



EURO-info

Overdue payments: companies in favour of Community initiatives

A public hearing on overdue payments in business transactions was held in Brussels on 7 and 8 July, on the joint initiative of the Commission and the European Parliament.¹

The hearing referred to a consultative document distributed by the Commission services at the beginning of the year². This raised the question of the appropriateness of Community initiatives to redress the current deterioration in time taken by firms to pay bills in the majority of Member States.

Opening the meeting, M. von Moltke, Director General responsible for Enterprise Policy (DG XIII) cited several recent surveys which concurred to confirm a deterioration in payment behaviour in 1992. While many look to SMEs to lead the recovery in growth and employment in the Community, this seems difficult to imagine without a considerable improvement in the payment situation which they are facing. With the intensification of trade and competition in the internal market, there is a risk that companies may try to outdo each other by delaying payments, leading to a general deterioration in the Community.

The hearing enabled the viewpoint of over 30 large federations representing companies in the Community as well as the professions involved in debt collection. This revealed their deep concern about the lengthening in contractually-agreed payment deadlines, and even more with regard to the widespread and increasingly serious problem of overdue payments. It was agreed almost unanimously that these practices are having a negative impact on the operation of the internal market. In addition, several studies have shown a negative correlation between the length of contractual payment deadlines and overdue payments and the size of the creditor company.

While the general economic situation could be blamed, many participants considered that the inequitable power relationships between business partners were also a fundamental reason for this phenomenon.

The vast majority of the organisations confirmed their support for freedom of contract, which enables business partners to fix the payment deadlines applicable to their transactions. However, many of them requested that certain principles be established at Community level to impose a framework on this freedom, in order to combat and sanction abusive practices and late payment.

There was very high demand for setting up simple legal procedures in all Member States, which would act quickly and effectively to settle disputes about payments. In fact, it seems that a link can be established between the speed of payments in certain countries and the effectiveness of the legal procedures for recovery.

(continued on page 2)

¹ Report dated 31 March 1993, EP 203.858

² Working document of the services of the Commission on payment periods in commercial transactions SEC(92)2214 of 18.11.1992 — see Euro-Info 56/93

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IN THIS ISSUE

	Page
● OVERDUE PAYMENTS: firms want Community initiatives	1
● EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND 1993: the catalogue is available	2
● CRAFT TRADES: colloquia and a European conference	4
● SUBCONTRACTING: pilot programme in the field of consumer electronics	5
● SMALL BUSINESS AND COMPETITION: a practical guide	6
● INTERPRISE: to encourage partnerships in Europe	6

(continued from page 1)

In addition to the speeches made during the hearing, the Commission received around one hundred position papers following the publication of the working document.

Referring to a Resolution adopted by the European Parliament in April 1992³, Messrs. Beumer and Speciale, Members of the European Parliament, emphasised the urgency of a Commission initiative on the subject during the hearing, if Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are to be in a position to take part in growth and take advantage of the internal market.

The Economic and Social Committee also suggested Community measures in its initiative opinion dated 30 June, including actions with regard to information and training in companies, and a recommendation from the Commission concerning transactions between private firms and a directive for public procurement.

The Commission will shortly be drawing the conclusions from this consultation exercise, as to possible initiatives to be proposed at Community level.

For further information: Commission of the European Communities
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EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND 1993: the catalogue is available

Since 1988, EUROPARTENARIAT has been stimulating the development of the least-favoured regions, by organising meetings between Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in these regions and potential partners from all over Europe, as well as encouraging cooperation agreements in the commercial, financial or technological fields. The programme invites SMEs from all over Europe and third countries to meet those from a selected less-favoured region. EUROPARTENARIAT works: selection of SMEs in the chosen region, publication of a catalogue, organisation of business contacts (appointments arranged in advance, presence of

