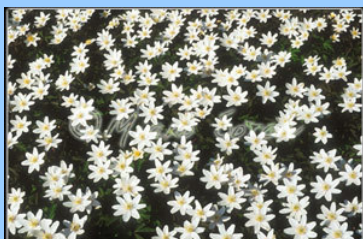


NEWSLETTER

2006 | APRIL | 01

Editorial - by Mr. Mattia Crosetto



Dear Readers,

Usually, April in Brussels is essentially a month of rest after the long Belgian winter. People are concentrated much more on their children's Eastern holidays and summer plans than on their current professional dossiers.

This year represents an exception.

The European Agenda both for the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions is full of appointments and meetings, for their main part linked to the approval of the EU common budget.

The European Commission has started working to define the structure of the future support Programme for Research and Innovation – the so-called VII Framework Programme – that has to be ready for the beginning of the summertime.

The Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is preparing the next plenary session, to be held at the end of April, including the audition of Mr. Vladimír Špidla, Member of the European Commission and responsible for employment and social affairs. The debate announces interesting, as it will offer an overview of the EESC responsibilities, ranging from economics and trade to agriculture and social issues. The event will be attended by stakeholders coming not only from the EU, but from countries across the whole world.

Even more activities are then scheduled for the following month of May.

As always, we will get you informed about the results of all these events.

As for myself, I would like to wish you a nice Eastern time.

Mattia Crosetto

Zlín Region in Brussels

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Mr. Franco Frattini, Vice-President of the European Commission, launches the competition « The European Union and the Rights of the Child »



The right to protection and care, the right to freely express their views, the right to have their best interests taken into consideration at all times, the right to maintain direct contact with both their parents... all these rights enjoyed by children in the EU are specified in Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

“The European Union and the Rights of the Child”.

This is the title of a competition launched by Franco Frattini, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, inviting European children and teenagers from 10 to 18 years of age to create a poster on children's rights within the Union.

The competition aims at increasing awareness among European younger citizens about EU actions in this field. After a first selection at the national level and a prize-giving ceremony organised in each EU country in early May 2006, winning teams of the first national prizes will be invited in Brussels for a European prize-giving ceremony.

The best works will become part of future European campaigns for promoting children's rights. The young people who will decide to partake in the competition are asked to develop a poster comprising a logo and illustrating the idea of protecting, respecting and promoting children's rights within the European Union. Participants will be divided into two age groups (10-14 years and 15-18 years) and will have to form teams of at least four youngsters.

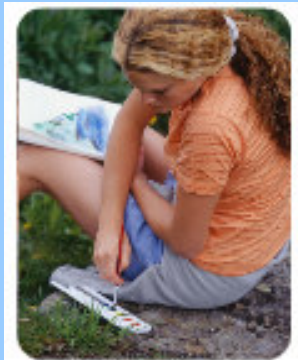
The works will be first selected at the national level and the first three teams will be invited to a prize-giving ceremony organised in each EU country in early May.

The winners of the first national prizes will then be invited to participate in a day-long guided tour in Brussels during the month on the 18th of May, focusing on the themes of the European Union and justice, freedom and security, as well as a lunch debate with Vice-President Frattini and an awards ceremony chaired by him.

The best posters will be presented on the web sites of Commission Representation Offices in the EU countries and on Europa. They will be also employed in future European campaigns for promoting children's rights.

Further information is available at the following Internet addresses:
www.euromladez.com

or on the
European Commission DG Justice and Home Affairs website:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/



The Commission will launch a strategy of promotion and protection of children's rights in all Commission's internal and external policies in June 2006. **"Rights are effective only when people are aware of them, assert them and defend them"** affirmed Vice-President Frattini, adding: **"My hope is that young people will enjoy working in teams on this subject, while becoming aware of what their rights are"**.

This document aims at launching a strategy of promotion and protection of children's rights in all Commission's internal and external policies. It is based on the current international instruments already in place such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Czech aid scheme for combined transport is making progress. A partial approval has arrived from the European Commission.



The **European Commission** has partly authorised a Czech aid scheme which intends to encourage the development of combined transport through incentives for the construction, extension and modernisation of existing combined transport terminals.

At the same time, it has also opened a formal investigation procedure regarding the compatibility of aids for the purchase of certain types of wagons with EU rules.

The aim of the scheme is to develop **combined transport** in order to achieve a traffic shift from freight road transport to other modes of transport. The scheme aims to increase the use of unaccompanied combined transport by improving its competitiveness.

