

EURO - info

The bulletin of enterprise policy

The Netherlands:
The success of
Europarteneriat

"BEST" report:
Working for a new
enterprise culture
in Europe



European Commission

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- Communication of the European Commission "Capital Investment: the key to job creation in the European Union" April 1998 - sec/98/552

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Erratum

DG XXIII is changing

The European Commission has decided to reorganise DG XXIII. The new organigram will be the subject of a special issue.

EURO-info is a concise information bulletin for SMEs and the craft sector. It is sent to those who put in a written request. EURO-info is published 10 times a year.

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Paola PICCAROLO - European Commission - Directorate General XXIII
"Enterprise Policy, Distributive Trades, Tourism and Co-operatives"

The Netherlands: The success of Europartenariat

The 18th Europartenariat was held at Apeldoorn (Netherlands) on 11 and 12 June. A success...



Europartenariat

It was the first time that the Netherlands had organised an event of this kind. The professionalism of the organisers, as well as the excellent cooperation of the three organising provinces (Gelderland, Overijssel and Flevoland), unquestionably contributed to its success. The presence of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of the Netherlands, representatives of the Dutch government and Commissioner Papoutsis at the opening ceremony underlined the importance of the event. But above all it was the presence in force of those representing small and medium-sized enterprises which ensured its success: more than 420 SMEs from the Netherlands and 1,700 from over 60 countries around the world - of which 1,000 came from the 15 Member States of the European Union (EU) - one of the best results of the Europartenariat. The participation of a large number of enterprises from the EU (68% of the participants) is a clear indication of the growing interest that SMEs are showing in cooperation. Also worth noting, and for the first time: the participation of 28 SMEs from South Africa. Finally, nearly 12,300 meetings took place between the participating enterprises - quality contacts in the opinion of those interviewed at the time.

EURO-info will report later on a fuller evaluation of the results.

INFORMATIONS

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Greece: "Partnership 98", the cooperation of enterprises facing the challenges of the Euro and electronic commerce

"Partnership 98", Athens, Greece, 10-11 September

For the record, DG XXIII of the European Commission organises a "Partnership" forum every year, the objective of which is to summarize the current situation and set out the perspectives for the programmes and networks of cooperation between enterprises that are managed by DG XXIII.

The 1998 session of Partnership will deal with the consequences of the introduction of the single currency and electronic commerce on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the context of cooperation between SMEs. Two background factors give this event a particular importance: in the first place, the definitive list of the countries which will adopt the Euro on 1 January 1999 has just been finalised; secondly, the increasing use of the Internet and electronic commerce is making significant changes in attitudes and the manner of doing business. The plenary sessions will be supplemented by seminars of the BC-NET/BRE networks, Europartenariat / Interprise and activities connected with sub-contracting.

EURO-info will report later on the results of Partnership 98.

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"BEST" report: Working for a new enterprise culture in Europe

European Council, Cardiff, 15 and 16 June. Among the items on the agenda: The report of the "BEST" task force for the "simplification of the business environment" which was published by the European Commission at the beginning of May. History of an initiative...

June 1997: the European Council in Amsterdam confirmed "that it is particularly concerned with the simplification of existing and future legislative, regulatory and administrative measures, which will generate an improvement in the quality of community legislation and reduce the administrative load imposed on European enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises. To this end the Council invited the European Commission to set up a task force.

September 1997: the task force is created. It is made up of representatives from the business world and from public organisations responsible for relations with enterprises. Its role: to study the possibility of eliminating current obstacles to activity and business growth and formulate realistic recommendations.

May 1998: Mission accomplished. The report highlights nineteen action areas intended to "promote enterprise and entrepreneurship". A key phrase for the authors of the report: to take action. The ball is now in the court of the Commission and the fifteen Member States, who must indicate what follow-up they intend to give to these proposals.

"BEST": Key points and summary of the principal recommendations

The "BEST Credo": The 18.5 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union make up the foundation of its economic power. They account for over 60% of total turnover and 66% of people employed. They play a crucial role in the process of improving European competitiveness and growth. Around one million new enterprises are created every year. For more than a decade, the SMEs, and particularly the small enterprises, are considered to be the principal source of future employment.