³ Resolution A3-0123/93 dated 21.4.93 on subcontracting and participation of SMEs in public procurement in the Community

interpreters), which are arousing a great deal of interest. In Lille, on 17 and 18 June 1993, EUROPARTENARIAT FRANCE NORD-EST enabled more than 11 000 individual meetings between representatives of participating SMEs to be set up to benefit French SMEs. Nearly 50% of the visiting firms were from countries outside the Community. The next EUROPARTENARIAT will take place in Glasgow, Scotland, on 13 and 14 December 1993. In the context of EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND, 335 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises have been selected. An information sheet about each one, and their proposals for cooperation in the business, technical or financial field, have been published in a catalogue, available now in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. This catalogue, which has been widely distributed, to the EURO INFO CENTRES, BC-NET advisers, contacts of the Business Cooperation Centre (BCC), Enterprise and Innovation Centres, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, professional organisations, is distributed by a network of specialised advisers. They are responsible, in particular, for seeking suitable partners and coordinating their participation in EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND. To obtain the catalogue or information, please contact one of the EUROPARTENARIAT advisers on the list:

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CRAFT TRADES: preparatory colloquia for the 2nd European Craft Trades and Small Enterprises Conference

The first European Conference on Craft Trades and Small Enterprises took place in Avignon, on 12 and 13 October 1990. It was intended to develop better understanding of the situation of craft firms and small businesses in the Community, and identify actions aimed at facilitating the integration of craft firms into the internal market. The various recommendations of the Avignon Conference led to the launch of a nine-point action programme in 1992:

- production of a Practical Guide of craft organisations
- production of a Guide to Centres for skill and technology transfer;
- an analysis of requirements for information technologies;
- pilot actions on transnational cooperation;
- analysis of existing programmes of support for cooperation;
- analysis of the situation of small firms and craft trades in border regions;
- pilot actions in favour of training of company bosses;
- survey of training actions to help spouses working in the business;
- pilot training actions in favour of spouses working in the business.

These various actions are currently being carried out.

On 14 June 1993, the Council adopted a Commission proposal for a programme of Community measures to intensify, with immediate effect, a number of priority areas of Community policy for enterprise, in particular SMEs, and to ensure the continuity of this policy in a number of fields. The Commission will be continuing and consolidating its actions in favour of craft trades and very small businesses in order to help them derive full benefit from the opportunities offered by the creation of the internal market. In order to determine the most effective actions to be taken in their favour, the Commission has decided to convene, in **October 1994, in Berlin, a second European Conference on Craft Trades and Small Enterprises.**

This Conference will be preceded by a series of nine preparatory colloquia, each dealing with a priority theme. Here are the dates for the first four colloquia:

- **Training of executives and founders of craft businesses.** In Luxembourg, on 15 and 16 November 1993.
For information: Chambre des Métiers du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg — 2, Circuit de la Foire Internationale — Luxembourg (Kirchberg) — Tel.: +352/4267 671 — Fax: +352/42 67 87
- **Integration of craft businesses into the single market.** In Rome, 9 and 10 December 1993.
For information: Union européenne de l'Artisanat et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises — 4, rue Jacques de Lalaing — 1040 BRUXELLES — tel.: +32/2/230 7599 — Fax: + 32/2/230 7861
- **Innovation and technology transfer in SMEs and craft trades.** In Copenhagen, in January 1994.
For information: TEKNOLOGISK (DTI) — Gregersensevej — P.O. BOX 141 — DK-2630 TAASTRUP — Denmark — Tel.: +45/43 50 70 40

- **Craft trades, partners in the protection of the environment.** In Düsseldorf, on 1 and 2 February 1994.
For information: Handwerkerskammer Düsseldorf — Georg Schulhoff-Platz, 1 — 40221 Düsseldorf — Germany — Tel. +49-211 87 95 0 — Fax: +49-2 11 87 95.110

For further information: Commission of the European Communities
DG XXIII — Craft Trades — Rue de la Loi, 200 (ARLN)
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On 14 June 1993, the Council adopted a Commission proposal (COM(92)470 final — 13.1.1993) for a programme of Community measures to intensify, with immediate effect, a number of priority areas of Community policy for enterprise, in particular SMEs, and to ensure the continuity of this policy in a number of fields (Council Decision 93/479/EEC of 14 June 1993 — OJ of the EC L 161 of 2.7.1993). With a budget of 112.2 million ECUs for the period 1993-1996, this action programme started on 1 July 1993.

