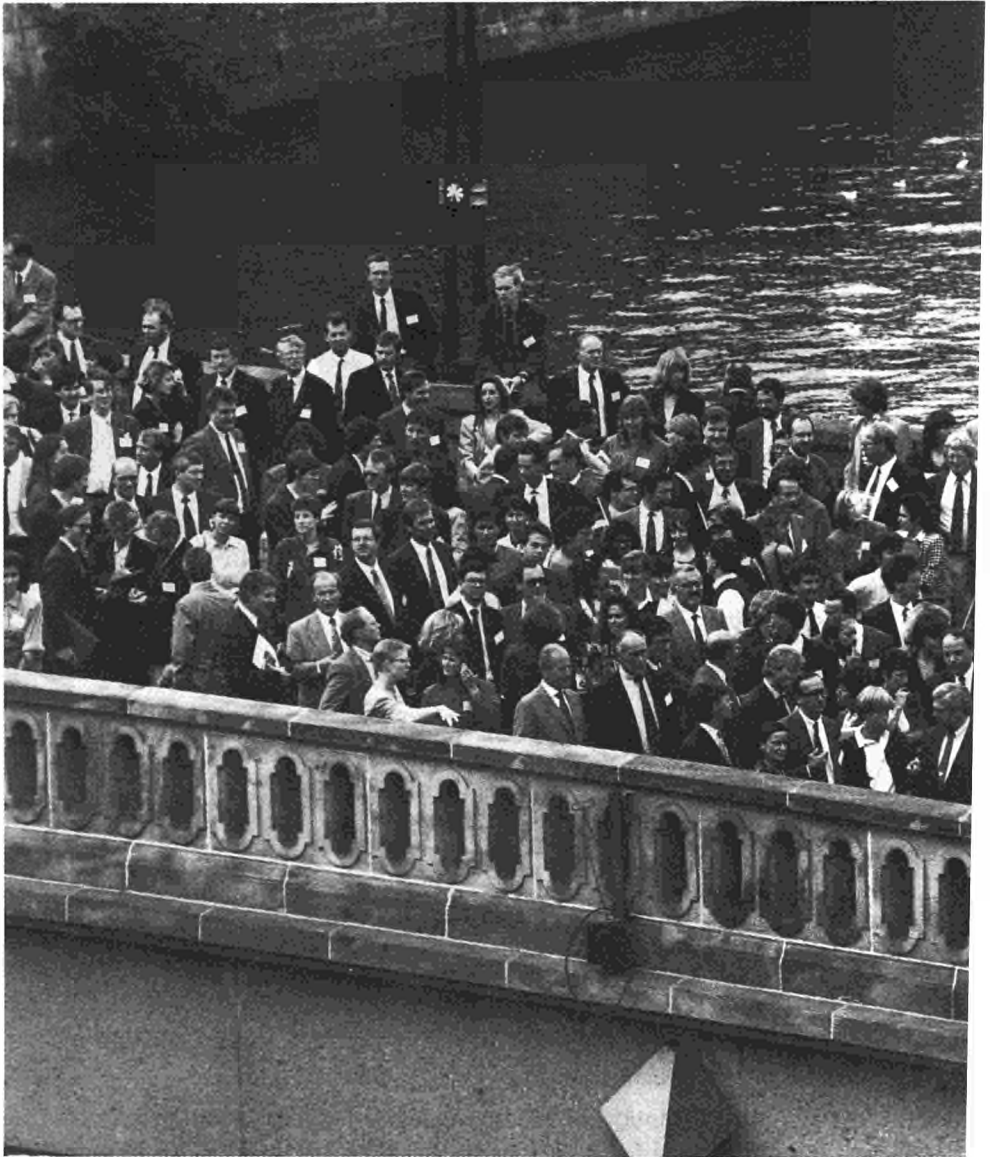
Second Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Berlin, 20 and 21 September 1991.

Right, Mr Heinrich von Moltke, Director-General of DG XXIII; left, Mr Jorg Schlegel, general manager BAO Berlin – Marketing Service GmbH.

which will have to be intensified once the European market has opened.

The afternoon of 21 September was spent debating the topic 'Euro Info Centres and the new dimension of information', in four working groups:

- (i) new information products (the role of EICs as information brokers; new sources of information; dissemination techniques; evaluation techniques);
- (ii) the promotion of qualitative assistance to business enterprises (the missions of the EICs with a view to the year 2000; strategies in the face of the opening-up of markets; the impact of specialization; the role of evaluation);



*Second Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Berlin, 20 and 21 September 1991.
All the participants.*



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- (iii) new techniques for promoting EICs (marketing techniques and motivation of EICs; new prospects within the framework of inter-EIC cooperation; the role of EICs in the strategies of host structures; evaluation of promotional activities);
- (iv) the cost of information (at company level; at the level of other EICs; opportunities for additional financing).

Several guidelines emerged from these discussions leading to concrete actions:

(a) Information products

The main conclusion of the working groups concentrating on information products was that the EICs do not see themselves as either exclusively generalists or exclusively specialists, but rather as information brokers whose purpose is to encourage specialization within the framework of a general information service to companies. All companies must therefore have access to the EIC of their choice.

This specialization, however, also depends on external factors, such as: the regional economic fabric, the amount of resources of the host structure, the state of relations between the host structure and its EIC and so on. It is no longer an end in itself, but rather it should flow naturally from the activity itself of the EIC.

Several actions have been undertaken by the central administration – with respect to information products themselves – in response to desires expressed in Berlin:

Special efforts have been made to disseminate information which is increasingly targeting the real needs of SMEs (redesigning information products; increasing the links with the Directorates-General in order to respond to the growing complexity of the questions);

Self-training courses (see Chapter II, Part 1.B.(e)) have been created to alleviate the rapid turnover of staff in certain EICs and to provide new members with better training in Community affairs;

Within the framework of technical developments (VANS, etc.), in-depth research is planned on complementary sources of information (national, sectoral and professional sources, etc.) available on the market, in order to make them accessible to the entire network if possible. The same measures have been taken for publications by EICs and by their host structures. They both call for stringent quality control of the information produced in this way before it can be disseminated to all the members of the network;

Lastly, research has been conducted among the traditional suppliers of Community information (Publications Office, Statistical Office, specialized DGs, etc.) in order to study, along with them, the opportunity for using new technologies (CD-ROM, optical disks, etc.).

(b) Qualitative assistance to companies

From this point of view, DG XXIII is determined to promote value-added subsidiary services.

1. Among its tangible achievements in 1991, the central administration created operational working groups to mobilize EICs around priority subjects which they then pass on to companies:

To stimulate heightened and more direct competition by firms in Community programmes, preferential relations have been established with certain competent Directorates-General by subject matter.

The creation of a working group on participation by firms in R&D programmes (especially Value) has, for example, enabled the gradual creation of an EIC sub-network specializing in this field. There is a twofold advantage to this system:

- (i) It allows the DGs concerned to set up individual relations with their partners via the EICs on the basis of specific criteria inherent in each programme. By doing this, they avoid having to carry out often costly field and feasibility studies, and they can also streamline their work and save time spent on administrative procedures.

(ii) At the same time, messages and information flows are channelled towards the companies involved through directly concerned intermediate bodies. In this way, the EICs act as a catalyst and control operations at a functional level. By giving substance to the system's credibility through growth in the network effect, this type of relation gives EICs direct responsibility, both as operators and as intermediaries. This factor undoubtedly encourages greater professionalism in their services.

Another working group concentrating on public contracts, a sector directly affected by the activities of SMEs, was created with the help of the central administration. It enables the growing sophistication of the resources employed in this area by some EICs to be evaluated.

A project is currently in preparation which aims to group together in a single database, created and supplied by the central administration and the EICs, information concerning the creation and transfer of business enterprises. A similar initiative is planned with respect to sources of financing.

Lastly, the central administration has encouraged the creation of transnational geographical groups. These include: the Atlantic Arc, Eric-North, medium-sized cities, Eurometropolises, Saar-Lor-Lux, Grand-Est, Spanish/Portuguese frontier areas, etc., i.e. 24 groups at present.

2. The sectoral advance watch is another approach currently being explored by EICs and the central administration.

However, to be of benefit to the network as a whole, operations of this type must be well targeted and defined.

(i) The high degree of specialization of information watch operations could lead to a selection in the services provided by the EICs;

(ii) Also, any initiatives by EICs in this area should aim not to compete with the activity of other types of organization (socio-professional organizations, associations, etc.) which carry

out specific actions *vis-à-vis* Community institutions with very different goals from the EICs' function of providing general information.

The EICs are and must remain a network of generalists, with some of them emerging as having special, well-defined skills, thus giving added value to the companies involved and to the network.

3. The extent of the progress achieved by the network at the functional level is closely linked to the decision by DG XXIII to conduct a systematic analysis of the services provided by the EICs. This has made it possible to evaluate each EIC and provide a survey of its activities. Detailed comments on this trend are given in Chapter II, Part 5.