However the Commission has decided to start a **formal investigation** procedure regarding the compatibility of the aid for the purchase of certain types of wagons for the use of combined transport with EU rules. The Commission has a cautious policy regarding the possibility of authorising **state aid to rolling stocks**. In the field of combined transport it has to be confirmed that such wagons can only be used for combined transport operations and not for normal railway transport.

The Commission has found the rest of the scheme compatible with EU rules on state aid.

Working in the EU Institutions Recruitment from the 10 new member states : state of play and way forward

Ahead of the second anniversary of the enlargement to the 10 new Member States, the report submitted today by Vice-President Siim Kallas to the College on the recruitment of EUR-10 nationals in the Commission provides a snap-shot of the progress achieved compared to last year.

Overall recruitment results are so far excellent with **1.627 citizens** from the ten new Member States recruited in the EU Institutions on **January 15th 2006**.

At middle management level, progress is satisfactory given the fact that the list of laureates was made available quite late in 2005. For senior management positions, the Commission is confident that it will succeed in recruiting at least **one Director-General** or Deputy Director-General **per Member State** by **mid-2007**. Significant challenges still remain in recruitment efforts and in competition planning for all levels.

In order to progressively build up the recruitment of EUR-10 nationals, the Commission set an overall EUR-10 indicative recruitment target over a 7-year transitional period (2004-2010) of a total of **3.441** establishments posts (officials and temporary staff), as well as indicative levels for the relative share of each new Member State.

At management level, the indicative recruitment target for the ten new Member States was set at **189 middle management** and **41 Director/Principal adviser** positions. At Director-General or Deputy-Director General level, the Commission set itself the target to recruit one official from each of the new Member States to obtain geographical balance. As the new resources become gradually available, the overall target of 3.441 posts is broken down by budgetary year.

The aim is, at the end of the transition period, to have an appropriate balance of staff from each of the new Member States across all grades and all categories. The main factor in determining recruitments is, and must be, individual merit. However, where the number of officials recruited from a particular Member State stays permanently too low, corrective action will be taken.

In more details

As of 15 January 2006, **1.627 nationals** from the new Member States have been recruited by the European Commission. This goes beyond the ambitious recruitment target set for 2004-2005 (1.529), and compares well with the target of 2.180 to be reached for 2004-2006.

At Director-General and Deputy Director-General level, 6 nomination decisions have so far been made, and five posts of Deputy Directors-General have been published following the mobility package adopted by the Commission last November.

In middle management positions, the Commission has so far recruited **34% of the expected target** of 134 recruitments for 2004-2006 and will keep up this pace of recruitments for 2006, even though the late availability of reserve lists produced by the internal administration and the lower than expected number of laureates in both rounds of competition does not make the target set easy to reach.

At **Heads of Representation** levels, **7 out of the 10** posts have been filled in the new Member States, the remaining three (**CZ, LV, LT**) shall be filled by mid-2006.

In the context of Director and Principal Adviser recruitments, although the efforts by the Commission services were sustained, with more than 2.900 applications examined and more than 400 interviews held, efforts will have to be maintained in order to meet overall indicative recruitment targets in mid-2007.

So far, 22 appointments were finalized out of the formally established target of 41.



EU competition policy: news about the discipline of State aids Proposal to extend scope of 'de minimis' rule

In its **State Aid Action Plan** published in 2005, the European Commission announced that it would have adapted the "*de minimis*" rule according to the "evolution of the economy".

This adaptation has to be realised within the confines of the case-law of the European Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance, which allow the Commission only a limited margin of discretion with regard to determining which support measures are to be regarded as prohibited "state aid".

The right time arrived, as at the beginning of April 2006, the Commission announced the approval of its proposal for the amendment of the rule.

The main purpose of the Commission proposal is to increase the ceiling from **€100.000** to **€150.000**, to take account of inflation and GDP growth in the EU since the ceiling was last increased.

The proposal also extends the scope of the "*de minimis*" rule, under certain conditions, to the marketing and processing of agricultural products. The Commission is currently considering, in the light of views expressed in the context of earlier consultations, whether to **include the transport sector** into the scope of the general *de minimis* rule as well.