For further information: DG XXIII — Enterprise policy — Jocelyne GAUDIN — rue de la Loi, 200 (ARLN) — B-1049 Brussels — Tel.: 295 0976; **Fax: 296 6278 or 296 1241.**

We ask Euro-Info readers to accept our apologies for the printing error in our 60/93 issue (page 3). The fax numbers should have read: 296 6278 or 296 1241.

SUBCONTRACTING: a pilot programme in the field of consumer electronics

In the context of Community measures aimed at remedying the difficulties currently facing the electronics industry, the European Commission launched a pilot project at the end of March, covering the period 1993-1994, aimed at promoting in the European Community the competitiveness of component manufacturers for the consumer electronics industry in Europe.⁴ Developed in close collaboration with MITI (Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry), this pilot programme is co-financed by European and Japanese companies in this sector, and by the European Commission (3 million ECUs, or 40% of the total cost).

A large part of the funding will be destined for encouraging the participation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

The pilot programme, implemented by the Euro-Japanese electronics industry⁵, which will be responsible for the choice of the programme, is intended to improve and develop consultation and communication between suppliers and users of components in the consumer electronics industry. It will take the form of joint (Euro-Japanese) projects, which will have the ultimate goal of improving the performance of Community component suppliers.

The first project planned in the context of the pilot-programme enabled a delegation of European printed circuit sub-contractors to go on a study trip to Japan, in June 1993. After having taken part in a symposium and a trade fair on printed circuits in Tokyo, the participants had 'in-depth tours of nine Japanese companies which supply PCB to the electronics industry. This trip to Japan enabled the delegation from the European Community to learn valuable lessons about how to improve their own competitiveness. The next stage of this project will be for participating companies to host a visit by Japanese experts to the European Community, who will present their conclusions on the actions to be taken in order to improve competitiveness in the whole sector, at a seminar for all the participants.

For further information: Commission of the European Communities
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Thierry PAELINCK van MEERBEECK
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⁴ see Euro-Info 56/93

⁵ European Association of Consumer Electronics Manufacturers and Electronic Industries Association of Japan

SMALL BUSINESS AND COMPETITION: a Practical Guide

Fighting to increase its competitiveness, combining forces to win market share, increasing its distribution network, sharing innovation, or improving the corporate image are all part of the successful operation of an SME, leading it to conclude agreements both in its own country and abroad. The Commission encourages SMEs to reach cooperation agreements with others, but not under just any conditions.

Entrepreneurs fear that their development may be hampered by the existence of large groups, operating across frontiers, with economic power enabling them to impose products, prices, standards and networks, i.e. to control the market, from production to distribution by means of a complex web of agreements. The Commission must ensure that concentration of economic power does not impair the dynamism and development of firms and SMEs, and it looks particularly carefully at establishment and respect of rules governing free competition.

What kind of agreements are desirable? Which ones are banned? What regulation prevents cartels and abuse of a dominant position? What is a notification? How can you make a complaint? These are among the questions answered by the Practical Guide 'SMEs and competition'⁶, published in the series 'Enterprise policy Aimed particularly at SMEs, this book, available in all official languages of the Community, gives details about the basics of competition, and makes it possible to understand the principles, appreciate what is at stake, and use the mechanisms. Practical examples are given, along with tables enabling you to check the legal character of an agreement with another company or concluded by others, and the measures to be taken: information, advice, notification, complaints, legal actions.

For further information: Commission of the European Communities
DG XXIII — Claudia SCHMIDT
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INTERPRISE: to encourage partnership in Europe

The objective of the INTERPRISE programme is to stimulate contacts between small and medium-sized enterprises in the Community. Three regions of three countries of the Community must band together to organise a meeting between firms, in order to set up commercial, technical, or financial cooperation etc. A programme between three regions of the Community may also include one or more regions outside the Community.

