

A memorandum to strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs in the European Community

On 30 September 1993, the Belgian Presidency¹ of the Council of the European Communities made public the main lines of a memorandum about strengthening the competitiveness of the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) of the Community in the Internal Market. This memorandum, accompanied by 38 practical recommendations, will be submitted on 11 November 1993 to the 'Internal Market' Council, which will be devoting part of its session to the Community's SMEs, for the first time. The purpose of the memorandum is to enable SMEs, which are the main source of increasing employment, to increase their competitiveness, deal with structural change, and derive maximum benefit from the internal market.

With a view to this discussion, which could lead to a Council Resolution being taken, the document suggests that the Council and the Commission should set up an integrated strategy which will improve the synergy between the Community policy in favour of SMEs, and national and regional policies. In the same context, the memorandum proposes that the Community should introduce more systematic consultation prior to action between the European Commission and the organisations representing SMEs, at all stages of the decision-making process, and involve these organisations directly in the social dialogue foreseen in the Maastricht Treaty.

The memorandum also suggests setting up further accompanying measures to solve structural problems facing SMEs: reducing administrative formalities, increasing access to capital markets for SMEs, and meeting their increasing need for information about the opportunities of the internal market, in particular with regard to subcontracting, research, public procurement and support for local and regional development of SMEs. In addition to a strategy aimed at improving the chances for survival and development of SMEs, the memorandum recommends that the Council and the Commission should increase the capacity of SMEs to finance their own development, through fiscal measures at Member State level, and set up at Community level a ceiling on the rate of taxation for profits retained and reinvested in the business.

In order to preserve the wealth of diversity in the world of SMEs, certain 'customised' measures are also planned. For subcontractors, the memorandum emphasises the importance of effective spreading of the opportunities on the Community subcontracting market. It also recommends setting up codes of practice for main contractors, and informing subcontractors of the regulatory provisions applicable in the various Member States, in particular in terms of time taken to pay bills.

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¹ Following on from Denmark, Belgium holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Communities during the second half of 1993. In 1994, Greece will hold the Presidency in the first six months, and Germany will follow in the second half of the year.

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Craft businesses and micro-businesses are also among the major concerns of the Belgian Presidency. It supports the action of the Commission in preparing the second European Crafts Conference (Berlin, 1994). Finally, in the context of the Fourth Framework Programme of Research and Technological Development, the Belgian Presidency is stressing the importance to be accorded to technology SMEs (better access to Community research programmes).

Far from questioning the achievements of the work carried out at Community level since 1986, the Belgian Presidency is confirming the main lines of Community policy in favour of SMEs, and requesting that certain activities which are regarded as priorities should be extended, via concerted action between the Community and the Member States. The Commission is pleased that, in parallel with the implementation of the Council decision of 14 June 1993²) which sets out a clear and coherent framework for the work over the next three years, this memorandum from the Belgian Presidency will enable a process of reflection to take place about ways of extending this policy, to deal with the challenges facing SMEs every day.

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RESEARCH: encouraging participation by SMEs in Community research and technological development programmes

When facing technological change, SMEs are confronted with specific problems, and have to seek ways of improving their competitiveness, in particular through cooperation and technology transfer. For several years, the Community has been endeavouring to respond to these needs through measures aimed at facilitating the involvement of SMEs in its research and technological development (RTD).

² See EURO-INFO 61/93 — July/August 1993 — Council Decision 93/479/EEC of 14 June 1993 — OJ of the EC — L 161 of 2.7.1993

Various actions, covering the various stages of the innovation process have been set up to help SMEs:

TO INVOLVE THEM IN RTD PROGRAMMES

● **BRITE-EURAM FEASIBILITY GRANTS:** financial contribution to the costs connected with the preparation of projects. Subsidies can be as high as 75% of the costs (maximum 30 000 ECUs) for research work to establish the feasibility of new equipment, processes or concepts.

For further information: DG XII Science, Research and Development — Isi SARAGOSSI — rue de la Loi 200 — B-1049 Brussels — Tel.: 32.2/295 5517 — Fax: +32/2/295 8046

● **EUROMANAGEMENT** — RTD Audits: this pilot action enabled a representative sample of SMEs eligible to take part in Community research programmes to be identified, and helped in submitting proposals. The EUROMANAGEMENT audit, lasting 5 days within the firm, was 50% financed by the Commission. This pilot action will be renewed.

