



## Citizens, business and the sustainable society

by Margot Wallström, Member of the European Commission

Protecting the environment and achieving sustainability are the most formidable challenges mankind has ever been confronted with. In order to survive in the short term, we have sometimes chosen solutions which make long-term survival difficult. However, a sustainable way of living and working is by no means impossible to achieve. What we need to ensure is that individuals, businesses, governments and other institutions act responsibly in taking care of the future.

### Five steps for a strategy

The European strategy for sustainable development will have to focus on key priority areas as well as to support actions at Member State level. I see five main steps in arriving at this strategy.

Firstly, we should identify the issues. What are the unsustainable trends which limit the potential of future generations? Climate change provides a good example of such trends. But there are other obvious candidates for this list, such as deforestation and the accumulation of toxic substances. And the build-up of public debt rolled over to our children is an economic sustainability issue.

The second step is to define strategic objectives. As far as climate change is concerned, for instance, we have to determine by how much greenhouse gas emissions have to be cut. It is likely that the EU will meet its commitment to stabilise CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2000 as compared to 1990. But overall emissions in the EU are increasing again rather than going down, especially in the transport sector. We are not on a sustainable track yet.

The third step is to identify the areas for action. For example, in what ways can environmental costs and benefits be reflected in the field of taxation or in land-use planning? The focus should be in the first instance on measures where economic and environmental benefits go hand in hand and where costs incurred are minor.

The fourth element of a strategy for sustainable development is to find new, more coherent decision-making mechanisms. The central problem of government today is the lack of coordination between different policy sectors. Sometimes choices between various aims will be unavoidable. But these political choices should be made in a transparent and rational way.

Last but not least, we have to draw on the strong support of citizens for progress in this area.

### How to achieve greater participation?

We have to involve citizens, businesses and NGOs in a dialogue on sustainable development. I am convinced that this is the key to our success. I believe the following factors are crucial to ensuring the necessary participation.

- We need to create a stimulating and concrete vision of what a sustainable society can look like.
- We have to focus on action at local level. National, European and international initiatives in the environmental field have to be made relevant to each and everyone to stimulate action at the local level.
- We have to increase environmental awareness through greater access to environmental information on key issues.
- We also need to facilitate participation through new forms of cooperation and new forms of governance.
- We need to promote good examples and make sure that investment in clean technology and safe products can actually be a business opportunity and not just a cost.
- But maybe first and foremost, we need clear political leadership promoting daring and new ideas on how to achieve sustainable development.

As Albert Einstein once said: 'The world we have created through our way of thinking has serious problems which cannot be solved by continuing to think the way we always have.'



## FROM CYBER-EUROPE TO SME RIGHTS ...

The information society and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remain in the firing line. In keeping with the growth strategy which they adopted in Lisbon on 24 March, European Union (EU) Heads of State or Government welcomed the European Charter for SMEs and endorsed the 'e-Europe' action plan at their summit meeting in Santa Maria da Feira (Portugal) on 19 and 20 June. The action plan calls on the EU, its Member States, businesses and all other actors to ensure the full and timely implementation of the information society by 2002. This involves greater usage of information technologies in economic activities, education, research and public services. A key aim of the action plan, to be realised this year, is to reduce the cost of accessing the Internet through the liberalisation of the telecom network. It also encourages the financing of high-tech SMEs. As regards SMEs in general, the European Council welcomed the recently adopted European Charter for Small Enterprises, which commits the Fifteen to encourage small businesses through the introduction of a regulatory, fiscal and administrative framework in particular. The charter sets out 10 areas for action, including lower start-up and registration costs, more suitable fiscal and financial systems, and better access to technology and e-commerce.

## ... TO THE TAXATION OF SAVINGS INCOME

The European Council endorsed the principles and timetable for the adoption of a directive on the taxation of savings income by the end of 2002 at the latest. The text would cover only income from savings deposited in one EU Member State by citizens resident in another Member State. The directive should ensure that all citizens pay the tax due on all their savings income. To this end, Member States would exchange information on savings income or operate a withholding tax, transferring a part of the tax to the investor's State of residence. During the next stage, all Member States will take part in the exchange of information. Before the directive is definitively adopted, the EU will enter into negotiations with the US, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Andorra and San Marino, to promote the adoption of equivalent measures by them. At the same time the Member States concerned, such as the UK and the Netherlands, undertake to promote the adoption of the same measures in all dependent territories, such as the Channel Islands and Antigua. Work is to continue in parallel on other key elements of the tax package. They include a code of conduct for business taxation, and a directive on the taxation of interests and royalties paid to each other by companies located in different Member States but belonging to the same group.

