

EUROPARTENARIAT ITALIA:

2,333 Visiting Enterprises from 79 Countries



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The fifteenth EUROPARTENARIAT event took place in Genoa, Italy 27-29 November 1996. Speeches were given at the official opening ceremony by MR. PAPOUTSIS, Member of the European Commission responsible for enterprise policy, by MR FANTOZZI, Italian Minister for Trade, by MR BERSANI, Italian Minister for Industry, and by MR LANDABURU, Director-General of DG XVI (regional and cohesion policy). After congratulating the event's excellent preparation, Mr PAPOUTSIS emphasised in his speech the importance of events such as EUROPARTENARIAT which offers small and medium-sized enterprises an effective platform for finding partners for transnational cooperation. The Commissioner invited all the participants to take part in the upcoming EUROPARTENARIAT GREECE to be held in Piraeus, Greece in June 1997.

At Genoa, 406 small and medium-sized Italian enterprises (SMEs) from eleven regions in northern and central Italy ('Objective 2' regions under regional policy) discussed the possibilities for cooperation with 2,333 visiting enterprises from 79 countries. Of these enterprises, 1,126 were from the European Union, 70 from the EFTA (European Free Trade Area), 347 from Mediterranean countries, 406 from Central and Eastern European countries (PHARE), 197 from the newly independent states from the former Soviet Union (TACIS), 77 from Asia, 86 from Latin American countries, 21 from the United States and 3 enterprises from other countries.

EUROPARTENARIAT ITALIA 1996 is the second EUROPARTENARIAT to be held in Italy. After the success of the EUROPARTENARIAT Mezzogiorno held in Bari in December 1992, the Italian authorities decided to organise a second EUROPARTENARIAT event to include all the 'Objective 2' regions (regions in industrial decline) from the centre and north of Italy: Liguria, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli, Venezia-Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Marche and Lazio.

Organised mainly by Mondimpresa, the planning and operation of this event — both the setting up of appointments and the logistics — were excellent. EUROPARTENARIAT ITALIA was the largest event ever held in terms of visiting enterprises. Thanks to the work carried out by the national consultants, 10,143 pre-arranged appointments were set up for enterprises from the host region and 1,864 other bilateral meetings were scheduled, not to mention the numerous spontaneous and informal contacts which took place between heads of enterprise.

As the EUROPARTENARIAT ITALIA event received particularly wide media coverage, it also provided an occasion to publicise the European Union (presentation of the CORDIS database, information on the more important community programmes, etc). It also provided a forum for presenting the instruments and programmes of DG XVI in questions of regional policy, and of DG XXIII in matters of enterprise policy.

Our readers will recall that the EUROPARTENARIAT programme was launched by the European Community — DG XVI and DG XXIII — in 1988. The programme aims to stimulate the development of the least developed regions or those in industrial decline by encouraging the heads of small and medium-sized enterprises from all over the Community to establish business contacts with enterprises from other Member States and even from third countries.

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The Council Adopts the New Multiannual Programme for SMEs

A new multiannual programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of the European Union (1997-2000)¹ will take up the baton for the current programme which expires at the end of 1996. A budget of 127 million ECU has been set aside for the programme's operation for the period 1997-2000. It is open for participation from associated countries from Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) as well as Cyprus, Malta, the EFTA (European Free Trade Area) countries, and members of the EEA (European Economic Area). The European Commission is responsible for implementing the programme. It will be assisted by a committee made up of representatives from the Member States. Such is the major thrust of the unanimous decision taken by European industry ministers on 14 November 1996 in Brussels after intense negotiation over the budget for this programme² whose objectives are described below.

The Fifteen also agreed on a resolution confirming the new **Integrated Programme in Favour of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and the Craft Sector**³. This programme provides a general framework to facilitate the coordination, coherence and visibility of all efforts undertaken in favour for SMEs and the craft sector in Europe while still not allowing for direct financing of European enterprises. The present programme updates and develops the prior integrated programme (1994)⁴. Its goal is to guarantee a stronger partnership between all the parties concerned with the development of SMEs and the craft sector at the Community, national and regional levels in order to promote the convergence and effectiveness of the measures taken. To obtain its goals, the integrated programme offers three types of action in close collaboration between all parties concerned by development of SMEs: **concerted actions** with the Member States, EU aid packages in the form of measures taken within the framework of enterprise policy (ie the third multiannual programme for SMEs 1997-2000 which forms an essential element of the integrated programme), as well as measures adopted under the heading of **other Community policies** such as the structural funds, technological development, the European Investment Bank, and the European Investment Funds.

