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Introduction

Enterprise Europe NI Launch

Just a reminder that we are formally launching Enterprise Europe NI on Thursday 22nd May at the BBC Blackstaff Studios in Belfast. The event will be a good opportunity to come along and hear about the services and support measures available from the new network, which has brought together two existing European networks – the Euro Info Centre and the Innovation Relay Centre.

Doug Richard, the entrepreneur and former Dragon's Den panellist, will present the keynote address on "Partnerships, Innovation and Europe" and there will be opportunities for networking with local SMEs, stakeholders and Enterprise Europe NI staff during registration and over lunch.

The launch starts at 10:00 and ends at 12:00 with lunch. If you haven't yet registered for this morning event please do so at www.investni.com/registration before 5:00 pm Wednesday 21st May.

FEEDBACK

We welcome your feedback, please email your comments to:

Eimear.dekoninck@investni.com



EVENTS

Innovation Voucher Launch

The Innovation Voucher Initiative is new to Northern Ireland and is jointly managed by Enterprise Ireland and Invest NI. A launch event will be held in the NI Science Park on Tuesday 27th May from 10:00-12:30.

The initiative aims to help Northern Ireland registered small companies establish links with the regions Knowledge Providers (universities, colleges and publicly funded research bodies in NI/ROI) to resolve knowledge problems that are holding the business back. It is open to all registered small enterprises in Northern Ireland (companies with fewer than 50 employees and less than €10 Million annual turnover) who can use knowledge providers to introduce solve knowledge problems in their business.

The vouchers can be used for many aspects of innovation within the current business environment such as the development of new business models, the development of new service delivery or customer interfaces, the development of new products and services, training in innovation management or innovation/ technology audits.

For more information on the Innovation Voucher Initiative or the launch event contact Kieran McGuinness on Tel: 028 9069 8818. You can register for the event at should register at www.investni.com/registration.

NEWS

EU Treaty Referendum

The Irish government has launched its campaign in favour of the EU treaty in advance of the referendum on the subject which has been formally confirmed for the 12 June 2008. Brian Cowan, the new Prime Minister, faces the first challenge of his leadership and recently said on the matter " It would be a very backward step to resign from the strategic political positioning we have established in 35 years of (EU) membership. It would have very serious implications."

Ireland is the only EU Member State to have a referendum on the new treaty and the government is coming under enormous pressure to secure a "yes" vote, with all 27 countries needed to ratify the document for it to come into force.

The most recent poll put the "yes" camp in front with 38%, the "no" side on 28 % and "don't knows" at 34% but much will depend on voter turnout among the 3-million-strong electorate. A low turn-out could result in a "no" vote, they say, while a higher turnout is set to work more in favour of the "yes" camp..

Source: EU Observer

Food Price Rises to Hit EU Farming Review

EU farm ministers are meeting in Brussels this week for an emergency debate on the sharp rise in food and agriculture product prices on global markets, just a day before the European Commission unveils proposals for a review of the bloc's agrosector. The Slovenian EU presidency put the food prices issue on the

ministers' agenda "with a view to finding a solution to mitigate the adverse effects of such market price trends,"

Despite a minor slowdown of the food price hikes, they still remain at historically high levels with wheat up 84% over one year, maize 21%, and butter 21%, according to media reports.

It is expected that the ministers will express a demand that the farm reform package - which EU agriculture commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel will present to MEPs in Strasbourg later in the week - includes measures aimed at curbing the trend. According to a draft proposal of the Common Agriculture Policy's (CAP) health check the EU executive is to suggest a phasing out of milk quotas and scrapping the rules on keeping land fallow in a bid to encourage more production.

Experts argue that a boost in demand from fast-growing economies such as China and India is one of the crucial factors causing the current food price increases.

The EU's farm policy meanwhile limits production in order to prevent paying for large amounts of agricultural products which would not be sold. But the current debate has strengthened the camp of CAP supporters, with both France and Germany seizing the moment to speak out against cuts in farm subsidies which were originally envisaged for both the partial health check and a more complex reform of the bloc's budget.

The farm policy issue is set to dominate the agenda of the forthcoming French presidency - starting on 1 July - with Britain seen as the key critic of any plans to water down the initiatives aimed at modernizing Europe's future spending in this area. French farmers remain the biggest beneficiaries of the EU's direct payments, which UK finance minister Alistair Darling recently argued should be ended, along with "all elements of the CAP that are designed to keep EU agriculture prices above world market levels". For its part, Germany - home to many large farm estates in the eastern part of the country - has been opposing Brussels' suggestion to cap subsidies for the largest farmers.