Improved public administration

- The public administration services, whose function is either regulatory or as suppliers of support to enterprises in the form of advice, assistance and information, must essentially consider themselves to be service providers to enterprises. To do this, a culture change is necessary in the public administration services.
- Regulation is necessary, but it must be adopted at the right level. The universal adoption of best practice is a better way to improve the position of SMEs than the harmonisation of national practices. The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are fundamental. Furthermore, regulation must be simple and practical at all levels. Its objectives must be clear and its implementation economical. It must also be frequently reappraised.
- One of the fundamental recommendations of BEST: to set up units of 'best regulation', responsible at the highest political levels, in the institutions of the EU and in all Member States. The role of these units: to make sure that the reform of regulations is carried out in a coherent manner; to guarantee that public administration services are genuinely supporting enterprises; to evaluate existing and proposed legislation; to examine the cost of new administrative procedures.
- "Think small first" is a fundamental guiding principle. If a measure is appropriate for a small enterprise, it is likely that it will be acceptable for a large enterprise.
- Specific recommendations of BEST to the Member States of the European Union: make legislation on health and safety at work more accessible and the administration of social security less costly.

New approaches with regard to teaching, training and working conditions

- Europe must promote an enterprise culture so that more individuals take the risk of starting up an enterprise. As a result, BEST has formulated important recommendations for teaching and training as well as for the flexibility of labour.
- The stimulation of entrepreneurship must start at school and be pursued throughout school, higher education and vocational training. In this way, throughout the period of education, the national education and training systems must take into account the current requirements with regard to business management and teach them as part of the basic curriculum (and not as options).
- Cooperation between enterprises and schools must be encouraged. Objective: to make sure that training pro-

duces the necessary skills for existing enterprises, SMEs in particular, and for those who wish to start their own enterprise. Examples of training to be developed: training specific to entrepreneurship, putting the accent on practical qualifications and useful skills; training specific to work in an SME, taking into account the different types of SME and varying industrial sectors. Generally, the training systems must be more flexible and allow greater mobility between university studies and vocational training in enterprises.

- Working conditions: to promote the development of a new attitude between employers and employees, BEST recommends the establishment of dialogue between employers and employees within the enterprise and on several subjects: divergences from collective agreements, a more flexible description of tasks in employment contracts and working hours. BEST also specifies that enterprises must respect the minimal statutory employment requirements.

Access to finance and help for innovation

- SMEs are not homogeneous. For example, the situation of a new and innovative SME in a period of rapid growth is not the same as that of a medium-sized company well established in a traditional manufacturing sector.
- The assessment of the different situations that SMEs have to face up to is particularly important if one wishes to ensure that all enterprises have access to appropriate forms of financing. In this area therefore, the BEST recommendations aim to identify and fill the gaps as far as access to financing is concerned, so that enterprises with the capacity to grow and develop have the necessary tools available to allow them to do so.
- For example, enterprises in a growth phase need a whole range of financing possibilities. To facilitate contact with "business angels" (private investors in SMEs), easily accessible networks could be organised and communication between the projects and the investors improved. Another example: sponsorship and guidance by experienced people, useful for all types of SME, should be encouraged through the creation of profit sharing programmes. For small enterprises or enterprises in the start-up phase, programmes for loan guarantees and mutual guarantees have an important role to play in the establishment of bank credit lines. SMEs should also be able to amortise the capital investment over a shorter period (3 to 4 years), which would allow them to retain their profits.
- From the point of view of innovation, it is indispensable to improve the utilisation of the research and technology of

the SMEs. For example, by developing programmes which favour technology transfer or by encouraging the "grouping together" of SMEs, universities and large companies to share resources and the necessary skills. In the same way, community research and technological development programmes must take more account of the needs of SMEs.