'MAXIMISING EUROPEAN SMEs' FULL POTENTIAL FOR EMPLOYMENT, GROWTH AND COMPETITIVENESS'

Third Multiannual Programme for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union (1997-2000)

In as much as they cannot be realised better at the Member State level, the European Commission will implement the following measures as of 1 January 1997:

¹ 'Maximising European SMEs' full potential for employment, growth and competitiveness — **COM(96)98 final**: Proposal for a Council Decision on the Third Multiannual Programme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union (1997-2000) and **COM(96)591 final**: The Commission has also submitted a modified proposal to the Council.

² The initial budget proposed by the Commission for the multiannual programme was 180 million ECU, of which 40 million would have come from a revision of the EU's financial prospective. As this revision did not take place, it was necessary to forget these 40 million ECU for the time being.

³ COM(96)239 final of 10.07.1996, see EURO-INFO 93/96

⁴ COM(96)207 final of 03.06.1994

1. SIMPLIFY AND IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND REGULATORY BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

- *Ensure consideration of the interests of SMEs in the various Community initiatives and policies:* Integration of the SME dimension into the conception of Community policies. Promotion of the coordination of Community actions in favour of SMEs which enable SMEs to participate fully in all Community actions and programmes, including the Structural Funds, R&TD, international cooperation and environmental programmes.
- *Simplify and improve Community legislation:* Actions to avoid and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens and compliance costs in Community legislation which hinder the creation and development of enterprises, in particular SMEs, through the implementation of a pragmatic methodology for the evaluation of the impact of legislative proposals (including the use of an improved Business Impact Assessment System and cost/benefit analyses wherever appropriate).
- *Increase transparency and the spread of best practices on simplifying and improving the administrative and regulatory environment:* Actions to promote the spread of best practices in particular in the field of administrative simplification; promotion of actions on transfer of businesses and retention of title clauses.
- *Improve the framework for transnational operations of SMEs:* Promotion of the development of alternative dispute resolution for settling transnational disputes between enterprises; stimulation of appropriate legal structures for transnational operations of SMEs, in particular the use of the European Economic Interest Grouping (REGIE project).

2. IMPROVE THE FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR ENTERPRISES

- *Improve access to loan financing:* Promotion of innovative practices in the field of better access of SMEs to loan financing (including mutual guarantee schemes, Round Table of Bankers and SMEs).
- *Intensify efforts to reduce late payments problems:* Acceleration of follow-up to Recommendation on late payment and foresee further proposals; support for actions to improve the financial management capabilities of SMEs, in particular in the field of information, training and the promotion of integrated cash flow management software.
- *Facilitate the development of specific financial instruments:* Promotion of the development of specific financial instruments of interest to SMEs, in particular factoring and credit insurance.
- *Stimulate the development of European capital markets for fast-growing SMEs (including EASDAQ).*
- *Analyse the specific requirements of small enterprises and crafts and the means for meeting them.*

3. HELP SMEs TO EUROPEANISE AND INTERNATIONALISE THEIR STRATEGIES, IN PARTICULAR THROUGH BETTER INFORMATION SERVICES

- *Development of information services (Euro Info Centres as 'First Stop Shops'):* Better access to community information for enterprises: development of the Euro Info Centre network as a First-Stop-Shop directing each request to the relevant service provider; improvement of the composition of the network by applying the existing evaluation methods; further professionalisation of the information task of the EICs including proactive information activities, in particular in the areas of accessing Community programmes, the Internal Market, internationalisation, environmental issues and the introduction of the Single Currency; facilitating access of SMEs to market information.

Maximise the efficient use of these networks by all types of SMEs by making use of synergies; strengthen and improve partnerships between these information networks and recognised professional organisations which traditionally have the closest contact with SMEs.

- *Improve the promotion of SME policy actions:* Generalise and decentralised promotion campaigns in coordination with EIC network; organisation of European Business Weeks.
- *Promote cooperation through business search networks:* Qualitative improvement and definition of a quality standard for the confidential business-partner-search network (BC-Net) and con-confidential partner-search network (BRE).
- *Promote direct contacts through partnership programmes:* Continued development of instruments permitting direct contact between entrepreneurs (Europartenariat and Interprise programmes).
- *Develop subcontracting partnerships:* Further develop actions aimed at promoting transnational sub-contracting.
- *Promote access to new markets and internationalisation of SMEs:* Test innovative approaches in particular by facilitating SMEs access to new markets and encourage their internationalisation.

4. ENHANCE SME COMPETITIVENESS AND IMPROVE THEIR ACCESS TO RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND TRAINING

- *Increase the innovative potential of SMEs:* Identify best practices and test concrete approaches through pilot actions, in particular in the fields of developing firms with growth potential and New Technology Based Firms (NTBFs). Rapid and wide-scale dissemination of the results of pilot actions as examples of successful business experience.