Source: EU Observer

Slovakia Confirmed as Ready for the Euro

Slovakia has received formal confirmation that it is ready to join the euro on 1 January 2009, despite the concerns of the European Central Bank about the forthcoming price stability performance of the country.

"The report finds that Slovakia has achieved a 'high degree of sustainable convergence' and therefore it is considered ready to adopt the euro in 2009," said the European Commission.

It stated that "the budget deficit in Slovakia has seen a credible and sustainable reduction to below 3 percent of GDP," and its average inflation rate "is well below the reference value, and it is likely to remain below the reference value in the months ahead, albeit with a narrowing margin." The levels of inflation in Slovakia were previously regarded as the most sensitive area of the Slovak candidacy, with Brussels urging Bratislava until the last minute to make more lasting cuts in the budgetary deficit to prevent future inflation hikes.

If all goes according to plan Slovakia would join the Eurozone as the bloc celebrates the 10th anniversary of the introduction of the single currency in 11 states in 1999, as its 16th Member State.

Source: EU Observer

BUSINESS

.eu Domain Celebrates 2nd Birthday in World Top Ten

The European .eu web domain has picked up 2.8 million customers in its first two years of existence and ranks in the global cyber top ten, the European Commission said recently. However 2007's .eu growth of some 300,000 registrations was far lower than the big-bang opening in April 2006 when over 2.5 million users were registered in the first year.

It now ranks fourth among European Internet addresses and ninth worldwide, with plenty of ground to make up on .com which had 71.7 million registrations by the end of last year. "Early adopters of .eu understood its value, and have grasped the opportunity to promote their own pan-European outlook," said EU Media Commissioner Viviane Reding in a statement. "The stronger Europe's single market for telecommunications grows, the more we ought to ensure that .eu becomes more visible, secure and affordable," she added.

In Europe the .eu tag still lags behind Germany's .de and Britain's .uk and is battling with the Netherlands' .nl for third place. In terms of total number of .eu registrations per country of origin, Germany continues to lead with 31.4% followed by the Netherlands (13.4%), Britain (13.3%) and France (7.3%). In terms of growth, however, there is a different picture. With overall growth at 11% in 2007, the number of registrations for .eu from Poland increased by 48.6%, followed by Lithuania (48.4%) and Finland (39.9%).

Source: EU Business

LEGISLATION

EU Go-ahead for Air Quality Directive

The legal text of the EU's air quality directive was adopted at the April Council meeting in Luxembourg, following agreement with the European Parliament.

The directive merges a number of EU pollution laws into a single directive on air quality, and foresees a limit of 25 µg/m³ for the average concentration of dust particles with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometers (PM_{2.5}). This figure is fixed as a target value to be attained by member states by 1 January 2010; it will become a binding cap from 2015.

PM_{2.5}, which are emitted by a wide range of sources (such as diesel vehicles, industrial facilities and residential fire places) have a significant negative impact on human health as they are small enough to be inhaled deeply in the lungs. They can cause serious health problems and in particular lung-related illnesses, including asthma, emphysema and bronchitis. Recent studies have shown that PM_{2.5} in the air contribute to the premature death of 350,000 people across the European Union every year.

The new directive will simplify current European legislation on ambient air quality by merging five separate texts (four directives and a Council decision) into a single legal act. This will reduce the volume of current legal texts by 50 %.

While existing standards for emissions of harmful air pollutants will be maintained, EU Member States will be granted more flexibility in meeting some limit values, especially for coarse particulate matter (PM10) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2). They will be allowed to postpone the deadline for compliance in zones and agglomerations where they encounter special difficulties (for example adverse climatic conditions or trans-boundary pollution). The new rules are expected to enter into force by the middle of this year.

Source: EU Business

Public Consultation on Medical Devices

The European Commission has recently launched a public consultation in a bid to modernise and simplify the legislation on medical devices. Europe represents 33 % of a global medical device market of about €187 billion, with a growth rate of roughly 5% - 6%. The medical device sector represents about 6% of healthcare spending in Europe and employs approximately 435,000 people in Europe spread over more than 11,000 medical device businesses of which more than 80% are SMEs.