## ■ Guidelines for the distribution sector

Since 1 June 2000 all new supply and distribution agreements, except those relating to cars, are covered by an EU regulation dating from last December. Existing agreements will come under its purview from 2002. The regulation exempts certain categories of agreements from the ban in principle on arrangements between companies provided for under the EC Treaty. To help these firms find out just where they stand in relation to this regulation, the European Commission adopted on 24 May guidelines covering 'vertical restrictions', such as those which result from agreements between producers and distributors. These guidelines make clear just which types of vertical agreements do not distort competition within the EU – such as those between SMEs, for example. They also show which kinds of vertical agreements benefit from the 30 % market share threshold, below which firms enjoy a great deal of freedom. The guidelines explain the conditions under which European or national competition authorities can withdraw the exemption granted under the regulation. They also specify the methods of defining markets and calculating market share.

The texts of the new regulation and guidelines are available on the Internet ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/anti-trust/legislation/entente3\\_en/html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/anti-trust/legislation/entente3_en/html)).

## ■ Frontier-free training

This year more than 30 000 Europeans living in the European Economic Area (EEA) – the EU plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – will train in an EEA country other than their own, thanks to the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The European Commission gave it the green light on 26 May, and some EUR 59 million (EUR 1 = GBP 0.64 or IEP 0.79) are being made available from the EU budget. Two kinds of training are possible under the Leonardo programme. (1) Those undergoing initial training can spend from three weeks to a year in a firm or a vocational training institution, at the end of which they will receive a 'Europass training' document. This records the periods spent in the different EEA countries, which count towards their diploma or other qualification. (2) Specialists in human resources and occupational guidance can take part in exchanges lasting from one to six weeks. The Leonardo programme is now in its second phase, and runs from 2000 to 2006. Countries that have applied to join the EU can also take part in it from now on.

## ■ Community regime for dual-use goods

As from 29 September, products related to the security of information, including encryption tools, will be able to move freely within the EU, with the exception of encryption analysis products. This is one of the consequences of the adoption by the EU Council of Ministers of a regulation setting up a European regime for the control of exports of dual-use goods, both civil and military. The Council has in effect replaced the existing method of partly harmonised national regimes with a less cumbersome European regulation. It provides for a Community licence, covering exports to 10 central and west European countries, which together account for more than 70 % of the goods in question. The regulation includes a list of goods subject to control, but also covers technology transfer by PC, fax and telephone.

## □ IN BRIEF

**Greece will join the euro zone as from 1 January 2000.** EU Heads of State or Government have made possible Greece's participation in the European single currency. At their meeting in Santa Maria da Feira on 19 June, they confirmed that it met the convergence criteria provided for by the Treaty on European Union. On 1 January 2001, EUR 1 will be equal to GRD 340.750. This is the current central rate of the euro vis-à-vis the drachma.

**Suppliers whose bills have remained unpaid for more than 30 days will soon have the right, throughout the EU, to interest at a rate**

# ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY RESEARCH

## Europe – an area for research

Europe, as the historical cradle of modern science interconnected by a network of universities, research centres, industrial laboratories and innovative SMEs, has one of the richest potentials of grey matter in the world. Each country in it has its scientific traditions, its strengths and its specific features.

Researchers obviously had no need to wait for the Union to become involved in joint projects or take their place in international networks. Since the start of the 1980s, however, the European Union's framework programmes have been the driving force of a new collaborative approach and helped to create a Europe of research. They are based on the priorities which emerged from broad consultation of the political authorities responsible, the scientific world, industrialists, and user representatives. They targeted projects catering for the needs of a changing society and their budget has been increased as a function of the tasks and objectives involved. The aim of these programmes is to promote cooperation between partners in different countries by funding transnational work and promoting coordination between scientific and technological facilities.

This policy means a pooling of data, comparison of results, the completion of multidisciplinary and comparative studies, transfer and protection of new scientific knowledge and know-how, the creation or consolidation of networks, the solution to delicate problems, access to centres of excellence and the most sophisticated equipment. This approach hinges on cooperation and broadens the potential and very dimension of research, and collaboration at European level brings them an undeniable added value.

The Union's framework programmes are also gradually gaining ground as more ambitious instruments. Thanks to agreements with many countries on other continents, researchers there and in Europe have reciprocal access to expertise and centres of excellence.