(c) New techniques for promoting the network

The Second Annual Conference gave several EICs the opportunity to express (a) their desire to organize a group event which would reinforce the network effect and create a better awareness of Commission actions in the area of enterprise policy, and (b) their hopes for more sustained attention from DG XXIII as regards activities to promote the EICs.

The EICs also demonstrated great willingness to participate in the various programmes set up by DG XXIII to benefit enterprises, such as Europartenariat, Interprise, Euromanagement, etc. This is an encouraging development, which has subsequently been greatly expanded.

(d) The price of information

This is clearly a difficult issue, bearing in mind the structural heterogeneity of the Euro Info Centres and that of their host structures.

In the light of these considerations, each EIC should itself define its pricing system, taking account of the following factors:

the application of this type of system should fall within the framework of tasks which are essential to the network, i.e. public service tasks;

the pricing of services should in all cases be limited to relations between EICs and companies, and should not be applied to services which EICs exchange among themselves;

the EICs are encouraged to include in their invoicing policy instruments aimed at encouraging enterprise loyalty, such as the 'discount card' system already used by several EICs;

lastly, the invoicing of value-added services is directly linked to views on the future tasks of the EICs and the services they provide. In other words, the determination of fee-paying services will largely depend on the type of activity which the EICs will themselves offer in the future (follow-up of dossiers; participation by enterprises, via the EICs, in pilot programmes; market research, etc.).

The Third Annual Conference in Funchal: defining a strategy within the context of the internal market

Three hundred people met in Madeira on 12 and 13 June 1992 to discuss the theme 'Information and the internal market' and to follow up and discuss in greater detail the debate begun in Berlin from a more strategy-oriented point of view, while taking account of recent developments.

The accelerated pace of the construction of Europe since Berlin (Treaty of Maastricht, Delors II Package, the European Economic Area) was the driving force behind the identification of new tasks to evaluate better – from this point of view – the vital importance of the 'information' dimension, and to give substance to the role of the networks as vehicles for disseminating Community information. The greater competitiveness which the internal market is likely to bring with it has highlighted the need for an overall approach to the problems of the information given to enterprises: determining objectives, defining content, identifying channels, and evaluating the quality of the information disseminated through the network. These four main lines served as the basis for debate between EIC representatives who once again met in working groups.



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*Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.
The EICs meeting in plenary session.*

Those present at Funchal tackled the topic of information according to three concentric circles: the challenge of information in the context of the 21st century; the information channels set up by the Commission; and information in the everyday work of the EICs.

(a) First dimension: the general context

In analysing the topic of information in a general context, Mr Richard Archer, President of Dun & Bradstreet International, defined the growing impact of information on the daily life of business enterprises: whether at the level of production, management, marketing or planning, each function currently requires increasingly rapid and efficient information tools and communications methods in order to give the enterprise a comparative advantage over its competitors. At the same time, the decision-maker, faced with an ever faster and



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Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.

From left to right, Mr Nelio Mendonça, President of the Regional Legislative Assembly of Madeira; Mr António Cardoso e Cunha, Member of the Commission of the European Communities; Mr Ranieri Bombassei, Director of DG XXIII; Mr Alberto Joao Jardim, President of the Regional Government of Madeira; Mr Jean Pierre Haber, Head of the EIC project.

greater flow of data, should have immediate access to accurate information enabling him or her to make a well-advised choice. Mr Archer stressed that in this context, 'It is the solutions proposed by the EICs, i.e. made-to-measure information, that will enable the enterprise to position itself correctly for the 21st century'.

(b) Second dimension: the Community framework

The question's second dimension, i.e. the Community dimension, was brought up in turn by Commissioner António Cardoso e Cunha and Mr Ranieri Bombassei, Director of DG XXIII, who chaired the conference. Faced with recent developments within the Community, and especially with the consequences of the Danish vote on the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht, the two speakers highlighted the need for the



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Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.

Left, Mr Richard Archer, President of Dun & Bradstreet International; right, M. Jean-Pierre Haber, Head of the EIC project.



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*Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.
Commissioner Cardoso e Cunha giving the welcome speech to the Conference.*



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Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.

Right, Mr Luis Mira Amaral, Portuguese Minister for Industry and Energy; left, Mr Ranieri Bombassei, Director of DG XXIII.

Commission to forge direct, reliable and efficient information mechanisms having a direct and comprehensive effect on the various partners concerned by the internal market dimension. This must be done in order to gain a correct understanding of the messages linked to the practical implementation of both the internal market and economic and monetary union. Faced with the need to extricate itself from centralizing mechanisms, the Community must be prepared to engage in a dialogue with its partners at regional and local level in order to bring together lively economic forces – i.e. small and medium-sized enterprises. This dialogue is especially encouraged by the instruments which DG XXIII has placed at the disposal of enterprises – Euro Info Centres, BC-NET and BCC – all of which allow intermediate bodies to be directly integrated into its actions.

(c) Third dimension: EIC action

Having clarified the general context and the Community framework in this way, Mr Jean-Pierre Haber, Head of the EIC project, set forth a detailed appraisal of the activity of the EICs over the past year, emphasizing new tasks assigned to the Euro Info Centres which move beyond disseminating raw information and answering questions. These tasks are currently firmly anchored in the process of advance information, based on the targeting of different components, depending on the needs of the enterprise; on consulting at the first level within the framework of their task as generalists; on direct assistance to enterprises at the level of participation by enterprises in Community programmes and financing, as well as in calls for tender; and, lastly, on the role of the EICs as operators and leaders in local economic life. While strictly observing the principle of subsidiarity, the EIC acts as a stimulating agent and a guarantor of the competitiveness of European companies.

The participants in the working groups then analysed 'The challenge of information in the daily functioning of the EICs'.

1. The objectives of the information

The group primarily re-examined in greater depth the debate begun in Berlin between generalists and specialists. While a broad consensus once again had the opportunity to make its views known with respect to the first role of the EICs, i.e. answering all questions posed by business, it also emerged that each EIC is increasingly developing areas of special competence, depending on the local economic scene, on the training received by its staff, and on the specializations of the host structure. Consequently, steps should be taken to decide how this qualified information could be made available to all the members via the network effect. It is here that the EIC network could genuinely exploit the individual skills of each of its components and give added value to the network as a whole by means of this cross-fertilization.

As preferential information brokers benefiting from the Community label, the EICs offer enterprises – or are on the verge of offering them – a personalized, immediately operational service which takes account of the specific time and financial constraints under which businesses have to operate. Constantly aware of the socio-economic realities of their region, and attentive to the concerns of enterprises, the EICs emphasized the relations-based capital at their disposal by working as a network. They base their flexibility and efficiency on a direct, non-bureaucratic approach to the dossiers processed. More than 250 000 dossiers were processed in 1992 by the 210 members of the network.

2. The content of the information

The speed and comprehensive nature of the services formed also a major concern of the working groups studying the content of the information provided. The EICs have reached a level of sophistication after two years of operation by the expanded network that allows them to offer an overall service to businesses combining a general information service (monitoring operations) with individualized actions of the 'information watch' type for individual companies or groups of companies. This specialization is also found within the information

The network effect in Funchal



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Meeting of Portuguese EICs; left, C. Santos (Angra do Heroismo, PT-512); J. M. Monteiro da Silva (Ponta-Delgada, PT-510); centre, J. M. Lomelino, Director of ACIF; right, F. Mendonça Pinto (Faro, PT-506); L. M. Campolargo (Coimbra, PT-504).



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Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.

From left to right, G. Busseniers (Antwerp, BE-002); P. Wolfmeyer (Mülheim, DE-101); F. De Rosa and F. Burlizzi (Rome, IT-374). In the background, J. Declerck (Ghent, BE-007).



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From left to right, G. Riesgo Fernandez and M. Collado Fernandez (Oviedo, ES-218); F. Garcia-Nieto Cano (Murcia, ES-217); M. Leon Lozano (Sevilla, ES-203); M. J. Cachorro Sanchez (Murcia, ES-17).



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From left to right, H. Patterson (Liverpool, UK-562); D. Oxlade (Maidstone, UK-563); K. McGoldryck (Sligo, IR-305).

instruments: creation of special software, access to regional or national databases, videotexts, electronic mail, early-warning systems for participation in programmes and calls for tender. This system presupposes a threefold synergy – with the host structures, with other EICs and with the network's central administration in Brussels – and is currently realizing its true potential. Operating within a widely competitive context, the EICs are positioning themselves squarely on the market, while maintaining the character of a public service *vis-à-vis* users.

3. Information channels

As far as channels are concerned, new circuits have appeared over the last few months: either upstream, via more direct and systematic availability to the network by sources available at the host structures; or downstream, with the creation of sub-networks by the EICs themselves. These sub-networks may be either collateral, with the creation of specialized or regional networks among EICs of several Member States (EIC of the 'Atlantic Arc', EICs in rural areas, EICs specializing in R&D, etc.), or may serve as a base for the channelling of information provided by the EIC within its region. Circuits have thus been established little by little, revolving around the more systematic dissemination of Community information and based on a promotional strategy defined by the parent EIC. This second dimension was given special emphasis during the European Week for Business, which, as was mentioned above, allowed regions and enterprises hitherto not covered by the actions of the DG XXIII network to be drawn into its scope. More than 800 relay stations are currently in place throughout the sub-networks.