The safety of medical devices in Europe is guarded by a series of medical devices directives which also contributed to free trade, innovation and competitiveness in the sector throughout Europe. However, in recent years a number of factors have come into play meaning that existing legislation needs to be revisited as the current system doesn't always offer a uniform level of protection of public health in the European Union. And also, the legal framework has been criticised as being too fragmented and difficult to follow and fraught with national variation. This situation has motivated the Commission to consider a revision of the legal framework in order to meet the growing expectations from European citizens.

Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen, responsible for Enterprise and Industry policies, said: "We stick by our promise to reduce and simplify EU laws on medical devices as well as to protect public health to the greatest degree possible. Now we need the stakeholders' view on how to best ensure the continued safety for our citizens into the future while at the same time maintaining the right conditions for innovation and competitiveness in the medical device industry."

Based on the New Approach, rules relating to the safety and performance of medical devices were harmonised in the EU in the nineties, beginning in 1990 with Directive 90/385/EEC on active implantable medical devices and later followed in 1993 by Directive 93/42/EEC concerning medical devices and finally, in 1998, by Directive 98/79/EC on in vitro diagnostic medical devices. These three legal texts form the core legal framework. Their aim is to ensure the functioning of the internal market and a high level of protection of human health and safety. They have been supplemented over time by six modifying or implementing Directives, including the last technical revision brought about by Directive 2007/47/EC.

Therefore, the Commission seeks the views of stakeholders on a number of aspects including:

- Are there medical devices that lie outside the legal scope and that need to be brought in?
- Should cosmetic implants and the like be regulated at the EU level?
- How can we avoid different levels of assessment being applied in the EU?
- How can we ensure that the appropriate expertise is used in the evaluation of the most critical and innovative medical devices?
- How do we better ensure that when an adverse incident happens there is swift coordinated action across the EU to protect citizens?
- What suggestions can be made to make the legislation more straightforward and readily understandable?

For further information see below:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/medical_devices/consult_recast_2008_en.htm

Source: Enterprise & Industry Online

FAQs

What is the “Small Business Act for Europe”?

Over the last few years Europe's 23 million SMEs have become the centre of interest at EU level and in the Member States. But the European Commission recognises that more can and needs to be done for SMEs as a vibrant SME sector is crucial for the economic health of Europe.

The Commission has promised to look at all the opportunities and has called this commitment a “Small Business Act for Europe” whose main aim will be to set principles and concrete measures to improve the framework conditions for European SMEs, while taking full account of their diversity. This initiative was welcomed by the December 2007 European Council, and the Commission's objective is to come up with a proposal by June 2008, following public consultation to stimulate open debate with all stakeholders on developing the “Small Business Act for Europe.

Consultation was intended to ensure that all remaining obstacles to EU SMEs' prosperity, and solutions to tackle them, are identified. More than 500 contributions were received as well as a number of position papers from SME stakeholders, national and regional administrations.

The results of the consultation are available at this link:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/sba_en.htm

Source: Europa



USEFUL WEBSITES

DG Enterprise & Industry

DG Enterprise & Industry has responsibility for many important policy areas – competitiveness, innovation, business regulations and standardisation amongst others.

Their website also has good industry specific information which covers a variety of sectors including aerospace, ICT, food industry, construction and biotechnology.

In order to ensure that rules and regulatory proposals keep pace with reality of rapid change and better respond to businesses' and citizens' needs, the European Commission dialogues with all stakeholders when evaluating existing EU policies or preparing new initiatives. This dialogue improves transparency as well as regulatory effectiveness and efficiency, which fosters economic dynamism, social security, consumer and environment protection. The Enterprise Directorate-General wants to contribute to a reinforced culture of external consultations and dialogue in the EU – details on all current consultations can be found on the website.

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/index_en.htm

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Market research plays an important part in keeping your business up-to-date with trends and developments in your industry. Within the Invest NI Information Centre there are a wide range of publications covering market research, company data, legislation, statistics and general business information. Recent new publications of interest are highlighted. Each report provides detailed information on market trends and size; major players in the sector and forecasts.