The Union's support also covers the aspects and challenges situated upstream and downstream of research. Upstream, areas such as training and information are essential instruments for the blossoming of a genuine scientific culture. Downstream, innovation enables research breakthroughs to be converted into tangible benefits for society. This does not mean that these elements are situated on the fringes of the research context. They play a key role in entering the knowledge-based society which is shaping up and in which the Union has a leading role to play.

A real 'European area for research' is thus beginning to take shape on this continent, of which one of the most invaluable assets is 'thought'.

## Catering for the expectations of society

Since 1984, the Union has defined the scale and guidelines of its research drive within 'framework programmes', each lasting five years. The fifth (1999–2002) of these was proposed by the European Commission after broad-based consultation of the players concerned (scientists, industrialists, consumer associations, etc.). This programme was adopted by the Council of Ministers in the European Parliament in December 1998 with a budget of EUR 14.96 billion.

The fifth framework programme is based on two very simple questions: what is the point of research and who does it benefit? While the role of research and technological development is obviously to go into matters in depth and to innovate, it is first and foremost in order to solve real problems and to cater for the expectations of society. This guideline gives rise to two essential objectives, firstly to concentrate on the research themes which correspond to the major scientific and technological changes taking place at the moment and to the social, environmental and economic issues they raise. This implies promoting multidisciplinary research approaches. The very structure of the framework programme, which is divided into seven programmes and mapped out into 23 *targeted key actions*, is designed to respond as efficiently as possible to this approach.

Alongside the key actions, some 30 % of the resources of the fifth framework programme are devoted to fundamental research activities – the development of knowledge and basic technologies for the rapidly emerging sectors of the future – and to support for research facilities. This last aspect is designed to ensure the optimum use of scientific and technical installations (European or national).

The fifth framework programme also devotes particular attention to the SMEs, which are the driving force in the dissemination of innovation and in job creation. A range of assistance is provided for them so that they can take part in transnational research projects.

Through this research policy the Union thus seeks to develop a European area of science and technology equipped with the best competencies, favouring top quality research, the establishment of networks of excellence and transnational cooperation, encouraging the mobility of players and ideas, boosting cooperation between the academic world and the business sector, contributing to build up an environment conducive to innovation, favouring the transfer of technology. These programmes fully respect the principle of subsidiarity and support projects to which the European dimension gives an advantage

## Getting involved in a project supported by the Union

The fifth framework programme is open to research centres, companies, natural persons, etc., provided they are involved in research and established in the 15 Member States and – subject to certain conditions – countries which are not part of the Union. The support is provided following calls for proposals or specific invitations to tender published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Research projects must involve at least two partners established in two different countries. Provided the legal and administrative criteria for eligibility are complied with, the only selection criterion for projects is the quality of the proposals.

## The Joint Research Centre

The JRC, which employs some 2 500 people and is financed primarily by the Union, is part of the European Commission. Its mission is to provide scientific and technical support as a function of the users, in designing, developing, implementing and monitoring European policies. As part of the Commission, the JRC stands as a scientific and technical reference centre for the Union. It plays a part in the preparation of policies and serves the common interest of the Member States while remaining independent of any private or national interests.

JRC research is carried out for the benefit of the citizen and relates in particular to health, the environment, protection and safety (in the area of food, natural risks, waste management, informatics security, etc.).

The eight specialised JRC institutes operate in five countries and have top-level scientific facilities. The Institute for Advanced Materials is located in Petten (Netherlands), the Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements in Geel (Belgium), the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies in Seville (Spain), the Institute for Transuranium Elements in Karlsruhe (Germany), while four institutes are located at Ispra (Italy): the Institute for Systems, Informatics and Safety, the Institute for Consumer Health and Protection, the Institute for Space Applications and the Environment Institute. The JRC pursues its mission in cooperation with many national scientific teams.

The Centre also receives and trains young European researchers.

and an effectiveness which they could not have achieved by national development.

Research is also at the forefront of Community policies in that it was the first to open up to the countries which have applied to join the European Union.

Information on European research

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research>

Keeping abreast of the latest scientific and technological developments, debates on research, European projects ... by consulting RDT Info, the European research magazine

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/rtdinfo.html>

Information on the formalities for taking part in European research projects

[www.cordis.lu/](http://www.cordis.lu/)

Information on European research policy

'Communication' Unit of the Directorate-General for Research at the European Commission.