4. Quality of the information

Lastly, no information system could claim to provide added value without an in-depth analysis of the quality of the information provided. The working groups devoted to this question made the rounds of the various instruments available to appraise the quality of the information provided, especially the answers to questions asked by enterprises. A



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Third Annual Euro Info Centre Conference, Funchal, 12 and 13 June 1992.

Reception at the official residence of the Regional Government of Madeira; front centre, Commissioner António Cardoso e Cunha; on his right, Mr Francisco Costa, President of the Associação Comercial e Industrial do Funchal; on his left, Mr Ranieri Bombassei, Director of DG XXIII and Mr Alberto Joao Jardim, President of the Regional Government of Madeira.

half-yearly assessment of the EICs' activities was established. This aims to comprehend the action of EICs, from a strictly qualitative point of view, by using various parameters (EIC/EIC, EIC/central administration, EIC/SME). Individual instruments include: the capitalization of EICs questions/answers via the creation of an *ad hoc* database; a programme of visits to the various members; the implementation of round tables in the regions to bring together enterprises, EICs and Commission representatives; making reply cards available from EICs concerning the services rendered by EICs which are intended to assist companies.

As a conclusion, the Third Annual Conference provided an opportunity to make the rounds of the different elements linked to the information

challenge on the eve of the third millennium, from both a functional point of view (new processing and dissemination techniques) and from the Community standpoint (the EICs as a natural channel for the dissemination of Community information to enterprises). The wealth and depth of the debate highlighted the progress made so far as well as the work which remains to be done. With all its advantages, both on the technical level and on the human resources level, and with the extremely powerful affirmation of the network effect, the EIC network now appears well armed to face the challenges ahead.

5. THE 'BALANCE AND PERSPECTIVES' GRID AT THE SERVICE OF QUALITY

This service has probably undergone the most significant change over the past 18 months. The explanation for this lies in the key role played by the EICs as vehicles of the enterprise policy, defined by the Commission. In this context, concepts such as 'advance information', 'cooperation', and 'quality' have become key words within the network. In order to promote network quality, the role of evaluation has moved from an analysis of the functioning of the project as a whole (services rendered by the central structure on behalf of EICs; services offered by the EICs to SMEs; functioning of the network) to an appraisal of the work of each EIC and its services on behalf of SMEs.

This analysis was performed on the sectors of information, training, promotion, relations with the network and relations with DG XXIII. It is presented as a summary in the form of a grid, in which each EIC is awarded a score (on a scale ranging from +1 to +3 points and from -1 to -3 points) for each criterion, taking account of efforts made or setbacks suffered in the EIC's various sectors of activity. The total of all the scores gives the overall total, which identifies the features of the EIC.

The first grid was published as an experiment in January 1992. It covered the period of EIC activity extending from April to September

1991 and placed special emphasis on the contractual relationship with DG XXIII. Although difficulties were encountered in making exhaustive measurements of the purely qualitative aspect of the network, some observations could still be made:

The reaction of the EICs appeared positive all round: many of them made an effort to correct past failings (by sending monthly reports more regularly, hiring staff, etc.), thus demonstrating not only that the exercise was beneficial, but that EICs hold particularly great store by their status as network members.

The evaluation also stimulated EICs to submit more detailed information on their activities. This augurs well for a more spontaneous and more direct dialogue between EICs and the central administration.

Lastly, analysing the reports gave a much more accurate picture of the overall activity of EICs and of the growing importance of the network effect.

The second grid appeared in July 1992 and covered the six months of activity extending from 1 October 1991 to 31 March 1992. It aimed primarily to emphasize the quality of the services provided. With the new title 'Balance and perspectives of the activities of Euro Info Centres', a step was taken from merely conducting analysis towards actually ensuring quality. This element is of fundamental importance and will remain a key element in future reports: other instruments will also be developed to appraise the qualities of EICs, to the mutual benefit of the network and the central administration.

The following sources of information have been used so far:

monthly reports of EICs;

annual reports of EICs;

visits to EICs;

reports on regional meetings;

feedback from different service groups in the central administration.

(a) Monthly reports of EICs

In order to reduce the administrative burden of the EICs, the central administration decided to make the reports quarterly instead of monthly.

These reports still constitute the major source of feedback available to the central administration, and are therefore the main reference used when appraising the work of EICs.

The reports have qualitative and quantitative sections. Qualitative information concerns the services provided by EICs, such as answering questions, training and information sessions, reactions from SMEs, contacts with other EICs and organizations, promotional activities, the situation for SMEs in the region, suggestions for improving the project or aspects of the project and so on. Quantitative information includes statistics, especially on the topics and origin of questions put by companies.

Three brief network 'evaluation reports', also based on these monthly reports, were published. They cover the periods January to March 1991, April to June 1991 and July to September 1991. These reports were made available to EICs in order to give them feedback on their monthly input.

(b) Annual reports of EICs

As with the monthly reports, the 210 EICs are contractually obliged to submit annual reports to DG XXIII. These reports are more detailed than the monthly reports and include a financial statement.

(c) Visits to EICs

Although during 1990 several EICs in five countries were visited by the Evaluation Service – the United Kingdom, Greece, France, Italy and Spain – the change in strategy applied to the Evaluation Service (i.e. the switch from network observation to quality assurance) meant that only an extremely limited number of visits could be made during 1991.

Priority was given to a selection of Irish EICs. These visits gave a better overview of the financial resources and infrastructure of Irish EICs and enabled DG XXIII to obtain additional financing for most of them from Community structural Funds.

(d) Reports of meetings between EICs

As seen above, the development of transnational groupings of EICs has been one of the striking trends within the network over the past few months. These international meetings, as well as national and regional meetings, constitute a major added value for the entire network – by means of the feedback sent to the central administration. National meetings were organized in each of the Member States during the period in question, in some cases several times a year. These meetings were often combined with EIC meetings in a given geographical area, such as the meeting of Iberian EICs or EICs in the British Isles.

(e) Feedback from different service groups in the central administration

The different service groups in the central administration are also consulted, so that the impression of the EICs is flushed out by the respective experience of these service groups with their network partners (especially in training, promotion, management and information). In this way, participation in the training sessions, the contribution to initiatives organized by the network and the quality of questions submitted by the EICs to the central administration are subjected to an objective evaluation.

From 1 August 1992, the Evaluation Service will be replaced by a new team called Audit. Audit will maintain the current system of analysing the activities of the EICs, and will add elements which have not yet been taken into account, so as to obtain as comprehensive an image as possible. As was announced at the Third Annual Conference in Funchal, the third report will cover, exceptionally, a nine-month period running from 1 April to 31 December 1992, so as to match the intervals at which reports are published with the system of financial

contributions provided by DG XXIII. Subsequent reports will cover six-month periods, from January to June and July to December, respectively.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that, with a view to taking account of all the concerns inherent in the challenge of the actual implementation of the single market, the central administration has opted to hinge its relations around the network, not so much by resorting to a stringent application of a contract as by maintaining a constant dialogue based on the search for improved operational efficiency. Several instruments were identified in order to stimulate this cooperation: the creation of a call free number for the network's various areas of activity and the central administration; development of the activities of the Monitoring Group; the availability of a hot line to the Information Officers, and so on.

* * *

Having reviewed the progress of the services rendered by the central administration, we shall now analyse those provided, in parallel, by EICs for SMEs.

III – The EICs at the service of enterprises

The heightened professionalism shown by the EICs in parallel with the consolidation of the network as a whole is reflected in the growing complexity of the tasks which they carry out and the steadily increasing number of dossiers processed. This demonstrates satisfactorily that the enterprises are given more and more Community information via the EICs.

This chapter traces the progress made by the network since 1990. It should be stressed that the quantitative data are restricted to 1991.

1. THE PROCESSING OF INFORMATION

(a) The questions/answers of EICs

Since the primary mission of Euro Info Centres is to provide information, there has been an exponential increase in the number of questions from SMEs processed by the 210 EICs – a 43.9% increase in the number of questions recorded in 1990.

