



Euro News

The UK Network of Euro Info Centres
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Questions and Answers

Question:

My UK-based company would like to import products from Malaysia, where do I find the relevant information on importing goods into the UK?

Answer:

Over 70 per cent of Malaysia's exports to the EU enter tariff-free. There are no bilateral preferential trade arrangements between Malaysia and the EU. Malaysia benefits from the EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), which provides tariff preferences to developing countries in general. When importing goods into the UK/EU from non-EU or developing countries it is important to determine the import tariffs and the classification codes of your products. To verify them you can contact HM Revenue and Customs and/or the EU's Export Helpdesk for the applicable import tariffs that you will have to pay when you import products into the UK.

The tariffs that apply will depend largely on the product sector and whether the EU has a preferential trade agreement with the country of origin. In this case there is no agreement. HM Revenue and Customs' classification helpline can assist you with the classification of products and the tariffs and can be contacted at 017 0236 6077. You can also conduct a search yourself on the EU's Export Helpdesk at www.export-help.cec.eu.int or at the EU Taxation and Customs' website TARIC http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/dds/en/tarhome.htm under import tariffs.

On HM Revenue and Customs' website you can find a useful user guide on imports and exports, as well as links to other information agencies that provide information and assistance on international trade matters:

http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pageImport_Home

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More useful information on EU trade relations with third countries can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/search/countries.htm

Question:

My company would like to do business with an Iranian company, are there any restrictions I need to be aware of?

Answer:

On 23 December 2006 the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1737 (2006) on Iran. The resolution introduced financial sanctions against those persons who engage in, directly associate with or provide support for Iran's proliferation of sensitive nuclear activities or the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems. Financial institutions and other bodies and persons in the UK must check whether they maintain any accounts or otherwise hold any funds for people and companies listed in the resolution and, if so, they should freeze the accounts and report the accounts or other funds and amounts frozen to the Bank of England.

Detailed information on the sanctions imposed on certain Iranian persons and companies can be found at www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/news/2007/037.htm. You can contact the Financial Sanctions Unit at the Bank of England by telephone on 020 7601 4768 or by email on sanctions.unit@bankofengland.co.uk. A general guide on export controls is available at DTI's website at www.dti.gov.uk/europe-andtrade/strategic-export-control/help-advice/page33913.html.

Question:

My company is experiencing problems with a Spanish company named The European City Guide as they have charged us for a service that we have not ordered. Now our company details have been forwarded to a Swiss debt collection agency and the original payment has tripled - what is our course of action?

Questions and Answers

Answer:

The European City Guide is a business listing publication produced by the European City Guides (ECG), a company now based in Valencia, Spain.

ECG solicits advertisements in its publication by sending order forms to companies. In the form it is not clear if the European City Guide is asking for an update of information or for an entry to the directory, and whether it is free of charge or not. This seems to reflect the illicit nature of the ECG, and companies should be careful when signing these forms.

If the company refuses to pay, ECG passes the case on to an aggressive team of debt collectors who subject the companies to considerable harassment in order to recoup the money owed to ECG. Moreover, according to a new 'European Enforcement Order', companies who do not pay may be brought to a Spanish court and may end up with a permanently impaired credit rating.

This means that the best course of action is to:

- 1) Launch a complaint to the ECG Ombudsman at Service@DefClientECG.com
- 2) Contact the Valencian Authorities in Spain (Dirección General de Comercio) at rosell_ber@gva.es. A pro-forma letter is available online from www.stopecg.com
- 3) Contact your local MEPs
- 4) Sign an online petition against ECG at www.stopecg.org
- 5) Gain representation from a Spanish solicitor.

For more information, please contact the Euro Info Centre at London Chamber of Commerce and Industry at europe@london-chamber.co.uk or +44 (0) 20 7489 1992.

Success Stories

Here we have two success stories illustrating how the EIC network helps SMEs every day.



Community Playthings

Community Playthings was referred to the EIC in Kent by an export advisor for UK Trade & Investment. In fifty-five years Community Playthings had become a well-established UK manufacturer of superior quality furniture for childcare centres, preschools or nursery schools. More than just selling furniture they provide a complete service in designing the layout of the physical environment where the children will play and learn, as the layout of a room, the space, the colour and noise have an impact on the ability of the children to learn, relax and exchange.

The company had never sold outside the UK, but could see an opportunity across the Channel, in France. Following the EIC's advice, they visited a large Trade Fair in Paris, Salon des Maires, where the exhibitors supply furniture, games and playground equipment to local authorities and schools.