- *Stimulate managerial training:* Helping to identify and test positive approaches in the field of management training and consultancy services tailored to SMEs (mainly through pilot projects).
- *Adaptation to environmental requirements.*
- *Improve advisory aid to SMEs.*

5. PROMOTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SPECIAL TARGET GROUPS

- *Business culture and entrepreneurship:* Stimulate the exchange of best practice and support the identification of particularly dynamic entrepreneurs.
- *Craft, small and micro enterprises:* Launching of pilot-projects, enabling these enterprises in particular to adapt to structural changes, to better integrate in the Single Market and to benefit from the opportunities offered by this market, including in the field of standardisation, certification, environmental and quality management.
- *Enterprises in commerce and distributive trades:* Facilitating the adjustment process of commercial enterprises to the Single Market and to structural changes, in particular through new technologies (COMMERCE 2000), promotion of cooperation between SMEs, dissemination of results of pilot programmes. Follow-up to Green Paper on Commerce and Distribution.
- *Women and young entrepreneurs; enterprises owned by minorities:* Identification of the specific problems faced by women and young entrepreneurs, as well as small enterprises owned by minorities and support for innovative solutions. Promotion of the position of spouses working in the same enterprise.

6. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SMEs

Improved statistics on SMEs without increasing the burden on enterprises; European Observatory for SMEs; studies; database concerning SME Policy measures; evaluation of existing policy actions and development of proposals for new Community measures in areas affecting enterprises.

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COMMERCE:

A GREEN PAPER to Help Face the Challenges of the 21st Century

On the initiative of Mr Christos PAPOUTSIS, Member of the European Commission responsible for enterprise and trade policy, the 'Green Paper on Commerce'⁵ was adopted by the Commission on 20 November 1996. It aims to provide the bases for a debate on the importance of this economic sector and challenges it, facing the dawn of the 21st Century. The Green Paper examines the economic and social structure of trade and its development, then describes the actions the Member States and European Union, and continues on to identify the challenges which the sector must meet and formulates a number of questions requiring a wide public consultation. Over the course of 1997, the Commission will propose within the framework of these consultations, specific measures to meet these most immediate challenges.

The importance of commerce in the European Union in 1994

- 4.5 million commercial enterprises
- one third of all EU enterprises, of which 95% have less than 10 employees
- 22 million jobs
- 16% of the European Union work force
- 55% of workers in retail trade are women
- 3.4 million retail trade enterprises employ 15 million people
- 1.1 million wholesale trade enterprises represent 7 million jobs
- an average 13% of the value added to the EU economy

⁵ COM(96)530 final

Amongst the principle challenges facing European commerce are the evolution of the information society and the rise of the electronic commerce, the need to ensure the effectiveness and better functioning of the Single Market, the introduction of the Single Currency, the EURO, the need to respond to consumer concerns, the need for a simplified and less costly enterprise environment, and addressing the problem of employment, competitiveness and cohesion in both the rural and the urban environment.

The **use of information technologies** has opened up important new perspectives with regard to commercial activities which extend from advertising on the Internet to electronic commercial transactions. Commercial enterprises must re-examine their strategies and organisation and study their needs in the area of training. In addition to meeting the most immediate challenge of providing an appropriate regulatory framework for the development of electronic commerce, The Green Paper poses the following questions: what action will the European Union, the Member States and commerce itself take to guarantee a safe, transparent, integrated and competitive market in the new environment? What will be the effects on employment throughout the sector? How can the sector be made aware of these new opportunities?

Although the Single Market stimulates commerce, it still suffers from barriers such as differing laws and regulations effecting the establishment of retail operations or the cross-border use of promotions and commercial communications. In order to benefit fully from the Single Market, what steps can be taken to encourage or facilitate access for retailers and wholesalers to cross-border markets? What type of cooperation will allow the smallest merchants to be competitive in the Single Market?

The dynamic effect of the Single Market will be increased considerably with the introduction of the Euro which will eliminate, in particular, the risks linked to fluctuations in the exchange rates and the related administrative costs, especially for merchants directly involved in cross-border transactions. The introduction of the Single Currency is very important for the distribution chain as this will be one of the sectors of the economy most effected. How should the information needs of the sector be met, and how can the specific problems of adaptation be facilitated for the sector?

The Green Paper also underscores the need to create a **business environment favourable to the development of enterprises**. One out of three SMEs have commercial activities: the initiatives in favour of SMEs benefit the commercial sector directly, especially in terms of administrative and legislative simplification and deregulation. Furthermore, as the need for new or more specific competencies becomes urgent, the commercial sector must be ready to invest in the training of personnel in order to take advantage of the new opportunities. The sector must also examine how the flow of information and the provision of better statistical data can be improved so that small enterprises as well as public administrations have access to the necessary data to react rapidly to the necessary adaptations.