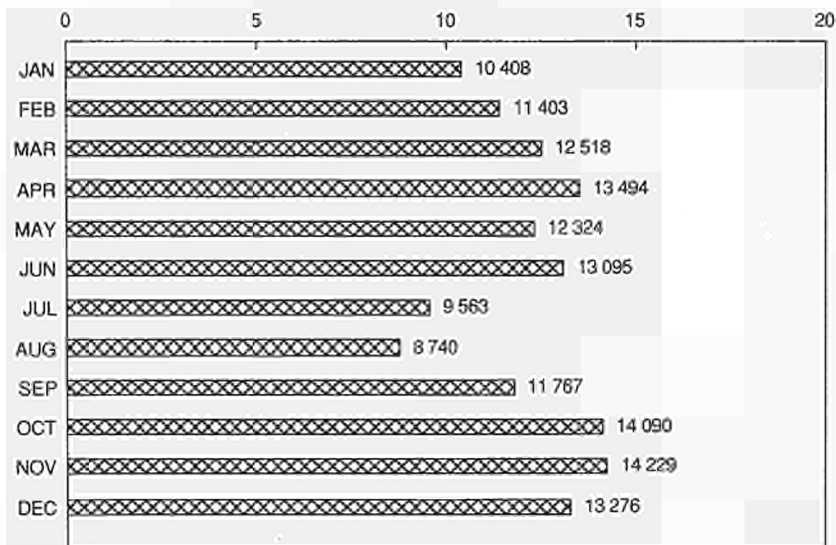
A monthly list of the questions recorded and processed by the EICs can be broken down as shown in Graph 4.

Of course, the figures have to be broken down, on the one hand, according to the number of monthly reports received by the central administration and, on the other hand, depending on the developments established in these reports. Having done this, we obtain the following figures: 34 329 questions processed by an average of 146 EICs per month during the first quarter; 38 913 questions processed by 153 EICs during the second quarter; 30 070 questions processed by 128 EICs for the third quarter; and, finally, 41 595 questions processed

Graph 4

Euro Info Centres – January to December 1991

Total number of questions recorded by EICs
(in thousands)



Total: 144 907 questions recorded

by 148 EICs during the fourth quarter, which had the most intense activity. This makes an average per EIC of 78.2 dossiers processed per month during the first quarter of 1991; 84.6 dossiers per month during the second quarter; 78.3 dossiers per month during the third quarter, and 93.5 dossiers per month during the final quarter of 1991.

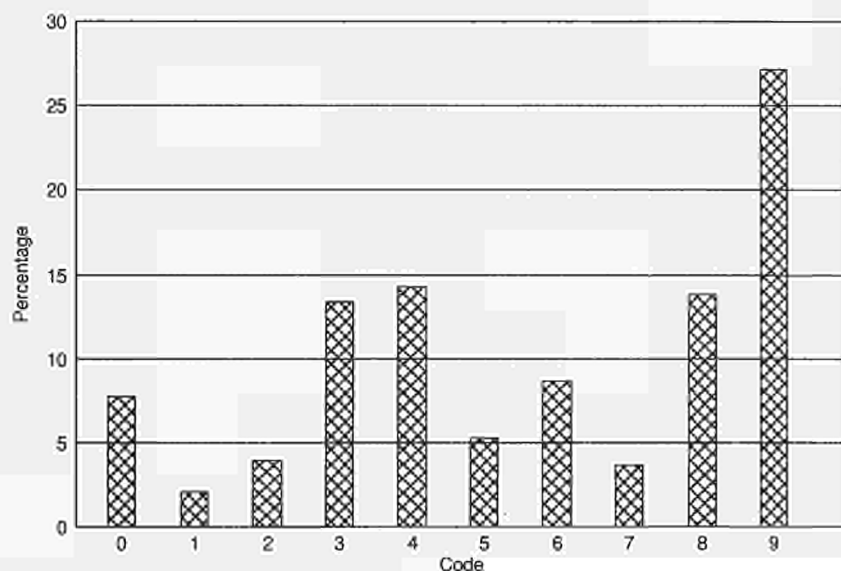
Taking account of the fact that DG XXIII received approximately 70% of all the monthly reports, and that some general information questions were not included by the EICs in their totals of questions submitted to the network, it would be reasonable to assume that an overall total of 250 000 dossiers was processed during 1991.

The following graphs (Graph 5 and Graph 6) present these questions categorized into sectors of activity (NACE) and Community sectors (Celex), in so far as they could be associated with a particular sector or subject.

Graph 5

Euro Info Centres – January to December 1991

Questions by industrial sector (NACE)



Base: 64 824 questions with identified sector

NACE code Sector

0 Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fisheries

1 Energy, water

2 Extraction, processing of non-energy-producing minerals and derived products; chemical industry

3 Metal manufacture; mechanical, electrical, instrument engineering

4 Other manufacturing industries

5 Building, civil engineering

6 Distributive trades, hotels, catering, repairs

7 Transport, communication

8 Banking, finance, insurance, business services, renting

9 Other services

Table 2
NACE sectors

NACE code	Sector	% 1991	% 1990	% 1989
0	Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fisheries	7.7	8.7	2.2
1	Energy, water	2.1	2.1	1.8
2	Extraction, processing of non-energy-producing minerals and derived products; chemical industry	4.0	3.9	3.9
3	Metal manufacture, mechanical electrical, instrument engineering	13.4	16.1	14.4
4	Other manufacturing industries	14.2	14.1	14.4
5	Building, civil engineering	5.3	5.0	5.4
6	Distributive trades, hotels, catering, repairs	8.7	8.2	7.9
7	Transport, communication	3.7	3.1	4.3
8	Banking, finance, insurance, business services, renting	13.8	16.3	18.1
9	Other services	27.2	22.6	27.7
Number of dossiers recorded		64 824	49 369	20 412

Generally speaking, roughly the same constants may be noted as in 1990, as Tables 2 and 3 clearly show. Research and development is still the main pole of interest, as is industrial policy, with a high number of questions on standards and certification. Questions of regional or environmental policy and consumer protection, transport and company law are becoming more frequent. On the other hand, questions concerning external relations, competition, customs union and general matters were relatively less frequent.

Taking all these observations into account, it would appear that many SMEs anticipated their information requirements in the run-up to 1993, which is resulting in an exponential increase as the 1 January deadline approaches.

Finally, with respect to the size of enterprises, the capitalization of 42 939 questions for 1991 submitted by companies of an identified size makes it possible to confirm the dominant role played by very small firms (of one to four employees), as was also the case during

Table 3
Celex sectors

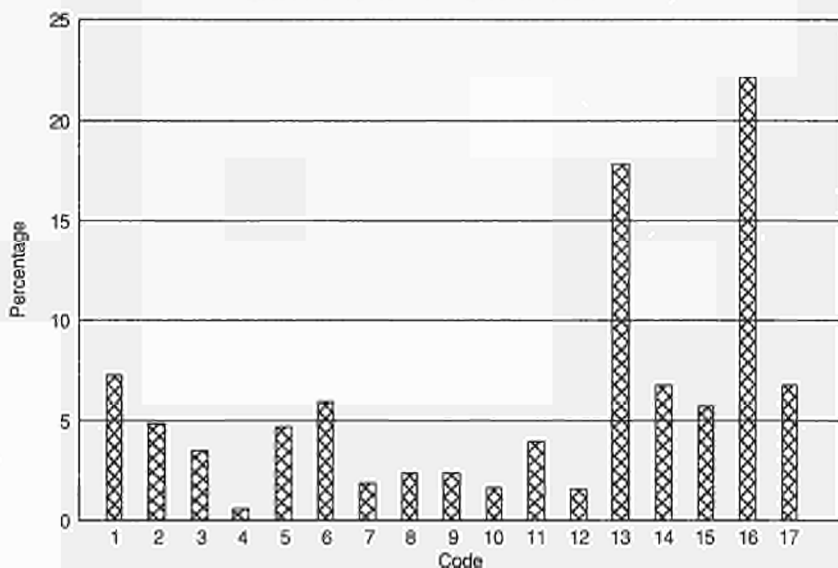
Celex code	Sector	% 1991	% 1990	% 1989
1	General, financial and institutional matters	7.3	8.4	9.4
2	Customs union and free movement of goods	4.9	6.9	4.7
3	Agriculture	3.5	3.6	3.0
4	Fisheries	0.6	0.6	0.4
5	Freedom of movement for workers and social policy	4.7	4.0	4.6
6	Right of establishment and freedom to provide services	5.9	5.6	7.6
7	Transport policy	1.8	1.5	1.4
8	Competition policy	2.4	2.8	3.0
9	Taxation	2.4	2.0	2.2
10	Economic and monetary policy and free movement of capital	1.7	1.5	1.6
11	External relations (including development policy)	3.9	4.7	4.5
12	Energy	1.6	1.5	0.8
13	Industrial policy and internal market	17.8	18.6	16.9
14	Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments	6.8	6.3	5.2
15	Environment, consumers and health protection	5.7	5.1	4.2
16	Research, information, education and statistics	22.1	21.0	25.9
17	Law relating to undertakings	6.8	5.7	4.6
Total number of recorded dossiers		74 545	57 517	10 527

1990, and as indicated by Graph 7 and Table 4. In fact, 25% of all questions were asked by such enterprises, as against 22% in 1990. Medium-sized and large enterprises (the latter represented nearly 10% of the clientele in 1990), most of whom were interested in the Phare programme), tended to ask fewer questions. In actual fact, companies with payrolls ranging from 1 to 50 persons comprise 70% of the total clientele of EICs.