Implementation

- BEST's position with regard to the implementation of its recommendations is clear: in order that entrepreneurship and the creation of an enterprise culture becomes a reality, action must be taken now at all levels of society.
- The BEST task force has also suggested that practical measures should be taken to ensure the effective implementation of the recommendations in its report. BEST suggests a mechanism in three parts:
 - BEST requests that the authorities to which each recommendation is addressed should indicate whether or not they accept the recommendation. In the case of acceptance, the authorities should establish an action plan with timing, clearly indicating how the recommendation will be implemented. A refusal should be justified.
 - An annual report should be prepared for the European Council, which would give an inventory of actions undertaken at each level of the decision process. The annual report should be published.
 - The Commission, in partnership with the Member States and organisations representing enterprises, should set up a panel of enterprises made up of a majority of entrepreneurs. Its role: to make a periodical assessment of the progress made within the European Union. This panel of enterprises should put together a first report for the Commission for 1 July 2000 at the latest.
- The follow-up of the implementation of the BEST recommendations is an essential element. At any moment it should be possible to assess progress achieved and the rate of achievement. To do this, assessment systems must be developed and used. Also, the process of identification and exchange of information on best practice must be strengthened, particularly where the process could be an alternative to more regulation and legislation. At the

European Council in Cardiff, the European Commission received the mandate to ensure this follow-up. It will present its action plan during the Austrian Presidency.

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The news

Sweden: Training, key factor in the success of SMEs - Conclusions of the Stockholm seminar on training for the creation of enterprises, organised in the framework of Concerted Actions 2 and 3 (support services for SMEs)

Training is essential for the success and survival of enterprises, particularly in the start-up phase. Based on this statement, the two days of discussion organised in Stockholm on 4 and 5 May by the Swedish Ministry for industrial development and technical development (NUTEK) and the European Council were the occasion for an exchange of best practice in this field.

The theme of the Stockholm seminar was training in the start-up phase of an enterprise. For several years, many countries, institutions and organisations have developed training for entrepreneurs. The objective of the seminar was to present the best training schemes with the aim of improving training schemes at national and European level.

The discussions developed three principal themes:

- **First theme:** how to develop an entrepreneurial attitude in Europe? Starting from the premise that in Europe entrepreneurship is not valued as it should be, the debates resulted in two main recommendations:

- training in entrepreneurship should be given to children as early as secondary education - to wait for university is too late in many cases;

- the possibilities of integrating entrepreneurship into courses for teacher training should be explored. Entrepreneurship could be taught as a normal subject or via special "training the trainers" sessions.

- **Second theme:** what training should be given to women to encourage them to create their own enterprise? In fact, the number of women entrepreneurs is vastly inferior to the number of women in working life, which leads one to think that more women could become entrepreneurs. An observation backed up by other data: 25%-35% of new enterprises are started by women. What prevents women from creating their own enterprise? In the first place, women come up against specific barriers: capital and financing, skills and education, interior barriers and social behaviour. Secondly, where promotion and entrepreneurship are concerned, the expectations of women are different from those of men. From this comes the following recommendation:

- it is important to take account of the expectations and interests of women when developing information, education, advice and all types of support for the promotion of entrepreneurship.

- **Third theme:** how to use Information Technology (IT) for training in the start-up phase of an enterprise? Several observations were made in the discussions:

- IT stimulates and improves the learning process (it gives it an element of play activity); it can be particularly useful for students, because it allows them to study on their own and manage their own learning process;
- the role of the teachers changes when the training is based on IT; they must in future help their students to find information - and not memorise texts. For that, teachers have to acquire new skills. From this flows the following recommendation: it is advisable to motivate teachers to acquire new skills and to develop training to "train the trainers".

The report as well as the conclusions of the seminar will be available during the summer of 1998. The report will be translated into English, French and German.

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Brussels: Tourism and the transition to the euro



The introduction of the euro... What will the effects be on tourism and how to prepare the sector? To reply to this question the European Commission has set up a working group made up of representatives from the tourism sector, the banking sector, the principal companies which issue bank money as well as the relevant national administrative services of the Member States. Statement of the position at the half-way stage...