In line with earlier Commission proposals and, more particularly, the new draft for a block exemption covering certain types of regional aid the scope of the **de minimis rule** will be limited to transparent types of aid for which it is possible to determine in advance the precise aid amount they include. In the case of loans, guarantees, risk capital measures or capital injections, it is often difficult to determine the precise aid amount in advance, since this depends on the risk associated with the transaction. Such types of state aid would therefore only be covered by the *de minimis* rule if the overall value of the transaction concerned does not exceed the new ceiling.

The proposal also clarifies the extent to which Member States may invoke the benefit of "*de minimis*" when confronted with an order of the Commission to recover illegally granted state aid.

Finally, the Commission proposal also clarifies the applicable monitoring requirements. For instance, in order to facilitate monitoring by Member States, the three year period will no longer be determined by reference to calendar years, but on the basis of the fiscal years applicable in each Member State.



To know more about the EU competition policy: general principals goals and procedures in the field of State aids

State aid policy is an important part of EU competition policy. State aid control comes from the need to maintain a level playing field for all undertakings active in the Single European Market, irrespective of the Member State in which they are established, and to avoid Member States getting locked into a contest where they try to outbid each other to attract investment. Preserving competitive markets is the best way for European citizens to get the products they want at low prices, and to foster innovation and growth in the EU.

The **EC Treaty (Article 87)** prohibits any aid granted by a Member State or through state resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain firms or the production of certain goods in so far as this affects trade between Member States.

A number of exceptions are however allowed. The Commission has the exclusive power to declare state aid compatible with the Treaty, provided it fulfils clearly defined objectives of common interest and does not distort intra-EU competition and trade to an extent contrary to the common interest.

The "*de minimis*" policy was initiated by the Commission in 1992, with special focus on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The current "*de minimis*" rule, laid down in Commission Regulation No 69/2001, provides that subsidies of an amount smaller than €100,000 granted to an undertaking over a period of 3 years do not constitute "State Aid" within the meaning of the EC Treaty's ban on aid liable to distort competition (Article 87).

Subsidies below that ceiling are presumed to have only negligible effects on competition and trade between Member States. Therefore such measures do not need to be notified to the Commission for approval. Regulation 69/2001 does not apply to a number of sectors of the industry, including most prominently, the agricultural sector and the transport sector.

The Commission will, in line with Council Regulation (EC) n° 994/98, convene an Advisory Committee two months after the date of adoption of this proposal, to give Member States the opportunity to make their views known. In light of these comments, the Commission can decide to adapt its proposal. This revised proposal will then be published in the Official Journal of the European Union for comments by all interested parties. An accordingly revised proposal will be discussed again with the Member States in a second Advisory Committee, following which the Regulation will be adopted by the Commission. This is expected to happen before the end of the year (the current Regulation (Commission Regulation n° 69/2001) expires end of December 2006).

The current Commission proposal will also be published on the website of the Commission at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/state_aid/others/action_plan/

Internal market, citizens' rights and free movements Agreement reached on European driving licence



"The European driving licence is of vital importance for road safety and for the fight against fraud," declared Jacques Barrot Vice-President of the Commission in charge of Transport.

"It will make travel around Europe easier and without bureaucratic difficulties."

Following the political agreement reached on 27 March by the Council of the European Union, **European driving licences** are to be gradually introduced from 2013 onwards.

One **credit-card style licence** will replace the existing models in circulation, of which there are over 110.

It will clearly indicate which vehicle a person is entitled to drive. The new driving licence will introduce major changes for **motorcyclists** with a view to curb the rising motorbike accidents. All motorcyclists, including those riding under 50cc motorbikes will now have to sit a theory test and the rules of progressive access will be reinforced. The minimum age to get a motorbike licence without prior experience will be **24** instead of **21**.

The new document, available with or without a microchip, will help to combat driving licence fraud and the phenomenon of '**driving licence tourism**.' This phenomenon describes people who, having had to hand in their driving licence after a serious offence, have gone to another country to get a new one. The validity of the European driving licence will normally be limited to ten years. However, Member States will have the possibility of raising this limit to 15 years. Driving licences for trucks and buses will only be valid for five years. It will be up to Member States to decide whether or not they introduce medical checks when driving licences are renewed.

Following the Council's political agreement, the formal adoption of the Directive by the European Parliament will be effective later **this year** in a second reading. Thus the Directive will enter into force **by the end of 2006** and be applicable at the end of **2012**, at the latest.

It is only at this stage that young drivers, or those whose driving licence has been stolen, will be issued automatically with a European driving licence. Each Member State will have 26 years to replace all current driving licences, which means that in **2032** the European driving licence will be the only valid driving licence.