Graph 6

Euro Info Centres – January to December 1991

Questions by Community sector (Celex)



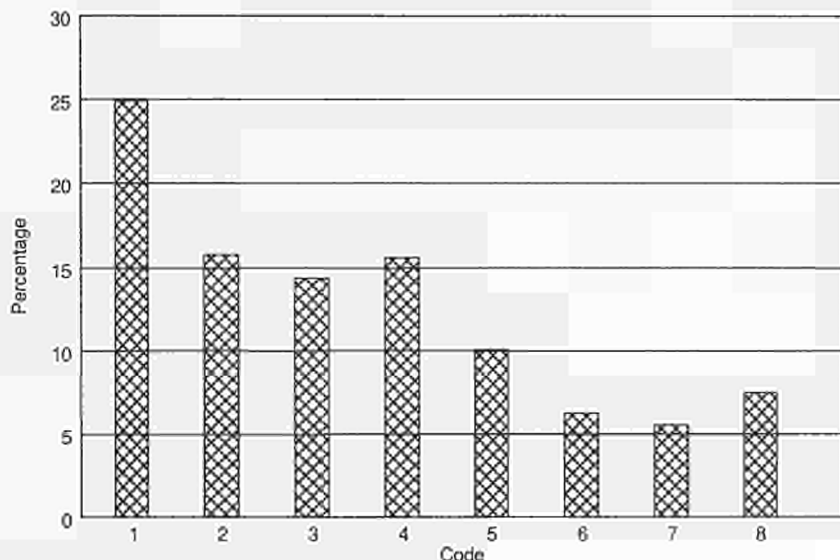
Base: 74 545 questions with identified sector

Celex code	Sector
1	General, financial and institutional matters
2	Customs union and free movement of goods
3	Agriculture
4	Fisheries
5	Freedom of movement for workers and social policy
6	Right of establishment and freedom to provide services
7	Transport policy
8	Competition policy
9	Taxation
10	Economic and monetary policy and free movement of capital
11	External relations (including development policy)
12	Energy
13	Industrial policy and internal market
14	Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments
15	Environment, consumers and health protection
16	Research, information, education and statistics
17	Law relating to undertakings

Graph 7

Euro Info Centres – January to December 1991

Questions by size of enterprise



Base: 42 938 questions with identified size

Code 1	1-4 employees
Code 2	5-9
Code 3	10-19
Code 4	20-49
Code 5	50-99
Code 6	100-199
Code 7	200-499
Code 8	500+

(b) Information tools developed by the EICs

Depending on the needs of the regional socio-economic fabric, and as part of their mission to distribute Community information to SMEs, EICs are creating their own instruments, in the form of printed information, electronic media or even databases.

As at 30 June 1992 there were at least 45 EICs which publish a newsletter or information bulletin.

Table 4
Size of enterprise

Number of employees	% 1991	% 1990	% 1989
1-4	24.9	21.4	19.6
5-9	15.7	14.7	15.0
10-19	14.4	15.3	16.0
20-49	15.6	16.0	16.7
50-99	10.1	9.7	10.4
100-199	6.2	7.6	7.8
200-499	5.5	5.9	8.1
500+	7.5	9.4	6.5
Number of recorded dossiers	42 939	32 493	14 981

Among the extremely numerous productions during 1991 and the first half of 1992, the following can be cited by way of example:

Ghent (BE-007), which published a study on 'Exclusive sales clauses (contracts)' and the corresponding regulations in the 12 Member States on the subject. This study was completed in conjunction with 11 other EICs (one per Member State) and Ghent University's European Institute.

Zaventem (BE-012) published three brochures dealing with the following topics: the trade in agricultural produce within the framework of GATT and the Uruguay Round (*Handel in landbouwprodukten binnen GATT*); Community trade in agricultural products with non-member countries (*EG-Handel in landbouwprodukten met derde landen*); and Community monitoring of concentrations (*Kontrolle op concentraties door de EG*).

Copenhagen (DK-055) published a handbook on the workings of the EEIG in conjunction with Coopers & Lybrand and the Dansk Teknisk Oplysningsjeneste (Danish Technical Information Service). The publication is entitled *Handbog om Europaeiske Firmagrupper* (Handbook on European company groupings).

In 1991, Oviedo (ES-218) edited a reference manual, intended for local governments and development agencies, containing information on subsidies and EC programmes aimed at benefiting SMEs in the Asturias region.

Valencia (ES-223) updated its 1991 *Financial guide for enterprises* and published *100 Answers for more than 300 million citizens* (aspects of the internal market and sectoral analyses).

Orléans (FR-270) brought out a manual entitled *Local administrations and SMEs faced with the opening-up of public sector purchases*, as well as a practical guide for 1992 entitled *Your SME and Europe: Community measures of simplification*.

Milano (IT-351) published 10 new editions belonging to the *Quaderni europei* series. These included *Research, development and technology*, *Handicrafts in the EC*, *Consumer protection in Europe*, *Europe, the prince and the networks*, *Agricultural information in Europe* and *Environmental policy in the EC*.

Bologna (IT-355) brought out a 'ready-to-use' handbook concerning mergers and takeovers of companies belonging to the 'Treuhändanstalt' in the new *Länder* in the eastern part of Germany.

Firenze (IT-362) published *Opportunità e tendenze del turismo comunitario* (Opportunities and trends in Community tourism (1992)), a guide for tourist operators with a view to the single market.

Luxembourg (LU-402) published a *Vademecum marché intérieur 1992* (Vade-mecum on the internal market 1992), a loose-leaf brochure with questions and answers on developments in the sectors which are of interest to SMEs (free movement of workers, freedom of establishment, standardization, taxation, public contracts, etc.).

Diemen (NL-451) updated its publication entitled *De EG-markt voor overheidsopdrachten: omvangrijk en uitdagend* (The EC market for public contracts: comprehensive and challenging).

Helmond (NL-452) created *Eurokompas*, a publication containing a complete series of files relating to various aspects of the 1992 deadline, in association with the other Dutch EICs (Helmond itself produced the file on packaging and labelling).

This EIC also published the document *Europese keuring en certificatie. Het EG-merk* (European approval and certification. The EC label).

Faro (PT-502) published *Turismo Algarvio e estrategia de crescimento* (Tourism in the Algarve and a strategy for growth), a document containing information on the current situation and the philosophy regarding the growth of tourism in the Algarve.

Milano (IT-351) set up Eurolink, an on-line service providing all the available information on proposals for cooperation that the EIC published in *Il Sole/24 Ore*.

Finally, Brescia (IT-353), in conjunction with *Teleartigianato Network* (a grouping of national handicrafts organizations), set up a Community column which is circulated by Videotel, the Italian national telematics network. This column features proposals of Community cooperation as well as other news concerning handicrafts.

(c) EIC specializations

As was already stated above, during the period under consideration, EICs have developed a number of specializations in addition to serving their generalist function. The nature of these specializations depends on the local socio-economic scene, their geopolitical situation, and – last, but not least – their abilities. We have managed to paint a picture of these specializations in R&D by referring to a wide-ranging survey conducted among EICs by the central administration in November 1990. However, the results must be taken within their context in order to account for the fact that, on the one hand, at the time of the survey not all the EICs of the extension phase (1988-89) were yet fully operational and, on the other hand, since 1991 there has been a manifest tendency towards specialization on the part of some EICs.

Overall results of the questionnaire on specialization in R&D

Of the 70% of the EICs which responded to the questionnaire, approximately half give advice on R&D (21% even offer a full service, which includes giving help in filling out forms). The remaining EICs only process general queries.

The main areas of specialization are the following: information technology; industrial technology and materials; the environment; agriculture and the agro-industry.

Of the EICs which responded to the questionnaire, 53 publish some form of information on R&D, 23 publish their information in this area either in the form of general newsletters covering all areas of Community policy, or in the local press, or in magazines published by other organizations.

For 35 of the 143 EICs which responded to the survey, R&D questions accounted for between 5 and 9.9% of all queries received. On the other hand, some of them have been extremely active in this area, which in these cases accounted for as much as 40% of the total number of queries received. These EICs included Mülheim (DE-101), Berlin (DE-108), Bonn (DE-112), Hanover (DE-116), Kiel (DE-118), Saarbrücken (DE-124), Trier (DE-126), Grenoble (FR-281), Nice (FR-283), Copenhagen (DK-055), The Hague (NL-453), Aveiro (PT-503) and Exeter (UK-558). This bears witness to the generally high level of interest with respect to R&D programmes in Germany and reveals the nature of the industrial structure of the country or even the nature of the host structures of German EICs.

Some EICs told of success stories for the Brite/Euram, STEP, Flair, Eclair and Esprit programmes, specific instances of technology transfer in the framework of Sprint, or even successes achieved within the framework of Community structural Funds, such as Valoren. We should also mention several examples of success with Eureka, which is not a Community programme.