The context is favourable for the introduction of the euro in tourism. The work of the European Commission in this area underscores this point. The work rests on a double hypothesis:

- tourism is the sector which will benefit the most, and the quickest, from the introduction of the euro. Several arguments support this hypothesis: the sector is already widely internationalised (1/3 of exports) and is used to managing many currencies; the euro will also permit the elimination of exchange commission in the framework of intra-European tourism (within the euro-zone) and facilitate the circulation of visitors coming from third countries through the decrease in the number of currencies required for visiting euro-zone countries; lastly, tourism is the sector where payment using bank money (plastic cards, travellers cheques, Eurocheques...) is the most widespread. This will facilitate an early swing to the euro by enterprises in the tourism sector.
- tourism is a privileged field for the introduction of the euro.

Every year, 22.1% of Europeans travel within the European Union. A large proportion of the European public is therefore likely to have its first contact with the new single currency on the occasion of their holidays, an ideal moment of relaxation to familiarise themselves with the euro from 1999 on. It appears to be more and more probable that a strong demand for tourist services in euros will spring up from 1999 - and this is more likely since certain large enterprises have announced their intention to pay their employees in euros from 1999 and the banking sector has widely declared itself ready to offer its clients instruments of payment in euros from 1999.

The objective given to the working group by the Commission is therefore:

- to prepare enterprises for the euro by putting in place synergies between all the participants in the field of tourist activity;
- to allow the tourism sector to determine strategies for the introduction of the euro.

The group has already met three times and has examined the stakes for the issuing and receiving industries (contracts with tourist destinations, services in euros during the transition period, costs of using and accepting the products of bank monies in euros, double pricing, notably electronic, by cash register terminals, communication and marketing). A final meeting will aim to consolidate the synergies between the various participants which have been brought forward by the work of the group as well as the implementation of pilot activities envisaged in some pre-determined tourist destinations during 1999.

At the end of the meetings of the working group, on 16 October in Brussels, the Commission will organise a seminar on the introduction of the euro into tourist activities. Its objective: to put forward recommendations on best practice with regard to the introduction of the euro.

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Sweden: Help for the craft sector and small enterprises



Following the call for proposals 97/C 117/17 "Assistance for craft and small enterprises", the European Commission has decided to subsidise around twenty programmes. Each pro-



ject can be financed up to a maximum of 50% of its cost. The total of the subsidies amount to 7 million ECU. This action is part of the third multiannual programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union (1997-2000). Two projects were presented in the June issue of EURO-info; here is another one:

"EMBNet - The Ethnic Minority Business Network"

This project aims to encourage the development and expansion of enterprises created by ethnic minorities through the identification and circulation of examples of good practice. The Swedish promoters of the project have partners in five countries, members of the European Union: Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In concrete terms, the project aims to:

- help entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities overcome commercial obstacles and regulatory constraints.
- establish a trans-European and multi-sectorial network of exchange of information and experience in the field of development of enterprises belonging to migrants and people from ethnic minorities.
- promote public-private partnerships, whose objective is to favour the creation of enterprises by migrants and people from ethnic minorities.
- bring the debate on the creation of enterprises by migrants and people from ethnic minorities to the level of the European Union and stimulate awareness of the obstacles that such entrepreneurs have to overcome.

To arrive at its objectives, the project intends to undertake activity with regard to four target groups: the intermediary organisations of ethnic minority enterprises, representatives of the financial sector, national and local authorities.

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Brussels: Local commerce, the centre of social life



How to encourage the development of local commerce in rural areas? This was the theme of the European conference organised by DG XXIII in Brussels on 11 and 12 May 1998. Opportunity for an assessment.