Interreg III Legacy and the future of interregional cooperation discussed in Brussels



Zlin Region in Brussels, representing the Zlin Region took part to the "Interreg III Legacy: Building future interregional cooperation on projects networking" seminar on 5th April 2006. With the support of the Committee of the Regions and coinciding with the COTER commission meeting, the **Valencian Regional Office in Brussels and ANCI-Ideali** (Italian National Association of Italian Municipalities) have launched this initiative aiming at raising awareness on how Interreg III projects promote territorial cohesion through interregional cooperation.

During the morning session representatives of outstanding Interreg III initiatives presented their know-how, experience in interregional cooperation and their main results. Following this introduction, the Interreg III Managing Authorities evaluated the cooperation results and their contributions for the forthcoming cooperation instruments. The afternoon session added a political value to the debate by providing policy recommendations for the next programming period.

The members of the Committee of the Regions COTER, commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy, were involved in the discussion, together with representatives of the Regional Policy Directorate General of the European Commission and the Austrian Presidency, as well as local and regional authorities involved in Interreg III projects.

Calls' Agenda

Education and Culture	Deadline	Link
Media Distribution - Support for the transnational distribution of European films — the 'automatic' scheme	30.04.2006	OJ C329
MEDIA Distribution -Support for the transnational distribution of European films and audiovisual works on video(VHS and DVD)	15.04.2006	OJ C329
MEDIA Broadcasting – Support for the television broadcasting of European audiovisual works	Various	OJ C329
Promotion of active European Citizenship — Support to town twinning actions citizens' meetings 2006	03.04.2006 01.06.2006	OJ C 230
Exchange of good practice in youth work between Europe and Africa, the Caribbean, Pacific (ACP), Asia, Latin America — YOUTH programme — Action 5.1.2. Support measures with Partner Countries	30.06.2006	OJ C 320
Call for proposals on general activities of observation, analysis and innovation, 2006	18.04.2006	OJ C 032
Environment	Deadline	Link
Information Society	Deadline	Link
Call for Proposals — Implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works	10.05.2006	OJ C 159
Call for proposals — Media Plus — Support for television broadcasting of European audiovisual works	16.06.2006 03.11.2006	OJ C 329
Call for proposals — Media Plus — Support for the transnational distribution of European films and the networking of distributors — the selective scheme	Various	OJ C 329
Call for proposals — Media Plus — Support for the transnational distribution of European films — the automatic scheme	30.04.2006	OJ C 329
Call for proposals — Media Plus — Support for the transnational distribution of European films and audiovisual works on video (VHS and DVD)	15.04.2006	OJ C 329
Call for proposals — eTEN 2006/1	19.05.2006	OJ C 040
Research & Development	Deadline	Link
Call for proposals for indirect RTD actions under the specific programme: 'Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area' - Activity: thematic priority area: information society technologies	25.04.2006	OJ C325
Call for proposals: Structuring the European Research Area — Science and Society: René Descartes Prizes.	04.05.2006	OJ C 322
Call for proposals: Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area — Activity: thematic priority area: information society technologies.	24.04.2006	OJ C 325
Call for proposals: Structuring the European Research Area	11.04.2006	OJ C 035
Call for proposals: Structuring the European Research Area	17.05.2006	OJ C 012
New calls		

Events of the Month

Seminars	Conferences	Debates
24.04 Bxl	20.04 Bxl	26.04 Bxl
		
European Parliament Committee for Constitutional Affairs Forum of the Civil Society	Economic and Social Committee Plenary session with Mr. Vladimír Špidla, Member of the EC	Robert Gordon University EuroConference Competitiveness and Communication EU Associations' role

Job Vacancies

European Commission	<p>The EC Directorate General for Competition has published a vacancy for a Chief Competition Economist to be hired in Brussels. The post is for a temporary agent.</p> <p>See at: OJC 2006 078A</p>
EU Medicines Agency	<p>The EU Agency for Medicines (London), responsible for coordinating the evaluation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use in the European Union, is searching for technicians and scientific administrators.</p> <p>Deadline: 19 May 2006</p> <p>See at : OJC 2006 084A</p>

Edition closed in Brussels on April 12th, 2006

What's on in the Next Number



- The Zlin Region in Brussels is preparing the new events for the Spring! We'll keep you informed in our next editions.

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