This first questionnaire served as the basis for extending the knowledge of the central administration with respect to the specializations of the

members of the network and has resulted in specific initiatives on the part of EICs themselves. Thus, at the start of 1992, on the initiative of the EICs in Mülheim (DE-101) and Milano (IT-351), a small number of EICs suggested mounting a joint initiative on R&D, designated an 'R&D sub-network'. Although administered under their responsibility, this initiative received the support of DG XXIII, which will also be consulted with a view to ensuring that their activities are compatible with those that it undertakes itself in this area. Furthermore, the EICs have demonstrated their desire to contribute to the action of BC-NET technology.

The R&D sub-network met at Funchal on 12 June 1992, on the occasion of the Third Annual Conference, in order to examine in detail the views of its members on the concrete initiatives to be launched, especially pilot activities, such as: a pilot meeting on Craft and feasibility awards, a training session on proposal writing, information days with the participants in R&D programmes, the exchange of information between the EICs involved, etc.

Other specializations

Beyond the specializations concerning R&D, the feedback from the EICs indicated that they are specializing in very different sectors. Here are some examples:

Charleroi (BE-006), in relations with the countries of Eastern Europe, in particular Czechoslovakia;

Köln (DE-119), in foreign economics;

Santiago de Compostela (ES-221), in enterprise creation;

Zaragoza (ES-225), in the fashion and beauty sectors;

Limoges (FR-267), in the wood industry;

Poitiers (FR-275), in engineering and the organization of training in the strategy of European development;

Dublin (IR-301), in marketing;

Torino (IT-375), in financial matters;

Diemen (NL-451) in the human sciences.

These specializations, which are based on the local economic situation, the specialization of the host structure, or even the training of staff at the Euro Info Centre, constitute a major added value for the network as a whole, without reducing the emphasis on the primary, generalist function of EICs.

A major study was launched at the Annual Conference in Funchal, aimed at fine-tuning the specializations and ensuring that they are updated.

(d) Synergy between the suppliers of information

The EICs or their host structures are also developing contacts with various bodies, such as regional development offices, industrial associations, ministries, and university libraries, which are specialized in areas in which the EICs themselves have relatively little experience.

Here are some recent examples:

Bielefeld (DE-110) is negotiating a cooperation agreement with the DIL, the German Institute of Food Technology. Under the terms of this agreement, which it is hoped will be finalized by September 1992, the DIL could answer technical questions concerning the foodstuffs, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics sectors;

Marseille (FR-268) has signed a cooperation agreement with Chimexpro, the regional association of exporters of chemical products. This agreement provides for close collaboration and the exchange of information, but also the implementation of joint projects;

Rouen (FR-277) has concluded an agreement with the general management of Insee, the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies, which entitles the EIC both to act as a regional relay station and to pass on information to the entire EIC network.

2. ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

Within the context of the growing complexity of the economic and legal situation in the Community, the roles of adviser and assistant – functions that EICs are under an obligation to fulfil according to the

contract associating them with DG XXIII – will be in full demand as the deadline of 1 January 1993 approaches.

Activities mentioned by the EICs include: the search for partners for SMEs, the completion of studies, the 'information watch', assistance in drafting international calls for tender, the organization of training sessions, helping SMEs to participate in Community programmes, and legal or administrative assistance.

We have selected a few major examples of these activities for the year 1991:

(a) The search for partners for SMEs

by selective, targeted advertisements for cooperation: Brescia (IT-353);

by direct aid: Kavala (GR-157) and Larissa (GR-158); Barcelona (ES-201), Sevilla (ES-203), Cáceres (ES-210) and Madrid (ES-215); Rouen (FR-277); Napoli (IT-352);

by monitoring SMEs in their meetings with the SMEs in the other Member States: Cáceres (ES-210).

(b) The execution of studies

Volos (GR-162), on the cost of energy in the Member States;

Albacete (ES-206), on legislation concerning milk, wine, veterinary products, etc.;

Dijon (FR-264), on the fisheries sector and drift-net trawlers;

Fort-de-France (FR-265), on the import/export sector;

Milano (IT-365), on cosmetics and the labelling of food products.

(c) The information watch

This kind of activity is more directly associated with the function of information broker, particularly on the markets in Member States:

Kortrijk (BE-009) and Dijon (FR-264): 'watch partner', i.e. follow-up of Community decisions affecting one SME in particular;

Aarhus (DK-051): monitoring (in its own database) any information that might be of use to its clientele;

Bilbao (ES-202): specialized monitoring of calls for tender;

Brescia (IT-353) and Belfast (UK-555): circulation of public calls for tender in the TED database once a week;

Diemen (NL-451): internal market early-warning network, i.e. follow-up of cases in which the Dutch authorities do not accept the entry of imported products.

(d) Assistance in drafting international calls for tender

The following EICs informed the central administration of this: Kortrijk (BE-009), Larissa (GR-158), Napoli (IT-352), Torino (IT-376), Leicester (UK-561).

(e) The organization of training sessions

Aarhus (DK-051) organized meetings for sub-contractors (marketing, quality and cooperation);

Vordingborg (DK-058) organized two training sessions in January 1991 entitled 'Important trade regulations' and 'Public procurement' respectively, intended for companies in the area;

Aachen (DE-107) arranged several practical seminars aimed at SMEs;

Berlin (DE-108) provided training in Community affairs as well as in French and English, intended for SMEs in the new *Länder*;

In September and October 1991, Thessaloniki (GR-153) organized a training programme lasting 150 hours for managers of SMEs. The programme, which was financed by the European Social Fund, comprised a general introduction to the European Community and a practical part with a series of workshops on R&D, the services sector, the legal framework of industrial cooperation and monetary affairs;

Kavala (GR-157) organized a specialized seminar on 'senior management';

Santiago de Compostela (ES-221) hosted a seminar on 'the management of SMEs';

Finally, Rouen (FR-227), together with its host structure, held a series of four seminars in the building sector, in France and the United Kingdom: in four workshops the participants received information on how the construction industry functions in the United Kingdom and a basic course in technical English; two seminars were held in France, the third in the United Kingdom. The last will be held in autumn 1992 in the United Kingdom. The initiative is also to be extended to Belgium.

(f) Helping SMEs to participate in Community programmes

The main EICs specialized in this area are the following: Thessaloniki (GR-153), Volos (GR-162), Madrid (ES-205) and Valladolid (ES-224), Fort-de-France (FR-265) and Napoli (IT-352).

(g) Legal or administrative assistance

Viborg (DK-057) provides a general back-up service on Community procedures on behalf of SMEs;

Cáceres (ES-210) offers legal aid in cross-border cooperation;

Blagnac (FR-259) provided support for the preparation of a dossier on how to submit a tax claim to the directorate-general concerned;

Vicenza (IT-379) has lent its support to the preparation of a procedure for lodging an appeal with the Court of Justice.

3. PROMOTION

This is an essential task which each Euro Info Centre must fulfil in so far as a certain reputation is absolutely essential if the vast majority of companies are to be made aware of the very existence of EICs and thus be informed of the extent of the services they offer.

Of course, the major promotional event was the European Week for Business (23 to 27 March 1992), which was held simultaneously in all the regions of the Community. Virtually all the EICs were involved in this event. Furthermore, a special double issue of *Info Business* was dedicated to describing the proceedings.

Here is a list of just some of the hundreds of events that were staged in this context:

Antwerpen (BE-002) organized a study afternoon on 26 March 1992, dedicated to the topic 'Health and safety at work, the harmonization of European legislation';

Herning (DK-054) organized a meeting on 24 March devoted to the subjects of standardization and certification;

Rostock (DE-134) planned a seminar on 23 March on 'Tourism in the internal market', a sector which suffered a decline in this region owing to very low standards and the previous lack of freedom of movement of persons;

Ioannina (GR-163) set up a round table on 23 March on the subject of 'Enterprises and environmental protection';

Albacete (ES-206) organized four conferences and colloquia on: 'Industrial quality' (23 March); 'One-man companies under the new Spanish and Community law' (24 March); 'The free movement of capital' (25 March); and 'Packaging in Community Europe. The new German regulation and its impact on Spanish exports' (26 March);

Besançon (FR-258) held a conference on 23 March on 'The opening-up of public sector purchases by 1993';

Waterford (IR-306) organized a conference on 27 March together with its host structure, entitled 'The European economic environment; Is Ireland ready to face up to the proposed changes?';

Genova (IT-363) presented speeches on 26 March on 'Community research, industrial innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises: the role of the APRE satellite in Genoa';

Luxembourg (LU-402) published background articles in several newspapers on 'European certification and its implementation in Belgium and Luxembourg', 'The abolition of customs formalities', 'Distribution: the challenge of harmonization', 'Enterprise policy', 'The opening-up of public sector purchases', 'The four freedoms of the internal market', 'The possibilities for financing SMEs', 'Taxation and cross-border cooperation between enterprises', etc.;

Enschede (NL-455) organized an information day on the Craft programme on 25 March;

Aveiro (PT-503) organized a meeting of businesses on 24 March, based on the topic 'The agri-foodstuffs sector – a European outlook; the new reference framework of Community industrial policy and the agri-foodstuffs sector';

Newcastle (UK-553) organized three breakfast briefings, on 25, 26 and 27 March, on 'Training for Europe', 'Drawing profit from Europe' and 'Doing business in a larger Europe'.