For further information: DG XXIII — Enterprise policy — Philippe POGGIOLI — rue de la Loi, 200 — B-1049 BRUSSELS — Tel.: +32.2/296 0940 — Fax: +32.2/295 2154

● **MINT (Managing the integration of new technology):** managed in a decentralised way by national or regional bodies, the MINT activity, which is part of the SPRINT programme, encourages SMEs to take up new technologies, with the help of consultants specialising in managing innovation.

For further information: DG XIII — Robin MIEGE — Bâtiment Jean Monnet — rue Alcide De Gasperi — L-2920 Luxembourg — Tel.: +352/4301 4180 — Fax: +352/4301 2165.

● **EURO-INFO CENTRES:** the 210 EURO INFO CENTRES throughout the Community are relay points for information and guidance close to businesses. Their role in disseminating information about Community research is constantly growing.

For further information: EURO INFO CENTRES — Diane EYBEN — rue Montoyer, 70 — 1040-Brussels — Tel.: +32 2/287 1570 — Fax: +32 2/230 0520

RESEARCH WORK AND FUNDING

● **CRAFT (Cooperative Research Action for Technology):** this programme provides support for transnational groups of SMEs, without their own research facilities, and who have their research projects on specific technical problems handled by specialised research centres.

For further information: DG XII Science, Research and Development — Isi SARAGOSSI — rue de la Loi 200 — B-1049 Brussels — Tel: +32 2/295 5517 — Fax: +32 2/295 8046

● **EUROTECH CAPITAL:** encourages investment by European venture capital companies in firms developing transnational high-tech projects. Under the name EUROTECH II, European venture capital companies have given a commitment to invest approximately 180 million ECUs.

For further information: DG XVIII — Credit and investment — Joël BERGER — Bâtiment Jean Monnet — rue Alcide De Gasperi — L-2920 Luxembourg — Tel.: +352/4301 6261 — Fax: +352/4301 6322

FINDING PARTNERS

● **BC-NET (Business Cooperation Network):** In order to meet increasing demand expressed by SMEs for partnerships in technology, BC-NET is trying out a sub-network of its existing advisors specialising in research and innovation. This sub-network offers a specific service for finding technological partners. The purpose of BC-Net, which brings together over 600 business consultants, is to assist SMEs in finding partners for commercial, technical or financial cooperation.

For further information: DG XXIII — BC-NET — Patricia DE SMET — rue de la Loi, 200 (ARLN) — B-1049 Brussels — Tel.: +32.2/295.94.21 — Fax: 32 2/296.25.72

FOR DISSEMINATION AND VALORISATION OF RESEARCH

● **SPRINT (Strategic programme for innovation and technology transfer):** dissemination of new technologies and innovation, particularly via supporting measures for networking of national innovation infrastructures at a European level.

For further information: DG XIII Telecommunications — Robin MIEGE — Bâtiment Jean Monnet — Rue Alcide de Gasperi — L-2920 Luxembourg — Tel.: +352/4301 4180 — Fax: +352/4301 2165.

● **VALUE (Valorisation and utilisation for Europe):** support for dissemination of the results of all research programmes, in particular via the creation of databases, information centres and partnership arrangements between research and industry.

For further information: DG XIII Telecommunications -Jean-Noël DURVY — Bâtiment Jean Monnet — Rue Alcide de Gasperi — L-2920 Luxembourg — Tel.: +352/4301 3610 — Fax: +352/4301 4129/

VALUE SME: To increase the impact of VALUE on SMEs, the VALUE SME pilot action offers exploration grants (subsidies covering the travelling costs for concluding an agreement: maximum 7 000 ECUs) and technology transfer premiums (grants for all the costs associated with the evaluation of technology transfer; 50% of the real costs with a maximum of 100 000 ECUs). This action was renewed in 1993.

For further information: DG XIII — Telecommunications, Information Market and Valorisation of Research — Massimiliano DRAGONI — Bâtiment Jean Monnet — rue Alcide de Gasperi — L-2920 Luxembourg — Tel.: +352/4301 3519 — Fax: +352/4301 4129. DG XXIII — Enterprise Policy — Simona INGRAVALLE — rue de la Loi, 200 (ARLN) — B-1049 Brussels — Tel.: +32 2/295 1234 — Fax: 32 2/295 2154

A communication adopted by the Commission at the end of September³ reviews the progress achieved, and examines how involvement of SMEs in Community programmes could be increased.

The 4th Framework Programme of Community RTD for 1994-1998 should constitute significant progress for SMEs, particularly with the extension to other programmes of the CRAFT system of cooperative research, the feasibility grants currently paid under BRITE-EURAM (industrial and materials technologies), and with larger VALUE and SPRINT programmes for valorisation of Community research and technology transfer to SMEs.