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## Employment in EU-15, 1999

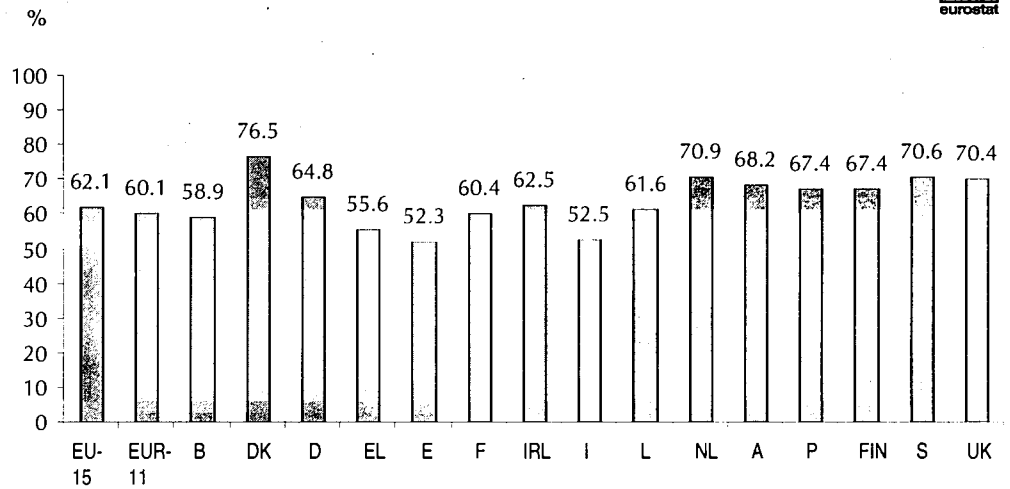
With the employment rate increasing in 1998 in all Member States, 155 million Europeans (aged 15-64) had a job in 1999.

Compared with 1998, this represents a net increase, in those with a job, of 2.8 million (!).

While the average employment rate for EU-15 was 62 %, Denmark had the highest (76.5 %) and Spain the lowest (52.3 %).

Throughout EU-15 the employment rate registered for men increased from 70.8 to 71.6 %, and for women from 51.2 to 52.6 %.

### Employment rate in %, 1999



### Total employment (1 000) for those aged 15-64, 1999 and 1998

|      | EU-15   | EUR-11  | B     | DK    | D      | EL    | E      | F      | IRL   | I      | L   | NL    | A     | P     | FIN   | S     | UK     |
|------|---------|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1999 | 155 272 | 117 436 | 3 987 | 2 708 | 36 089 | 3 967 | 13 773 | 22 755 | 1 593 | 20 618 | 176 | 7 605 | 3 678 | 4 830 | 2 333 | 4 054 | 27 107 |
| 1998 | 152 494 | 115 019 | 3 857 | 2 679 | 35 537 | 3 853 | 13 161 | 22 469 | 1 496 | 20 357 | 171 | 7 402 | 3 626 | 4 764 | 2 179 | 3 946 | 26 883 |

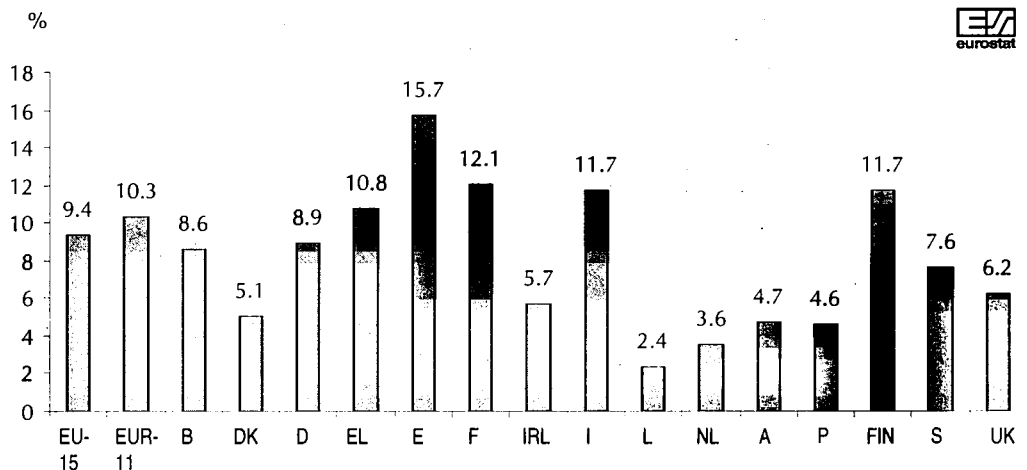
### The EU's unemployment rate was 9.4 % in 1999

In spring 1999, there were 16.2 million unemployed in EU-15 and 13.4 million in the euro zone (EUR-11), giving rates of 9.4 and 10.3 % respectively.