- Context of the discussion: In 1996, the European Commission published a Green Paper¹ which suggested the need to take initiatives in the field of local commerce in disadvantaged rural and urban areas. This reflection was backed up by the reactions of the various commercial partners, both public and private, national and local, which all underlined the importance of commerce in disadvantaged areas. Since then, the Commission has endeavoured to identify the best European practices, to support the action of all the public authorities and the private entities concerned with the matter.
- Commerce is important in disadvantaged rural areas: a shop in a village is a place where people who live in the countryside can buy almost all they need. It is the centre of social life. Furthermore, a village without a local shop very seldom attracts potential entrepreneurs. Finally, additional social costs can result from responding to the needs of local residents who no longer have access to the services that local traders were offering, such as a post office or a café.
- The development of commerce in disadvantaged areas, potential and obstacles: local commerce in disadvantaged areas is a field in which there are prospects for increases in employment. However, many obstacles have to be overcome to develop such activity: access to capital, viability of the project, need for training, local groupings which do not share a pro-active attitude towards projects of this nature, etc.. In order to face up to these obstacles, the Commission recommends the development of innovative experiments and the circulation of information about them. Its recommendations are also directed at the national level, because in order to fully develop action at

¹ Green paper: an analysis and reflection document whose purpose is to launch discussion prior to decision making. Green paper on commerce: COM (96) 530 final dated 20/11/1996.

the grass roots, there must be a link-up between the local, national and European levels in both directions. It also recommends that emphasis be laid on themes such as quality, innovation and supply logistics, which have a bearing on the value for money equation. Indeed, the analysis of the trade sector showed that, today, consumers are more sensitive to quality in their assessment of value for money.

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The Euro Info Centres are pursuing the awareness campaign for SMEs on health and safety at work



In 1997, the European Commission (Directorate General for Social Affairs, DG V, in collaboration with Directorate General XXIII) had entrusted the Euro Info Centre network with a vast campaign of public awareness for European SMEs with regard to the concepts of safety, health and hygiene at work.

As many as 100 Euro Info Centres, selected on account of their expertise and knowledgeability in that field, have organised 150 awareness actions throughout the Union from September 1997 to July 1998

Directorate General V, satisfied with the initial actions undertaken by the Euro Info Centre network, has decided to renew the operation to heighten the awareness of an even larger number of enterprises. From July 1998 onwards, 47 events will take place in regions that have not as yet been covered.

Organised within model enterprises in the form of open days, these events allow enterprises to attend demonstrations of good practice in health, safety and hygiene (HS) at work and to obtain practical guidance from specialists.

This campaign is in line with the recommendations of the BEST report which foresees that "regulations in the fields of health and safety deserve particular attention on account of their impact on SMEs".

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Italy: Public sector, private sector and associations and foundations, the conditions for partnership



"The co-financing between the private sector, the public sector and the associations". This was the theme of the conference organised on 15 and 16 May 1998 in Rome (Italy) by the ACLI association (Associazione Cattolica Lavoratori Italiani), in partnership with other Italian associations and foundations and with the support of the European Commission.

The work structured in plenary sessions and workshops gave rise to discussion not only on the subject of the conference but also on all the questions pertaining to Cooperatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations (CMAF). In particular, participants discussed:

- the difficulty of access to community programmes managed by the Member States of the European Union (EU) or by agencies financed by the EU (lack of information, excessive centralisation, non-recognition of certain structures at local or regional level);
- the necessity for increased collaboration between the CMAFs. In this respect, the representative of the Italian

Minister of Social Affairs favourably welcomed the idea of creating social economy agencies;

- the importance of acknowledging the role played by the social economy in the market and in society. Most of the participants also agreed on the necessity to defend the idea of a single and united social economy.

The conference also emphasised the fact that the situation of the social economy in Italy is markedly more advanced than in most of the 15 States of the European Union. Indeed,

- CMAFs have a legal status and laws are in preparation (for example concerning the foundations);
- social cooperatives are being created and are developing more and more. They are an "innovation" that should be transposed to other Member States;
- new cooperatives and structures are also being created.

France: Associations and foundations participate in the construction of Europe



How to enable the associations and foundations to be first rank participants in the construction of Europe? This question was debated for two days, on 25 and 26 May 1998, in Paris (France), by representatives of CMAF in France and other countries of the European Community as well as journalists and personalities from the political, trade union and university fields.

This conference was organised by the National Liaison Committee for the activities of mutual societies, cooperatives and associations, under the patronage of the President of the French Republic and his Prime Minister and with the support of the European Commission. The three objectives of the programme:

- to help associations and foundations become better acquainted with the European paths of development;
- to obtain their opinions on European policies to be implemented;
- to encourage their involvement at a European level in partnership with mutual societies and cooperatives.