Moreover, the Commission will consolidate its actions and information networks on Community research and its exploitation (VALUE relay centres, Euro Info Centres). Finally, to take account of the difficulties encountered so far by SMEs, the Commission has implemented measures to simplify the tendering and project management procedures.

TOWARDS A MORE FAVOURABLE FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR SMES

On the initiative of Mr. Raniero VANNI D'ARCHIRAFI, member of the European Commission responsible for Enterprise Policy, and particularly SMEs, VIPs from the banking industry of the European Community met in Brussels, for a Round Table discussion about improving the financial environment for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

The purpose of the Round Table, which will meet at regular intervals — will be to undertake a process of detailed reflection on the financing difficulties specific to SMEs, and ways of solving these problems. The analysis will not be restricted to access for SMEs to bank credit, but will also deal with access to venture capital. Henceforth, it will be a matter of identifying practical measures within the Community, evaluating the possibilities of transposing measures to other Member States and suggesting new approaches encouraging a better financial environment for SMEs. It will also involve examining the role which the European Commission could play in promoting those financial instruments which are most favourable for SMEs, devising new financial instruments, or for improving the financial structure of SMEs.

CRAFTS: Preparatory colloquia for the 2nd European Crafts Conference

On 14 June 1993⁴, the Council of Ministers adopted a Community action programme for the period 1993-1996, to intensify a number of priority areas of Community enterprise policy, in particular SMEs, and to ensure the continuity of this policy in a number of fields. The Commission will continue and consolidate its action in favour of crafts and very small enterprises, to help them to derive maximum benefit from the opportunities offered by the completion of the internal market. In order to determine the most effective actions to be carried out in their favour, the Commission has decided to organise in September 1994, in Berlin, a second European Crafts and Small Business Conference. This Conference will be preceded by a series of preparatory colloquia⁵, and the following have been added to the list:

³ COM(93)356 final.

⁴ See EURO INFO 61/93 — July-August 1993

⁵ See EURO INFO 62/93 — September 1993

● **Quality, crafts, small businesses:** in Paris (France), on 10 and 11 February 1994.

For further information: Organisers: Ministère de l'entreprise — PME, Commerce, Artisanat — Direction de l'Artisanat — 24, rue de l'Université — F-75700 PARIS CEDEX — Tel.: +33/1-4319 2422 — Fax: +33/1-4319 3473 — Contact: Daniel PERRIN.

● **Wives working in the business, and women executives:** in Thessaloniki (Greece), from 9-11 March 1994.

For further information: Organisers: EOMMEX — 16, Xenias Street — GR-11528 ATHENS — Tel.: +30/1-7715 002 — Fax: +30/1-7715 025 — Contact: Caroline TURNER — Breakthrough Consultants — 36, Vas. Georgiou Street — GR-54640 THESSALONIKI — Tel.: +30/31-84 06 25 — Fax: +30/31 36 11 00.

● **Specific problems facing craftsmen and heads of small businesses in frontier areas:** in Mons (Belgium) from 16 to 20 April 1994.

For further information: Organisers: BUREAU DE DEVELOPPEMENT FRONTALIER DES ENTREPRISES: Hainaut office: Claude DURIEUX — 50 rue de Nimy — B-7000 MONS — Tel.: +32/65-31 93 10 — Fax: +32/65-34 80 96; Nord Pas-de-Calais: Pierre NOE — 9, rue Léon Trulin — BP 114 — F-59001 LILLE CEDEX — Tel.: +33/20-51 99 23 — Fax: +33/20-55 51 92

● **Assistance to businesses:** the role of professional organisations and public bodies: in Lisbon (Portugal), in the first quarter of 1994.

For further information: Organisers: Associação Industrial Portuguesa — João Laureço VIEIRA — Pc. Das Industrias — Apartado 3200 — P-1304 LISBOA Codex — Tel.: +351/1-362 0100 — Fax: +351/1-363 9047.

For further information: DG XXIII — Crafts

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SUBCONTRACTING: European statistics soon

Subcontracting is a key factor in the competitiveness of European companies. This competitiveness depends on the capacity of subcontracting firms to innovate, and respond, in terms of quality, delivery times and costs, and the increasing demands of a constantly changing world market.

In this context, the Commission has launched actions along three main lines:

- creation of a favourable environment for the development of subcontracting;
- improvement of information and communication between main contractors and subcontractors;
- valorisation and promotion of European subcontracting with investors from third countries.