Of those without a job, 37.4 % had been looking for work for less than six months, and 46 % for more than a year.

Just over a fifth (20.7 %) were seeking a first job, with the highest figure - over 50 % - occurring in Italy.

### Unemployment rate in %, 1999



### Unemployment by duration in %, 1999

|                    | EU-15 | EUR-11 | B    | DK   | D    | EL   | E    | F    | IRL  | I    | L    | NL   | A    | P    | FIN  | S    | UK   |
|--------------------|-------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Less than 6 months | 37.4  | 34.9   | 26.5 | 61.5 | 32.8 | 25.2 | 34.0 | 47.1 | 23.2 | 22.8 | 46.2 | 19.3 | 52.4 | 36.2 | 62.9 | 52.9 | 54.3 |
| 6-11 mths          | 16.6  | 16.5   | 13.0 | 18.0 | 15.4 | 19.9 | 19.7 | 14.3 | 20.9 | 15.8 | 21.5 | 37.3 | 16.0 | 22.6 | 14.4 | 17.6 | 15.9 |
| 12 months or more  | 46.0  | 48.6   | 60.5 | 20.5 | 51.7 | 54.9 | 46.3 | 38.7 | 55.9 | 61.4 | 32.3 | 43.5 | 31.7 | 41.2 | 22.7 | 29.5 | 29.8 |

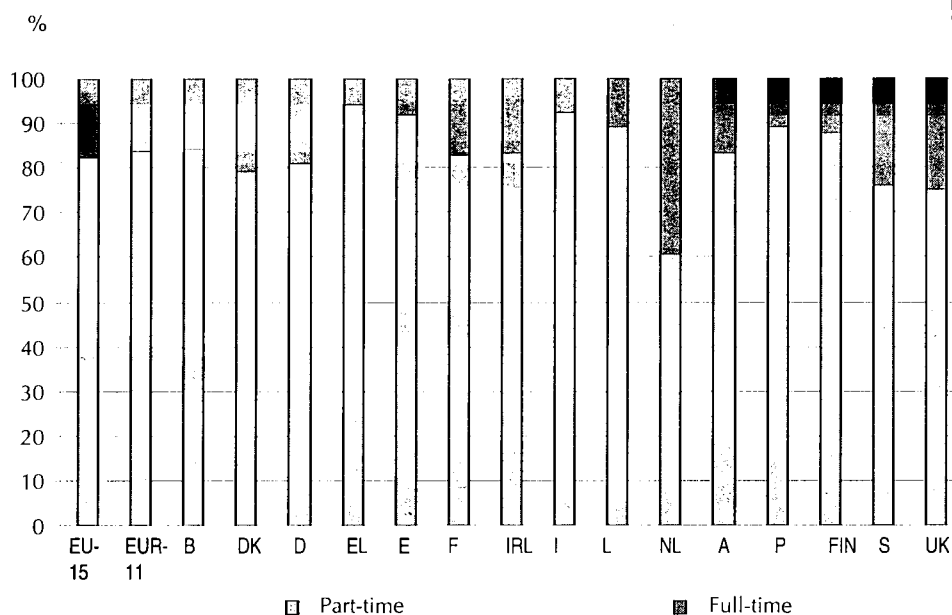
(!) In 1999, there were 247.1 million people aged 15-64, compared with 246.8 million in 1998. This figure does not indicate the number of jobs created in 1999, but the difference between jobs that disappeared and newly created jobs.

**Of the 155 million Europeans in work, 127 million (82 %) were employed full-time and 27.4 million (18 %) part-time.**

Of the 127 million in full-time work, 105.9 million were employees, 19.3 million self-employed persons and 1.8 million family workers.

Among employees, those with a contract of limited duration accounted for 13.2 %, the rate ranging from 3.4 % in Luxembourg to 32.7 % in Spain. For those under 25, the average rate throughout the EU was 39.1 %, with a low of 12.6 % in the United Kingdom and a high of 70.1 % in Spain.