Finally, the issues of employment and cohesion are significant challenges for the **business environment both in the rural and the urban areas**. The rural areas, which cover 80% of the Community's territory, face a shortage of commercial enterprises or primary services. As regards the urban environment, mass consumption and new forms of distribution have changed the urban land use. How can the survival of local small commerce be ensured despite the economic and commercial conjuncture? How can contradictory interests be reconciled when they represent environmental objectives, the growing use of private vehicles for travel to and from work and for shopping, and the needs of the EU's non-mobile population?

In order to respond to the challenges of the decades to come, the European Commission, with the publication of this Green Paper on Commerce, aims to launch a wide-ranging debate. To complete this analysis and suggest the routes to follow, DG XXIII invites the Community Institutions, representative organisations, the social partners, and commercial organisations at the European, national or regional level, and those individuals with a knowledge of the sector to submit their reactions to the Green Paper on the role of commerce in the European Union **no later than 31 May 1997 to the European Commission — DG XXIII — 'Green Book on Commerce' - rue de la Loi, 200 — B-1049 BRUSSELS — For further information: Fax: +32-2/295.89.84 — E-mail: commerce@dg23.cec.be**

'TRANSATLANTIC SMALL BUSINESS INITIATIVE': Facilitating Cooperation Between European and American Enterprises

Launched by Mr Ron BROWN, former US Secretary of Commerce, and by European Commissioners Sir Leon BRITTAN and Dr Martin BANGEMANN, the **'Transatlantic Business Dialogue'** (TABD) is aimed at creating a favourable framework for the development of commercial relations between Europe and the United States in response to the specific proposals submitted by European and American businessmen.

In this framework and following on the proposals of the 'SME Group' the European Commission and the US Department of Commerce have decided to develop a common initiative directed specifically at the SME sector. This initiative is supported by Mr Christos PAPOUTSIS, Member of the European Commission responsible for enterprise

policy. The 'Transatlantic Small Business Initiative' (TASBI) will facilitate cooperation, commercial relations and investment flows between SMEs on both sides of the Atlantic. TASBI was officially launched during the second TABD Conference held in Chicago on 8-9 November 1996.

The 'Transatlantic Small Business Initiative' will work on two fronts:

- organisation of sectoral partnership events to encourage SMEs on both sides of the Atlantic to conclude commercial alliances and partnerships; and
- development of a common EU/US database to enable SMEs to discover the economic environment of each region and to identify potential partners.

The first actions, coordinated and supported by the Commission under the 'Transatlantic Small Business Initiative' will take place from 24 to 27 February 1997 in Detroit, Michigan at the 'SAE EXPO' the largest world wide trade show dedicated to automotive engineering. The 'European Automotive Suppliers' Mission' will allow some one hundred European enterprises and European organisations in the sector to meet directly with local enterprises and to show their know-how in the 'European Village'.

The US Department of Commerce will organise a delegation of American enterprises, 'Eurobenefit Matchmaker' which will visit Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy from 21 to 29 April 1997.

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EURO INFO and many other sources of information are available on the INTERNET via the EUROPA server:

<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg23.htm>

* EURO-INFO is a newsletter for small businesses and craft trades. It is distributed free of charge to business organisations, associations and groups and to correspondents of the Business Cooperation Centre (BRE) to members of the BC-NET (Business Cooperation Network) and to EURO INFO CENTRES and to SME executives who request a copy. EURO-Info appears 10 times per year.

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|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> J International Organisation | <input type="checkbox"/> NI Tourism (restaurant, hotelier, travel) |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> L Trade Union or Professional Organisation of wage earners | <input type="checkbox"/> NO SME (-250 employees) <i>(please specify)</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LC Craft Sector or Commercial Organisation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LE Chamber of Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> NP Craft Enterprise and micro-enterprise |
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| | <input type="checkbox"/> YB Enterprise Association <i>(please specify)</i> |
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6. In the framework of actions carried out by DG XXIII, I am especially interested in the following areas (please tick)

- Community strategy for the development of enterprises
- Improvement of the business environment
- Social economy (cooperatives, mutual companies, associations and foundations)
- Trade and distribution
- Craft sector and small enterprises
- Information for Enterprises and relations with other Community networks
- Development of cooperation and promotion of internationalism
- Reinforcement of competitiveness (access to technology, training and the information society)
- Promotion of sub-contracting
- Concerted actions and improvement of access to support programmes
- Concerted actions and improvement of conditions for better access to financing
- Concerted actions and Community contribution in favour of tourism

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