Projects supported in the context of INTERPRISE must include at least the following phases: identification and selection of firms in the regions concerned, interested in establishing a cooperation agreement with other participating regions; publication and distribution of a catalogue containing cooperation profiles; organisation of an event, in the context of which direct contacts are set up between participating firms (appointments planned in advance, interpreters present).

The following events are being organised as part of INTERPRISE in November:

INTERPRISE 93 — PAMPLONA

Meetings: 4 and 5 November 1993, in Pamplona (Spain)

Countries concerned: Spain, Ireland, United Kingdom and France

Sector: multiple

Organisers CAMARA OFICIAL DEL COMERCIO E INDUSTRIA DE NAVARRA — Mr. Ignacio Galanena — Yanguas y Miranda, 27 — E-31002 Pamplona — Tel.: (34) 48-24 11 00 — Fax: (34) 48-24 28 94

EUROMARE '93

Meetings: 4-6 November 1993, Port of Piraeus (Greece)

Countries concerned: Greece, United Kingdom, France, Netherlands

Sector: measurement, control and fight against pollution; management, processing and recycling of waste; port logistics.

Organisers EPSILON EUROCONSULTANTS LTD — Mr. Alexis V. Caniaris — 101, ave Syngrou — GR-11745 ATHENS — Tel.:(30)1-92 21 254 — Fax: (30)1-92 21 589

EUROPARTNERS 1993

Meetings: 9 November 1993 in Groningen (Netherlands)

Countries concerned: Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom, Denmark, Belgium and Norway

Sector: multiple

⁶ Commission of the European Communities — 'Enterprise policy' series — Small Business and Competition — A Practical Guide — 55 pp. — 6 ECU — ISBN 92-826-5213-0 — CT-77-92-409-EN-C. Distributed by the Office of Official Publications of the European Communities — L-2985 Luxembourg

Organisers EIC Groningen — Mr. Theun J. Wijbenga — Damsport 1 -P.O. BOX 424 — NL-9700 AK GRONINGEN — Tel.: (31)50 267856 — Fax: (31) 50 261475

EUROTECHNOLOGY 93

Meetings: 10-11 November 1993 in Rome (Italy)

Countries concerned: Italy, Spain, Austria, Benelux, Germany, United Kingdom, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia

Sector: electronics, information technology, computerised databases and telecommunications

Organisers PUBLICA ORGANIZZAZIONE & STRATEGIA — M. Francesco Marcolini — Via Cicerone, 28 — I-00192 ROMA — Italy — Tel.: (39)6-36 00 11 42 — Fax: (39) 6-36 00 11 44

EUROSUBCONTRACTING PARTENARIAT

Meetings: 15-17 November 1993 in Barcelona (Spain)

Countries concerned: Spain, France, Germany

Sector: subcontracting, particularly electrical and electronic engineering, metallurgy and plastics

Organisers CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE CAMARAS DE COMERCIO INDUSTRIA Y NAVEGACION DE ESPANA — Sr. D. Valentin Laiseca — Claudio Coello, 17 — ES-28001 MADRID — Spain — Tel.: (34)1-57 53 400 — Fax: (34)1-43 42 392

INTERTEXTILE LODZ 93

Meetings: 17-20 November 1993 in Lodz (Poland)

Countries concerned: France, Italy, Spain, Poland

Sector: textiles

Organisers CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE ET D'INDUSTRIE DE LYON — Mr. Bernard Falck — 20, rue de la Bourse — F-69289 LYON — Cédex 02 — France -Tel.: (33)72 40 58 58 — Fax: (33) 72 40 57 61

FLANDERS PARTNERSHIP FORUM '93

Meetings: 18-19 November 1993 in Houthalen (Belgium)

Countries concerned: Belgium, France, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Germany

Sector: building materials, heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment, industrial electronics, plastics, packaging, fire prevention and protection, industrial coatings

Organisers GOM Limburg — Mr. J. Swinnen — Kunstlaan, 18 — B-3500 HASSELT — Tel (32)11 22 29 64 — Fax: (32) 11 22 17 06

INTERPRISE '93 NORTHERN IRELAND

Meetings: 21-23 November 1993 in Belfast (Northern Ireland)

Countries concerned: Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, France