Part-time and full-time employment in %, 1999



Employment contract type for employees in %, 1999

|                                | EU-15 | EUR-11 | B    | DK   | D    | EL   | E    | F    | IRL                 | I    | L    | NL   | A    | P    | FIN  | S    | UK   |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Contract of limited duration   | 13.2  | 14.8   | 10.3 | 10.2 | 13.1 | 13.0 | 32.7 | 14.0 | 9.4 <sup>(*)</sup>  | 9.8  | 3.4  | 12.0 | 7.5  | 18.6 | 18.2 | 13.9 | 6.8  |
| Contract of unlimited duration | 86.8  | 85.2   | 89.7 | 89.8 | 86.9 | 87.0 | 67.3 | 86.0 | 90.6 <sup>(*)</sup> | 90.2 | 96.6 | 88.0 | 92.5 | 81.4 | 81.8 | 86.1 | 93.2 |

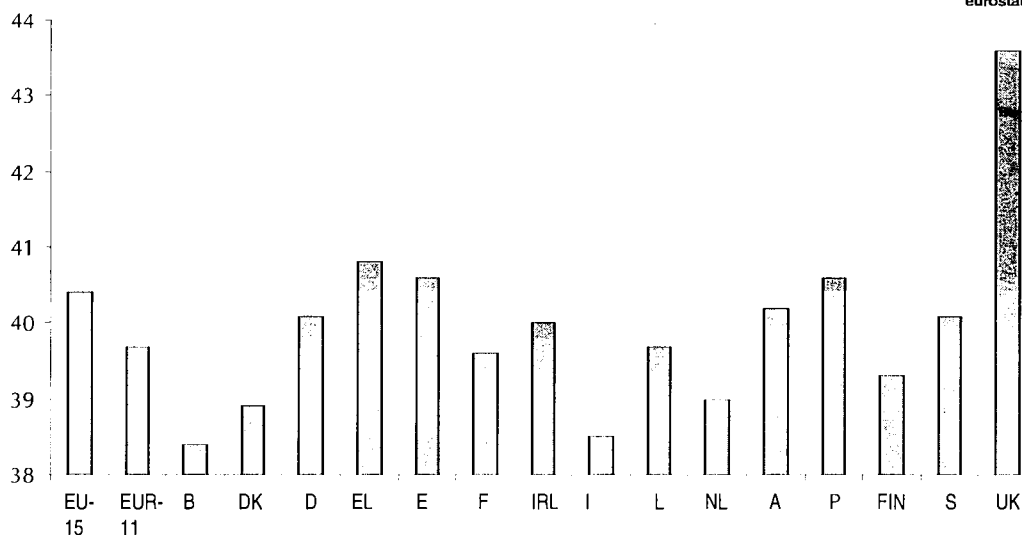
(\*) 1998 data.

**The average working week in EU-15 for full-time employees (men and women) totalled 40.4 hours**

The longest working week was in the United Kingdom (43.6 hours) and the shortest in Belgium (38.4), closely followed by Italy (38.5) and Denmark (38.9).

For part-timers (employees) the average working week was 19.6 hours with Germany having the shortest (17.9), followed by Spain (18.0), the UK (18.2) and Ireland (18.4), and Sweden having the longest (23.9).

Number of hours worked per week for full-time employees, 1999



Usual number of hours worked per week, 1999

|           | EU-15 | EUR-11 | B    | DK   | D    | EL   | E    | F    | IRL  | I    | L    | NL   | A    | P    | FIN  | S    | UK   |
|-----------|-------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Full-time | 40.4  | 39.7   | 38.4 | 38.9 | 40.1 | 40.8 | 40.6 | 39.6 | 40.0 | 38.5 | 39.7 | 39.0 | 40.2 | 40.6 | 39.3 | 40.1 | 43.6 |
| Part-time | 19.6  | 19.9   | 21.7 | 19.6 | 17.9 | 21.3 | 18.0 | 22.9 | 18.4 | 23.2 | 21.1 | 19.0 | 22.1 | 20.1 | 21.2 | 23.9 | 18.2 |

Source: Eurostat - Statistics in focus: Population and social conditions n°5/2000.

equal to the tender (repo) rate of the European Central Bank – 3.5 % at present – plus 7 %. The European Parliament approved definitively on 15 June the directive on late payments in commercial transactions; it had been adopted by the EU Council on 18 May. It has been estimated that late payments are responsible for one in four company bankruptcies.

For the first time, on 4 July, the European Court of Justice imposed a daily fine on an EU Member State, for failing to implement one of its earlier rulings. Greece was ordered to pay EUR 20 000 per day to the EU treasury until such time as it implemented two European directives on waste disposal, particularly toxic and hazardous waste. The Court of Justice had already noted in 1992 that Greece had not kept a proper watch on waste disposal in the Cretan province of Chania. The possibility of imposing daily fines was made possible by the Maastricht Treaty on European Union.