A pan-European Subcontracting conference was held in Madrid, on 14 and 15 December 1992. It brought together all the actors in the subcontracting relationship, and reviewed the situation and prospects for change in this sector, based on economic and legal studies, and networking of subcontracting exchanges⁶.

DG XXIII, in cooperation with EUROSTAT (Statistical Office of the European Communities) recently launched a statistical survey which will enable accurate evaluation of the scale of the phenomenon of subcontracting in Europe. It will affect various industrial sectors, including: electronics, vehicle manufacture, aerospace, textiles/clothing. To carry out this exercise, EUROSTAT is coordinating the activities of national statistical offices in Europe on these themes. The latter will be working in close cooperation with the various professional associations concerned. The first results will be available in early 1994.

For further information: DG XXIII — Subcontracting

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⁶ see EURO INFO 57/93 — March 1993

ARIES — A EURO INFO CENTRE for cooperatives

Linking together cooperative organisations (cooperative societies, mutual societies, associations and foundations) at a European, national or local level by a modern communication system, promoting transparency and exchange of information between them, encouraging transfers of experience and opening new possibilities, and facilitating grouping and searching for partners, all form part of the role of the ARIES European information network. Recognised as a EURO INFO CENTRE (EIC) in July 1992, ARIES enables the organisations in this sector to find an immediate response to any question about legal provisions prevailing in other Member States and about all the Communication policies for various sectors, and Community programmes (access to the majority of European databases), and provides a link with the EIC network.

The operation of the European ARIES computerised information network will be demonstrated during the 4th Cooperatives Conference, to be held in Brussels from 8-10 November 1993 (see announcement on page 8).

For further information: **ARIES**

rue Guillaume Tell 59
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BC-NET: Canada and Morocco join

During the annual cooperation conference, on 1 and 2 July in Brussels, the memorandum to join the BC-NET (Business Cooperation Network) was signed by Canada and Morocco. BC-NET is a network of around 600 business advisers and intermediaries throughout the European Community, EFTA countries, and a growing number of third countries. This network enables businesses to identify quickly and confidentially potential partners in other Member States and other regions, in response to a specific proposal for cooperation. The business advisers in the BC-NET network analyse the cooperation opportunities proposed by firms, pass them on to a central organisation (the BC-NET Central System — BCS) which is responsible for matching them, deal with responses from the central system, and possibly, take part in the negotiations leading to conclusion of cooperation agreements between the firms.

Since it was launched in 1988, BC-NET has dealt with over 70 000 requests for cooperation (financial, technical or commercial) from all types of business and manufacturing and service industries.

The 'national contact point' in CANADA is:

Canadian Chamber of Commerce — Mrs. Lucy BOILY — 55, rue Metcalfe — OTTAWA — Ontario — K1P 6N4 — Canada — Tel.: +1-613-954 5493 — Fax: +1-613-954 5492

The 'national contact point' in MOROCCO is:

Groupement professionnel des Banques du Maroc (GPBM) — Mrs. Farida LHASSANI-OUAZZANI — 71, avenue de l'Armée Royale — CASABLANCA — Morocco — Tel.: +212-2-31 16 24 — Fax: +212-2-31 49 03.

For further information: Commission of the European Communities

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INTERPRISE:

to encourage partnership arrangements 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 December 1993:

EUROPARTNERSHIP PARIS '93

Meetings: 2 and 3 December 1993 in PARIS (France)

Countries involved: France, Spain, Germany and Italy

Business activities: medical equipment, food processing, environment and waste processing, computers and electronics

Organisers: EIC-CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE ET D'INDUSTRIE DE PARIS — Mr. E. Viviand — 2, rue de Viarmes — F-75001 PARIS — Tel.: 33 1/4508 3600 — Fax: +331/4508 3700

INTERPRISE 'ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY '93'

Meetings: 6 and 7 December in Utrecht (Netherlands)

Countries involved: Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Israel, Canada, Spain and United Kingdom

Business activities: environment, treatment of industrial and sewage effluent, chemical and non-chemical waste, soil reclamation; high-risk industrial activities.

Organisers: IMC Nederland BV — Roland F. van der Graaf — Achter Emer, 17 — NL-4824 ZA BREDA — Tel.: +31-76/41 19 64 — Fax: + 31-76/41 96 43

INTERPRISE '93: HUNGRIA Y REPUBLICA CHECA

Meetings: 14-16 November 1993 in Praha (Czech Republic)

Countries concerned: Spain, France, Belgium, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Hungary

Sector: metal, food and drink, textile, wood, chemical, transport and mechanical

Organisers: INSTITUTO DE FOMENTO REGION DE MURCIA — Fernando Garcia-Nieto Cano — Plaza de San Agustin, 5 — E-30005 MURCIA — ESPAÑA — Tel.: (34-68)362 800 — Fax: (34-68)293 245.