In order to fulfil these objectives, the discussion focused mainly on the following themes: partnership, complemen-

tarity between the families (CMAF), new forms of employment, access to funding and to community programmes, as well as the role of the associations and foundations in the construction of Europe.

It should be noted that this conference and the one organised in Italy (see previous article), are part of the implementation plan of the Communication of the Commission "The promotion of the role of associations and foundations in Europe". These events took place in accordance with the viewpoints of the 6th European Conference on Social Economy which took place in Birmingham (Great Britain) from 3 to 5 June 1998. This event will be the subject of an article in the September issue of EURO-info.

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Greece: The OECD is giving attention to the future of SMEs

The OECD working group on SMEs held its 10th biennial session in Athens from 26 to 28 April 1998. On the programme: the future working framework for the exchange of best practice, SMEs and electronic commerce and the identification of SMEs with strong growth.

- The exchange of best practice should be improved. In order to achieve this goal, the OECD is developing a guide for presenting best practice in a structured manner. Furthermore, the structure of the biennial publication of the working group is to be changed. In future it will include, in particular, an overall view of the political trends with regard to SMEs, profiles of countries, presentations of best practice, assessments of programmes as well as statistical indicators.
- The participation of SMEs in electronic commerce must be increased. In order to contribute to this, the working group on SMEs will draw up a document on electronic commerce for the ministerial conference of the OECD, which is to take place from 7 to 9 October 1998, in Ottawa. This text will examine the obstacles to an increased participation of SMEs, and will describe the

activities of governments and the means to encourage them to support an increased participation of SMEs in electronic commerce.

- The SMEs with strong growth should be identified. Research studies carried out in several countries of the European Union indicate that such SMEs are to be found in all sectors of activity, but that they are more frequent in sectors that are in expansion. The growth of an enterprise seems to be linked to certain traits: most of the SMEs with potential for fast growth are involved with export and are open to the idea of being integrated into networks or cooperation structures. Organisation also plays a major role.
- The situation in Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC). The OECD session was supplemented by a seminar on business opportunities in the CEEC. Both events showed the great interest of the CEEC in benefiting from exchanges with regard to SME policies and best practice.

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Recently published

- "Capital investment: the key to the creation of employment in the European Union", Communication of the European Commission, April 1998 - sec/98/552. This document is available in French and in English on the EUROPA server of the EC at the following address

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg02/document/misc/mis-len.htm>

This document is also available on paper in the 11 official languages of the European Union, at the following addresses.

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Interprise meetings

- **Interprise Aqua-Partners**
1-2 October 1998 in Piraeus (Greece)
Europartners Ltd.
Contact: Alexis Caniaris
Tel. + 30 1 92 21 254 Fax. + 30 1 92 21 589
Participating countries: United Kingdom, Norway
Sector of activity: Aquaculture
- **Interprise International Health Care**
5-6 October 1998 in Stockholm (Sweden)
Business Area Stockholm
Contact: Ylva Hultam
Tel. + 46 8 785 80 65 Fax. + 46 8 651 76 33
Participating countries: Germany, Austria, Italy, Belgium
Sector of activity: Health

- **Interprise Medical and Electronics**
12-13 October 1998 in Durham (United Kingdom)
Durham County Council
Contact: Frankish
Tel. + 44 0191 383 43 73 Fax. + 44 0191 383 36 57
Participating countries: Finland, Germany, Netherlands
Sector: Medical and electronic equipment

- **Interprise Iberscan 98**
22-23 October 1998 in Toledo (Spain)
C.C.P de Toledo
Contact: Javier Diaz Herranz
Tel. + 34 925 28 01 12 Fax. + 34 925 28 00 07
Participating countries: Sweden, Denmark, Norway
Sector: Leather goods

«ERRATUM»

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Portugal		0505.32.96.30
Finland		0800.11.32.41
Sweden		020.93.10.10
United Kingdom		0800.78.36.553
Iceland	00 800	0800.11.22
Norway	00 800	0800.11.22



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