As from 1 March 2001, divorce and separation proceedings involving at least two EU Member States should be simpler, thanks to a regulation adopted by the EU Council on 29 May. The text, which will also apply to marriage annulment and parental responsibility for children, makes it possible to determine the court with which jurisdiction lies in such matters, and facilitates the recognition of judgments throughout the EU without further proceedings. The regulation limits the possibility of asking for a judgment not to be recognised to well-defined cases.

The European Commission decided on 28 June to ban the merger between MCI WorldCom and Sprint, two American telecommunication companies. MCI WorldCom is the leading supplier worldwide of Internet connectivity, and Sprint is one of its main competitors. In the Commission's view the merger in question would have enabled the new company to dictate its terms and conditions on the world market, and more particularly in the EU.

The transmission between one EU Member State and another of documents relating to civil or commercial proceedings should be quicker after 31 May 2001. The EU Council adopted on 29 May a regulation which provides in particular for direct transmission between local bodies, rather than indirect transmission via central authorities; the use of fax and e-mail, and the establishment of certain time limits. The Council also adopted on the same day a convention on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters. Its implementation will improve cooperation between police and judicial authorities.

Insolvency proceedings involving companies having establishments in at least two EU countries will be more transparent and effective as from 31 May 2002, with the entry into force of a regulation the EU Council adopted on 29 May. Under its provisions, the main insolvency proceedings must open in the Member State where the debtor has his main interests. Even when secondary proceedings are opened in another EU country, their effects must be limited to the assets located in that country. The regulation does not apply to banks, insurance companies and investment undertakings, which are subject to special arrangements.

There will be a limit on working hours soon for all workers who have been excluded so far from the EU regulation on this subject. The European Parliament adopted on 17 May – and the EU Council on the following day – the directive which extends the existing general rules to sedentary workers in the transport and fisheries sectors and in coastal activities, as well as to mobile workers on the railways and in offshore activities. The directive guarantees mobile workers in other forms of transport a four-week annual holiday and a limit to their working hours. As for housemen, their working week would be reduced to a maximum of 58 hours at the end of four years, and to 48 hours at the end of nine years.

2001 will be the European Year of Languages. The EU Council took a decision to this effect on 8 June, in agreement with the European Parliament. Some of the Year's key objectives are to raise people's awareness of the EU's linguistic riches and the advantages of know-

ing more than one language, and to encourage the lifelong learning of languages. The budget for the Year has been set at EUR 8 million. Some of the measures will enjoy 100 % Community support, others 50 %. The activities include information and promotional campaigns, with a logo and an Internet website; meetings and events, and surveys and studies.

EU Member States will have to offer protection from racial discrimination and a right to compensation within three years at the outside, under the terms of a directive adopted by the EU Council on 29 June. The directive bans discrimination at the workplace, in employment, education, vocational training and welfare, and as regards social benefits as well as goods and services, including housing. Under the terms of the directive, those presumed guilty of acts of discrimination will have to prove their innocence in civil court. Member States that have not already done so, will have to set up bodies to promote equality of treatment.

Chocolate products will be able to move freely throughout the EU within three years at most – that is, once Member States have in principle transposed a directive which the EU Council adopted on 25 May, in agreement with the European Parliament. The directive authorises the use, in the manufacture of chocolate, of vegetable fats other than cocoa butter up to a limit of 5 % of the weight of the finished product. It contains a full list of the authorised ingredients, as well as the labelling rules which make it possible to distinguish chocolate made from pure cocoa from other kinds of chocolate. The present regulation does not guarantee the free movement of chocolate.

The new MEDIA cinema prize was awarded on 19 May to the Irish director, Damien O'Donnell, for the film *East is east*, made in England. Thanks to the European MEDIA programme, this prize will now be awarded annually to the first film by a director to have been distributed in the largest number of EU Member States. The prize winning film had been released in 10 European countries by the time of the award. The prize money, amounting to EUR 25 000, is meant to help the director produce a second film. The MEDIA programme (1996–2000) supports film development, distribution and promotion. It will be followed by MEDIA+, for the period from 2001 to 2005.

Takeover bids will soon have to follow certain ground rules throughout the EU. The EU Council adopted on 19 June a directive which harmonises national regulations dealing with this subject. The text, which is to be returned to the European Parliament for a second reading, is designed to protect the interests of minority shareholders in particular, in the event of a takeover bid for a listed company. Those launching the bid would be required to make a public offer to all shareholders, while the board of directors of the company which is the object of the bid would be banned in principle from taking defensive measures.