Apart from the European Week for Business a great many other initiatives were taken during 1991, including the following:

Tournai (BE-014), together with the Belgian State Secretary for Europe 1992, organized a round table on 'Customs authorities and shipping companies in the run-up to 1993', and touching in particular on the problems of retraining and recycling affecting these professions;

Mülheim (DE-101) organized a seminar in February 1991 on the topic of 'The structural Fund and the former GDR' and another entitled 'Community policies on technology in the 1990s';

European Week for Business.



Information stand at the Ministry of the Flemish Community (Brussels, BE-005) at the Open Day, 24 March 1992.



Press conference in Thessaloniki (GR-153), 23 March 1992.

From left to right, Y. Stavrou (GR-153); J. Jamar (DG XXIII); V. Panoutsos, President of the Association of Industries of Northern Greece; N. Efthimiadis, Vice-President of AING.

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Colloquium on 'SMEs after 1992. What changes?', Evora (PT-505), 27 March 1992.
From left to right, J. Rente, entrepreneur; Dr Ramalho de Almeida, President of IAPMEI;
Mr Alves Monteiro, Secretary of State for Industry; A. Balsa Cebola (PT-505); R. Gomes
(DG XXIII); J. Saude, entrepreneur.



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Exhibition entitled 'Working in Europe', Telford (UK-569), 23 to 27 March 1992.
From left to right, M. Thompson and R. Truslove (Telford, UK-569); B. Roden (DG XXIII);
J. Plested (Shropshire County Council); A. Clarke (Wrekin District Council).

Stuttgart (DE-106) organized a 'European handicrafts week' from 8 to 12 April 1991 together with the chambers of handicrafts in Alsace, Karlsruhe, Freiburg and Meurthe-et-Moselle;

Bremen (DE-113) presented a travelling exhibition in a local bank in Bremerhaven in September 1991. The exhibition was entitled 'Europe is coming'. This event was part of a programme which was conducted in different towns throughout the 'Bundesland' of Bremen, during the first half of 1992, and consisted of a series of talks by members of the EIC and other speakers on the general structure of the internal market, cross-border cooperation, technical innovation, R&D, venture capital and the new opportunities for local companies;

Murcia (ES-217) organized nine bi-monthly seminars from 7 March to 21 June 1991 on the subject 'Murcia on the eve of the internal market in 1992', dealing with such subjects as industry, agriculture, financing and the environment;

Venezia Mestre (IT-378) arranged two seminars in October 1991: on 18 October in Venice, on investment opportunities in the new federal States, and on the Europartenariat in Leipzig (consultants from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Mittelstandsberatung analysed the financial and fiscal incentives for investing in the region); on 22 October in Belluno, 'Technical harmonization and distribution: opportunities and risks of European integration';

Finally, Faro (PT-506) arranged an information day on 21 January 1991 on systems for promoting the modernization of trade. The meetings involved were organized together with the Directorate-General for the Internal Market, the Association of Algarve Traders, and the Caixa Geral de Depósitos, with a view to providing useful information on the presentation of investment projects in the retail and wholesale trades.

4. COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP

This is a task which, in parallel with the consolidation of the network, is tending to develop as a consequence.

In this final chapter, we will analyse the four main forms of cooperation developed within the network:

cooperation between companies

cross-border cooperation

cooperation between EIC relay stations and inter-EIC cooperation

cooperation with third countries and non-member countries.

(a) Cooperation between companies

The EIC, in the service offered to companies in their search for partners, can often propose one or more instruments developed by DG XXIII in this area.

1. BC-Net – business cooperation network

The business cooperation network is a network of some 600 advisers from the public and private sectors, including more than 150 actual EIC members. It offers a confidential computerized system aimed at finding partners in Europe and the rest of the world, thus promoting transnational cooperation between firms. The year 1991 marked the extension of the network to the EFTA countries (Austria, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) and to Central and Eastern Europe. This confirmed the emerging trend toward integration, responding to companies' need to enter into a dialogue with each other and find partners.

2. BCC

The Business Cooperation Centre (BRE – Bureau de rapprochement des entreprises) covers non-confidential opportunities for technical, financial and commercial cooperation. It comprises a network of 320 professionals spread over 47 countries. More than 50 EICs are BCC correspondents.

3. Europartenariat

The period from 1 January 1991 to 30 June 1992 saw the organization of three Europartenariat events, a biennial initiative arranged jointly by

DG XXIII and DG XVI (Regional Policies), in the various regions of the Community (the less well-developed regions – Objective 1 – or regions suffering an industrial decline – Objective 2). On this occasion, and in each case for two days, they welcomed a wide range of firms (either from the same country, from other Member States or from non-member countries) which were in search of potential partners. All the participating enterprises were listed and described in a catalogue.

Porto (PT-501) prepared *Europartenariat-Porto*, which took place on 17 and 18 June 1991. More than 1 000 firms, participated from both Community and EFTA countries, resulting in more than 4 000 cooperation meetings. Approximately 200 Portuguese companies were represented. France, Spain, Italy and Belgium also sent large delegations. A large number of cooperation agreements were concluded.

Europartenariat-Leipzig, which was held on 2 and 3 December 1991, aimed to promote the inclusion of the five new German *Länder* in the future single European market and to enable the companies selected to take part in the event to present existing business opportunities to businessmen from other regions of the Community and neighbouring countries (Central and Eastern Europe and the EFTA countries). The 1 200 visitors and more than 6 000 direct contacts between businessmen brought about some concrete results.

Finally, the EIC in Thessaloniki (GR-153) actively contributed to the success of *Europartenariat-Thessaloniki* (22 and 23 June 1992) which was hailed as such both by the participants and by the competent Commission officials involved. More than 1 300 firms were present, including very large delegations from Romania and Bulgaria. A large number of EIC officials supervised the national delegations at these events.

The next *Europartenariat* events will be held in Bari on 3 and 4 December 1992 (with a major extension to include the entire Mediterranean basin), and in north-eastern France in spring 1993.

4. *Interprise*

Interprise is a partnership action (it stands for 'Initiative to encourage partnerships among industries and services in Europe') aimed at

supporting local, regional and national actions intended to promote direct contacts between businessmen and cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises. These projects must involve, in each case, at least three regions from three different Member States, and at least 10 companies.

Initiatives to which EICs make a direct contribution include:

Namur (BE-001), which is coordinating a project entitled 'Marketing schools', run jointly with the EICs at Saarbrücken (DE-124), Bilbao (ES-202), Châlons-sur-Marne (FR-262) and Leicester (UK-561). As part of this Interprise project, local firms or marketing schools are conducting surveys and studies for local companies.

Poitiers (FR-275) set up an Interprise during the European Week for Business, entitled 'Futurallia '92'. Twelve countries took part in this event, the main aim of which was to promote cooperation between companies from France and from the north of Scotland in the areas of commerce, finance and research.

On 11 and 12 April 1991, Evora (PT-505), together with Cáceres (ES-210), organized a meeting of 350 Spanish and Portuguese SMEs, with the support of the Commission. These entrepreneurs from border regions (Extremadura and Alentejo) discussed problems of economic development and the best way in which to face up jointly to the increase in competition that European integration is bringing about. This meeting took place within the framework of the Interprise programme and aims to ensure better economic cooperation between these two regions.

(b) Cross-border cooperation

Various initiatives undertaken by EICs also bear witness to their concern to continue heightening companies' awareness of this economic necessity, with a view to the abolition of intra-Community frontiers:

On 23 March 1992 – as part of the European Week for Business, Mons (BE-011), together with Tournai (BE-014) and Lille (FR-266), organized

a cross-border conference and debate on the subject of 'European standards: strategic stakes for 1993'.

On 22 May 1991, Aabenraa (DK-053), together with the Flensburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Germany), organized a conference on cross-border cooperation in the Danish-German border area. The conference involved more than 150 participants, representing firms, public bodies, educational and political institutions.

In September 1991, Stuttgart (DE-106) organized two seminars on cross-border cooperation: the first involved cooperation with Italian companies (afterwards the representatives of 25 SMEs went to Italy to define a system of cross-border cooperation); the second concerned opportunities for cross-border cooperation with France.

(c) Cooperation between EIC relay stations and inter-EIC cooperation

Since the network was extended, there has been non-stop development of preferential relations by and between EICs. These relations took concrete form with the constitution of sub-network relay stations, both transnational and cross-border sub-networks on the one hand, and the increase in the number of joint initiatives involving cooperation on the other hand. Another concrete form of cooperation is exemplified by the exchange of personnel, an initiative which will receive the effective support of the central administration as from the second half of 1992.