FUTURALLIA 93

Meetings: 18-19 November 1993 in Poitiers (France)

Countries concerned: France, United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain

Sector: textile, wood, paper, chemical, printing, informatics, food and drink, electric and electronic appliances

Organisers: CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE ET D'INDUSTRIE DE LA VIENNE — Association Poitou-Charente-Europe — Françoise Vilain — 47, rue du Marché — BP 229 — F-86006 POITIERS Cedex — Tel.: (33)49 60 98 00 — Fax: (33)49 41 65 72.

EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND 1993: 335 SMEs are waiting for you

The role of EUROPARTENARIAT is to establish direct contacts between Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, encourage cooperation agreements in the commercial, financial or technological field, activate the local potential of a less-favoured region, and stimulate productive investments. Since 1988, this programme has been inviting SMEs from all over Europe to meet those from a selected less-favoured region. EUROPARTENARIAT is an effective formula — selection of SMEs, publication of a catalogue, organisation of face-to-face contacts (presence of interpreters) — which have aroused increasing interest from businesses and regions. In December 1993, it will be the turn of Scotland to host this Community action, which contributes effectively, through cooperation between firms, to supporting the efforts of weaker or peripheral regions to overcome their specific handicaps. **The meetings between executives will take place in Glasgow (Scotland) on 13 and 14 December 1993.** 335 Scottish Small and Medium-sized Enterprises have been selected for EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND. Their proposals for cooperation, in the commercial, technical or financial fields have been published in a catalogue, available in the English, French, German, Italian and Spanish languages.

For further information: EUROPARTENARIAT SCOTLAND 1993
25 Bothwell Street — GLASGOW G2 7HY
Tel.: +44 (0)41 221 6711 — Fax: +44 (0)41 221 6722

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

● 4th EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON COOPERATIVES

Contribution by Cooperatives, Mutual Societies and Associations to Social Cohesion, and Economic Development in Europe.

Mutual societies, associations and cooperatives aim to continue contributing to social cohesion or economic development in Europe. What forms of partnership arrangement should they develop with government for managing social and public services? What can associations, cooperatives and mutual societies contribute to a changing Europe? What strategies and requirements do they have? What do they need to compete on an equal footing with other businesses, and to uphold their values and specific features? These are the main questions which, after Paris (1989), Rome (1990) and Lisbon (1992) will be on the agenda of the **4th European Conference on Cooperatives which be held from 8 to 10 November 1993 in Brussels, at the Palais des Congrès.**

For further information and registration: Belgian branch of CIRIEC (International Research and Information Centre on Public, Social and Cooperative Societies).

Université de Liège au Sart-Tilman (Bâtiment B31) B-4000 LIEGE — Belgium. Tel.: +32 41/56 27 46 — Fax: +32 41/56 29 58.

● PREPARATORY COLLOQUIUM FOR THE SECOND EUROPEAN CRAFTS CONFERENCE

Training in craft businesses and qualifications of top and middle managers and company founders.

Organised to prepare the 2nd European Crafts Conference in 1994, this Colloquium has the objective of determining the soundness of Community actions, defining essential actions to be supported by Member States, and at Community level, and establish the main lines of a specific Community programme intended to promote qualification in craft SMEs.

Two themes will be on the agenda:

— Improvement, at Community and at Member State level, of basic and continuing training in SMEs and craft trades:

— improvement of the level of qualifications of middle and top managers and founders of craft firms.

This colloquium will take place on 15, 16, and 17 November 1993 in Luxembourg.

Location for the meetings, and address for information:

Chambre des Métiers du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg

2, Circuit de la Foire Internationale

BP 1604 — L-1016 Luxembourg

Tel.: +352 4267671 — +352 426787

● EC-CHINA SEMINAR — cooperation and economic development

The Commission (DG I — External economic relations, and DG XXIII Enterprise Policy and Trade), will be organising an information seminar in Antwerp (Belgium) on 6, 7 and 8 December 1993, on the development of economic relations and cooperation between China and the European Community. Furthermore, approximately forty Chinese enterprises will be present, and will offer cooperation agreements to interested European firms. The organisation of this event will be handled by the CHINA-EUROPE Institute of the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium).

For further information: Institut CHINE-EUROPE

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