Counterfeiting euros or tampering with genuine ones will be punishable by a prison sentence of at least eight years, according to a framework decision of the EU Council of 29 May. The decision, which Member States in the euro zone will have to implement, adds to the list of offences contained in the 1929 International Convention for the Suppression of Counterfeiting Currency. Euro notes and coins come into circulation on 1 January 2002.

The European Commission approved regional development programmes for 2000–06 in three countries: the UK, Germany and Finland. The UK programmes were approved on 26 June. A total of EUR 4.8 billion has been allocated from the EU budget for four regions, including Cornwall and Merseyside, whose development is lagging behind. The programme for Germany was approved on 24 May; it covers the former East Germany, which is also lagging behind in development. It will receive EUR 20 billion. On 29 June the Commission approved the programmes for regions undergoing economic change in Finland. A total of EUR 500 million has been allocated to these regions.



The European Commission approved on 30 May Austria's regional maps for State aid to companies, for the period 2000–06. The areas in question account for 27.5 % of the country's total population. On 28 June the Commission approved that part of the Portuguese regional aid map which covers the Lisbon-Tagus valley region.

## INITIATIVES

### ● All you wanted to know about the EU ...

Do you know where to look for information on the EU? Try 'Europe Direct'. Set up by the European Commission, it is your first contact point. It will answer questions of a general nature at once, and direct you to experts in the case of more difficult questions. The European Commission announced on 25 May a modernisation programme and an information campaign. To reach Europe Direct by telephone, dial the freephone numbers 0800 58 15 91 in the UK, and 1800 55 31 88 in Ireland. The pilot call centre is under the Commission's control, and must provide it with information on the main demands. A single freephone number will serve all 15 EU countries by the end of the year. You can also ask questions by e-mail: (mail@europa-direct.cec.eu.int), or on the Internet (<http://europa.eu.int/eurodirect>).

The European Commission announced on 26 May the publication of a new guide, *Enforcing your rights in the single European market*. It explains the ways in which this can be done at the local, national and European level. Country fact sheets show the various courses of action open to you, in relation to the type of problem you face and the competent authority. You can obtain these publications, free of cost, by calling Europe Direct or on the Internet (<http://europa.eu.int/citizens>).

### ○ IN BRIEF

The average cost of transferring EUR 100 between two countries in the euro zone is EUR 17.10, while a similar transfer within the same country costs less than one euro. This is one of the findings, made public by the European Commission on 23 May, of a study carried out by an outside agency. The Commission has asked banks in EU Member States to take steps to reduce their charges, failing which it could open infringement proceedings.

The European Commission warned banks and banking associations in Belgium, Ireland, Portugal and Finland on 4 July that it suspected arrangements between them as regards exchange charges for national currencies in the euro zone. The banks and institutions that have been targeted must reply before the beginning of

October. They can be fined if they have entered into price fixing arrangements.

The transposing of EU single market directives into national law has not progressed in recent months. In all, 13 % of them had not been transposed by all EU Member States as of 15 April, according to the single market scoreboard published by the European Commission on 22 May. Four countries – Greece, France, Luxembourg and Portugal – account for 40 % of the delays, while the gap is widening between the leaders – Finland, Spain and Sweden – and the laggards.

People travelling by air in the EU have rights, particularly as regards flight information, overbooking, compensation in the event of an accident and package holidays. A campaign to inform them of these rights was launched by the European Commission on 23 June. It includes the publication of a charter of passenger rights, which should be displayed in EU airports.

Statistics on vocational training in the EU, its impact on integration, the role of firms, and equal opportunities for women and men – these are just some of the subjects covered in the second edition of the handbook *Key statistics on vocational training in the European Union*, published on 26 May. It is the work of Eurostat (the EU's statistical service), the European Commission and the European Centre for Vocational Development and Training. This book can be obtained from the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, L-2985 Luxembourg. It is priced at EUR 20, exclusive of VAT.

## SEEN FROM ABROAD

### ► The Swiss edge closer to the EU

In a referendum held on 21 May, Swiss voters approved seven agreements concluded between Switzerland and the EU. The areas covered range from the free movement of workers to transport and public works contracts. The 'yes' votes accounted for 67.2 % of the total. The agreements should come into force next year, after ratification by the Parliaments of the 15 Member States. However, only 19 % of the electorate would like to see the government open entry negotiations with the EU at once, according to a poll published on 28 May. Some 26 % of those polled envisage such negotiations taking place within the next six years, 13 % within six to eight years and 35 % 'not for the time being'. The government in Bern applied for membership of the European Community in 1992. In December of that same year the voters rejected, by a small majority, membership of the European Economic Area.

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