CONSTRUCTION

Access Control, KEYNOTE, April 2008

Bricks & Tiles, KEYNOTE, April 2008

UK Housing, SNAPDATA, 2008

ENERGY

Gas Supply and Distribution UK, MINTEL April 2008

FOOD AND DRINK

Catering Equipment (Industrial report) ,MINTEL, April2008

Cooking Sauces & Food Seasonings, KEYNOTE, April 2008

Food & Drink Packaging (Industrial Report), MINTEL April 2008

UK Confectionery, SNAPDATA, 2008

Public Houses, KEYNOTE, April 2008

Catering Equipment, KEYNOTE, April 2008



FINANCE

Independent Financial Advisers, KEYNOTE, April 2008

UK Consumer Borrowing, SNAPDATA, 2008

UK Debit Cards, SNAPDATA, 2008

HEALTHCARE

Alternative Healthcare, KEYNOTE, April 2008

ICT

UK Application Software, SNAPDATA, 2008.

UK PCs, SNAPDATA, 2008

PACKAGING

Glass Packaging UK, MINTEL, April 2008.

Light Metal Packaging UK, MINTEL April 2008.

Plastic Packaging, UK, MINTEL, April 2008

PRINTING

Alternative Healthcare, KEYNOTE, April 2008

RETAILING

Bookselling, KEYNOTE, April 2008

China & Earthenware, KEYNOTE, April 2008

Home Shopping, KEYNOTE, March 2008

Living Room Furniture, UK, MINTEL, April 2008

SPORT

Sports Market, KEYNOTE, April 2008

TRAVEL & TOURISM

Cruise Market, KEYNOTE, April 2008

DIRECTORIES AND OTHER HARD COPY SOURCES

Computing Market Intelligence IT Software 2007 - VNU Business Publications

Computing Market Intelligence IT Services 2007 - VNU Business Publications

Clearing the Hurdles - Women Building High Growth Hurdles - Brush, Candida G.

If you would like to make an appointment to view any of the above publications please contact Linda Orchin, Tel: 028 9069 8128



PARTNER SEARCH

The partner search mechanism run by the Enterprise Europe network is designed to promote and support business, creating an environment in which SMEs can thrive and exploit all the advantages open to them and achieve their objectives in a global market.

Business cooperation is any contract or agreement between partners, based on a common activity and mutual interest. There are many forms of business cooperation:

- Trade intermediary services (agent, distributor, other representative)
- Franchise
- Joint venture
- Merger, exchange of shares, sale, acquisition
- R&D activities
- Production/manufacturing opportunities
- Sub-contracting/outsourcing activities
- Licence agreements

The benefits to companies involved in cooperation with international partners are:

- Creation or expansion of a business
- Facilitation of strategic alliances
- Innovation and increased competitiveness
- Reduction of costs
- Increased efficiency
- Implementation of new technologies
- Penetration of new markets
- Piggybacking on another company's infrastructure

The opportunities we have selected this month are in various market sectors and further information on any of them can be obtained from Enterprise Europe NI – see contact details at the end.

ICT

- 01/ICT/05** German company specialised in developing, distributing and marketing of social networks requires trade intermediaries with experience in new media and internet services.
- 02/ICT/05** German company specialised in the manufacture of secure communications solutions and system engineering is seeking potential value added partners in Europe.
- 03/ICT/05** Portuguese company which provides technical assistance for Samsung offers its services to businesses which require technology support in Portugal.
- 04/ICT/05** Italian company active in the area of wireless communications, in particular the development of RFID and ZigBee technology, wishes to expand into the European market and initially seeks distributors for their products.



MANUFACTURING

- 01/MAN/05 Scottish company seeks partners across Europe to sell their extensive range of wire and cable manufactured products for the telecommunications, offshore, instrumentation and industrial markets.
- 02/MAN/05 French SME involved in the sale and technical maintenance of electronic display systems seeks manufacturers of graphic electronic components using LEDs.
- 03/MAN/05 Bulgarian company working in the field of interior design for home, office and hotels offers its services as a subcontractor.
- 04/MAN/05 UK company specialised in the manufacture of glass paperweights for museums, galleries and gift shops seeks manufacturers and suppliers of glass blanks throughout Europe.
- 05/MAN/05 Lithuanian company specialised in the manufacture of planed wood products – floorboards, panelling, decking, stairs etc - requires trade intermediaries.

SERVICES

- 01/SVS/05 Scottish company which offers consultancy services covering all aspects of retail design and training of retail staff in merchandising standards wishes to build a network of retail clients who require this expertise.

To obtain further information on any of the business partner opportunities listed or general advice on the subject please contact Eimear Dekoninck at Tel: 028 9069 8133 or email: eimear.dekoninck@investni.com