Sector: textiles, chemicals, construction, food and drink

Organisers INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND — Mr. Alan Hingston
IDB HOUSE — Mr. Alan Hingston — IDB House — 64, Chichester Street — BELFAST BT1 4JX — Tel.: (44) 232 23 32 33 — Fax: (44) 232 23 13 28

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS EXCHANGES

Meetings: 25-27 November 1993 in Halton (United Kingdom), 17-19 March 1994 in Hainaut (Belgium); 7-9 July 1994 in Bergamo (Italy)

Countries concerned: United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium *Sector:* engineering

Organisers: EUROSNERGY NETWORK — Mrs. V. Schulman — 9, Gatefield Lane — Faversham — KENT ME13 8NX — United Kingdom — Tel.: (44) 795 59 04 11 — Fax: (44) 795 53 88 67

INTERPRISE 'NATURAL FOOD AND DRINKS'

Meetings: 29-30 November 1993 in Thessaloniki (Greece)

Countries concerned: Greece, Netherlands, United Kingdom, France, Bulgaria, Romania

Sector: food and drink

Organisers: Exporters' Association of Northern Greece — Mr. Babis FILADARLIS — - 1, Morihovou Square GR-54625 THESSALONIKI — Tel.: 30/31/545 457 — Fax: 30/31/546 102

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FOR YOUR INFORMATION

● A specialised international event for vehicle equipment: EQUIP'AUTO 93

The EQUIP'AUTO93 trade fair, a specialised event for vehicle equipment, will be held in Paris, from 22 to 28 October 1993, at the Parc des Expositions Paris Nord. The information and documentation stand about Community actions in favour of sub-contracting will be present. EQUIP'AUTO will group together four highly professional trade fairs which will present all the components which go into a vehicle, from design to maintenance: 'EQUIP'AUTO First Equipment' 'EQUIP'AUTO Spares and Accessories' 'EQUIP'AUTO Garage' and the first trade fair in the world devoted to automated production in the car industry 'EQUIP'AUTO Process' 'EQUIP'AUTO First Equipment' will bring together all the leading equipment manufacturers and their suppliers. Not to be missed: all the countries concerned with automobile subcontracting will be present.

● An international market for industrial subcontracting: MIDEST 93

MIDEST, the 23rd International Market for Industrial Subcontracting will be held in Paris from 29 November to 3 December 1993, at the Parc d'Expositions Paris Nord. For the first time, it will host a large stand providing information and documentation about Community actions in favour of subcontracting.

Visitors to MIDEST 93 will be able to use the 'Subcontracting crossroads' the 'Buyer's City' 'Business Points' and 'Interactive Information Terminals' In addition, a new area will be devoted to the professions of industrial design and development, 'Engineering, design and research' which will show visitors the best work by engineering design consultancies, technology transfer and applied research centres, quality management and certification companies, and the work of professionals in design or industrial protection.

For further information: DG XXIII — Subcontracting Secretariat
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Tel.: 295 6795 — Fax: 296 6048

● Panorama of EC Industry 93

A complete analysis of the current situation and outlook for manufacturing and service industries in the European Community

The European Commission (DG III — Industry) has just published the 1993 edition of the PANORAMA OF EC INDUSTRY. It is intended for those who need information about the current situation and outlook for manufacturing and service industries in the European Community. The Panorama contains a series of monographs, which adopt an overall approach for a certain number of cross-sectoral subjects (including: the leading groups of companies worldwide); cross-border mergers and acquisitions in the EC; Direct West European inward and outward investment; Wholesaling and retailing; Cooperation between Small Firms within the EC etc.). The core of the book — the sectoral monographs — provide a micro-economic study of industry and services in the EC, outlining the main trends in production, employment, trade and structural changes (with statistical data and detailed forecasts).

The PANORAMA 93 is available in French, English, German, Italian and Spanish from all agents for official publications of the European Communities.

Luxembourg: Office of Official Publications of the European Communities — 1993 — 1254 p. — ISBN 92-826-5429-X — Price in Luxembourg, excluding VAT: 125 ECU.

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