Relay sub-networks and transnational sub-networks

More than 40% of EICs mention the existence of a sub-network or local relay station. The size of the sub-networks may vary: from 1 to 4 members (30%), from 5 to 10 members (25%), or even more than 10 members (45%). The latter category includes Bruxelles/Confindustria (IT-354), which aims to have its 220 regional organizations serve as relay stations, and Lisbon (PT-509), which is proposing 420 relay stations.

The EICs have the task of disseminating information from DG XXIII within their sub-network, formulating specific information aimed at it, training the members of the sub-network, and, lastly, organizing the sub-network's operations using their own procedures. Some interesting initiatives have been taken by certain EICs to enhance the performance of the sub-network:

Toledo (ES-222) uses Carbon Copy software to transfer information to relay stations;

Brescia (IT-353) uses electronic mail to transmit cooperation advertisements and handicrafts dossiers to relay stations;

Exeter (UK-558) has developed a system of relay stations at training centres and business consultancies to respond better to the questions raised by SMEs.

On the other hand, the contribution made by these relay stations is precious for their contribution in the area of feedback 'in the field'.

Other transnational or cross-border sub-networks have been set up in accordance with criteria of complementarity which might be geopolitical (e.g. Eric-North), geophysical (the Atlantic Arc), regional (Saar-Lor-Lux) or economic (medium-sized cities). These networks exchange information primarily in the areas of subcontracting, partnership and cooperation.

Joint cooperation initiatives

Mention was made of the following events for the period covered by the present report:

Saarbrücken (DE-124), Trier (DE-126) (which set up a cooperation scholarship), Metz (FR-253) and Luxembourg (LU-401 and LU-402) met in February 1991 to discuss how to strengthen cooperation within the Saar-Lor-Lux region.

On 12 and 13 May 1992, Enschede (NL-455), together with Groningen (NL-456), Vordingborg (DK-058), Bremen (DE-113), Osnabrück (DE-128), Rennes (FR-276) and Cleveland City Council organized another

edition of 'Europartners 92', involving a mini-partnership uniting neighbouring, but distinct, regions in four countries of the Community.

Milano (IT-351) joined up with the Welsh Development Agency (host structure of EIC UK-567) to organize a visit by a delegation of about 20 Welsh companies from various industrial sectors to Milan on 28 and 29 April 1992, where they met up with representatives of some 60 Italian firms which were seeking to collaborate with Great Britain. These enterprises had been selected following the publication of a special edition of *// Sole/24 Ore* as well as on the basis of telephone contacts made by the EIC in Milan.

On 8 February 1991, Lisbon (PT-509), with the support of DG XXIII, organized a gathering of Spanish and Portuguese EICs with a view to improving the conditions required for closer cooperation between SMEs in the two countries, particularly in the run-up to the single market.

(d) Cooperation with third countries and non-member countries

Finally, the desire for cooperation is reflected in the context of the future expansion of the European Community and of existing preferential links with certain third countries, mainly leading to cooperation agreements or the establishment of contacts aimed at stimulating investments.

More than 50% of EICs indicated that they have contacts outside the EEC with – in decreasing order of importance – the countries of Eastern Europe, EFTA, the CIS, Latin America and Japan.

Thus, for example:

In June 1991, Copenhagen (DK-055) signed a cooperation agreement with 19 Norwegian regional development centres, covering the whole of Norway. Under the terms of the agreement, the EIC is bound to keep the 19 centres informed about the latest developments in Community policy, rules, directives, etc. and to organize training

sessions for advisers from these centres. Priority will be given to the stimulation and strengthening of cooperation between Norwegian and Community enterprises.

Aveiro (PT-503) proved extremely active during 1991 in establishing relations with Third World countries. This EIC set up a 'partnership of entrepreneurs' to encourage foreign investment and stimulate cooperation between SMEs in Portugal and Pelotas, in southern Brazil. This partnership will take effect as from June 1992.

Finally, in the spring of 1992 Thessaloniki (GR-153) and Ioannina (GR-163) set up satellites in Sofia, Bulgaria, and Argyrokastr, Albania, respectively.

Conclusions

The present report has aimed to highlight the European dimension acquired by the entire Euro Info Centre network during the period extending from January 1991 to 30 June 1992.

During these 18 months, the EICs have demonstrated their desire and ability to adapt to the growing complexity of the socio-economic situation in Europe, which is making increased interaction between the various protagonists indispensable. Such interaction may be achieved primarily via joint initiatives concerning cooperation and partnerships. At the same time, DG XXIII has demonstrated a concern to develop instruments which can meet market requirements, by profiting from the experience gained by Euro Info Centres in the field and by supporting some of their initiatives.

In this context, the network sought to fulfil its mission to the best of its abilities, namely to prepare firms for the 1 January 1993 deadline by taking specific and integrated action aimed at implementing the new dimension of enterprise policy in the field.

ANNEX

Excerpts from the Code of Ethics

1. Euro Info Centres and their relations with SMEs

- 1.1. Euro Info Centres shall endeavour to arouse the interest of small and medium-sized enterprises in Community affairs. They shall inform them of Community legislation affecting them and shall indicate in particular any Community action which concerns them.
- 1.2. EICs shall reply to any request for information from an SME concerning:
 - Community legislation and regulations;
 - incorporation into national law of Community regulations;
 - Community aids and loans;
 - Community programmes.
- 1.3. EICs shall provide active assistance to SMEs
 - to help them complete Community administrative formalities;
 - to prepare a tender or application to participate in a Community project or measure.

- 1.4. EICs shall provide advice to enterprises on:
 - access to Community programmes on financing, training, research, etc.;
 - looking for partners if this falls outside the scope of other networks;
 - analysing the single market.
- 1.5. EICs shall ensure confidentiality if so required.
- 1.6. EICs shall clearly establish their contractual relationship with SMEs.
- 1.7. All missions accepted by EICs shall, within the agreed limits, adhere to the highest possible standards of quality, in other words ensuring the exhaustive, thorough handling of the question and provision of an adequate response to the SME.
- 1.8. EICs may, if they so decide, invoice clients for their services. However, for the moment, they agree to pass on free of charge any information they have received free of charge.

2. EICs and their relations with trade organizations, intermediaries and consultants

- 2.1. EICs shall reply to questions put by trade organizations representing enterprises within the same framework and under the same conditions as for SMEs.
- 2.2. EICs shall reply to requests for information put by private organizations, intermediaries or consultants – particularly members of a network set up by DG XXIII – even if the latter require the information for their clients.
- 2.3. EICs shall freely choose whether or not to reply to questions put by students or universities.

3. EICs and their relations with Correspondence Centres

- 3.1. EICs shall be free to choose whether or not to cooperate with a Correspondence Centre.

4. EICs and their relations with the general public and the press

- 4.1. EICs shall initiate and foster relations with the specialized press.
- 4.2. EICs shall avoid sensationalism and defamation.

5. EICs and their relations with DG XXIII

- 5.1. EICs shall supply to DG XXIII, as often as possible and whenever necessary, information on developments in the situation of enterprises in relation to the services rendered to them by the Commission.
- 5.2. EICs shall make available to DG XXIII non-confidential information from their question and answer files to supply the central database which processes the questions and answers from the EIC network.

6. EICs and their relations with Community institutions (other than DG XXIII)

- 6.1. EICs shall cooperate when their services are requested by Members of the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Council and other Directorates-General of the Commission.

- 6.2. EICs shall refrain, where possible, from contacting Commission officials directly.

7. EICs and their relations with other EICs

- 7.1. EICs shall contribute to the network effect by replying to questions put by other EICs.
- 7.2. EICs shall attempt to organize transnational events jointly with other EICs.
- 7.3. EICs shall inform DG XXIII of their areas of specialization and shall keep it informed of any changes therein.
- 7.4. EICs shall opt for reciprocity agreements with other EICs rather than a system of internal network invoicing.
- 7.5. EICs shall take part in national EIC consultations when these are organized.

8. EICs and their relations with their host structures

- 8.1. EICs shall legitimately seek the support of their host structures with regard to promotional work and logistics.
- 8.2. EICs shall keep their host structures informed of the development of their activities.
- 8.3. EICs and their satellite(s) shall keep each other informed of the development of their activities.

9. EICs and their relations with their sub-networks

- 9.1. EICs may establish relay stations in their regions provided that SMEs benefit directly from these.

- 9.2. EICs shall remain the sole partners of DG XXIII and shall assume all responsibility for the quality of the services provided by the members of their sub-networks.
- 9.3. Only the Commission can grant permission to a member of the sub-network to use the Euro Info Centre logo. The logo shall indicate that the party is a member of an EIC sub-network.

10. EICs and their relations with their own staff

- 10.1. EICs shall constantly seek to enhance the skills of their consultants.
- 10.2. EICs shall ensure that their staff are loyal.
- 10.3. EICs should establish 'consultant fidelity' as far as possible.
- 10.4. EICs shall establish sound, straightforward management procedures as rapidly as possible.

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