When they came back, it was clear that their range of products and the additional interior design service would be welcomed in France, if the price was reasonable. Nevertheless, they would need a strong partner, well connected with the local authorities and the educational system. They met a few companies that seemed to understand the concept and were interested in receiving more information.

The EIC compiled a letter in French presenting the company and the products, drafted a price list in euros and followed up the leads by directly contacting the French company. The price was an issue. The unique selling point of Community Plaything is the fact they advise on the layout of their products for the wellbeing of the children. One French distributor understood the concept and two representatives of Community Playthings and the

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French-speaking advisor from the EIC went to visit them in their premises in Royan, West of France.

The UK company supplied free samples for the 20 French sales people based within the French distributor, who visit schools and nurseries all over the country. After two months, it was identified that the best market was the new private nurseries, built in large organisations and companies for their employees. Community Playthings went back to their national sales meeting to train the sales people on the concept, supplied a brochure in French and the software for interior design. The EIC assisted with translation, interpreting and coaching. Many telephone conferences took place. The French distributor now place regular orders and directly contacts the EIC if there is any communication issues with the English company.

Access France is a service available to companies in the South East and is provided by the Kent EIC. Contact Valerie Pondaven for further information at Valerie.pondaven@businesslinkkent.com.

EICs in the UK can assist companies to find new partners in Europe. Contact your nearest EIC for further assistance <http://www.euro-info.org.uk/location/>.

Abtech

Bidding for local authority work is not always easy, procedures have to be followed and a lot of time is spent drafting proposals that do not guarantee any return on investment.

Abtech is a small company of just 11 employees, based near Bournemouth in the South of England. They specialise in IT infrastructure solutions (computer servers, data storage and management). In the past couple of years they have tried to offer their services to local authorities, universities and other public

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organisations. However in order to sell to these organisations they have to take part in public tenders.

These public tenders scare off many companies because they do not always understand what is required of them, there are specific ways of applying for these contracts, various documents are required of these companies and there is the traditional clash between the public and private sector both of whom use different approaches.

Abtech did try to bid with not much success and before they were totally discouraged heard from Bournemouth Borough Council that EIC Southampton was organising one of their 'how to win tenders' workshops.

For half a day in October 2006, two of their staff members took part in an interactive workshop where they got an understanding of how and why tenders have to be processed in this way, and plenty of tips on how to bid more successfully for them.

Amanda Hall, one of the two delegates from Abtech, tells us that 'it has been of great value to us, and our tender responses are now much more professional and we know what to put in and what to leave out'.

Abtech also signed up for the EIC tender search service that allows them to receive every week a selection of tenders that fit with what they do and gives them a quick list of opportunities they could go after.

With all that, Abtech have won their first contract in April 2007 and not a small one! Worth £1.6 million (2.4 million euros), they will be supplying a university in Scotland (the other side of the UK from where the company is based) with their computer servers. They also have partially won another tender recently.

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Attending the workshop as well as using the tender search and knowing they have somebody they can speak to if they have a question about tenders reinstated their confidence in winning public contracts.

The company is now waiting for a number of tenders they have bid for and they expect to be successful in some of them.

Companies based in the South East who are interested in selling to the public sector should contact Richard Hall or Toni Saraiva on 023 8083 2866 or info@euro-info-centre.co.uk

EICs in other parts of the UK can assist companies in their regions who want to sell to the public sector. Contact your nearest EIC for further assistance <http://www.euro-info.org.uk/location>

Company falls foul of waste packaging laws



Image: © European Community, 2007

Stuart Miller of Miller Rosenfalck reports on how one company was fined by the Environment Agency for evading the Packaging Regulations.

The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations aim to ensure that a significant proportion of packaging is recovered and recycled, by placing responsibilities on the companies that produce and handle it.

Mill House Inns (Trading) Ltd has been fined £15,000 plus costs after pleading guilty, at Cheltenham Magistrates' Court, to nine charges under the Regulations of failing to meet its obligations to recover and recycle packaging over a three-year period. The charges were brought by the Environment Agency.

The Environment Agency tried to contact the company on a number of occasions for information regarding its turnover and the tonnage of the packaging being handled at its sites.

The company claimed that it was unaware of the Regulations and admitted that between 2002 and 2004 it had not been registered with the Environment Agency as required. Neither had it taken reasonable steps to recover and recycle packaging nor to submit a certificate of compliance to the Environment Agency.

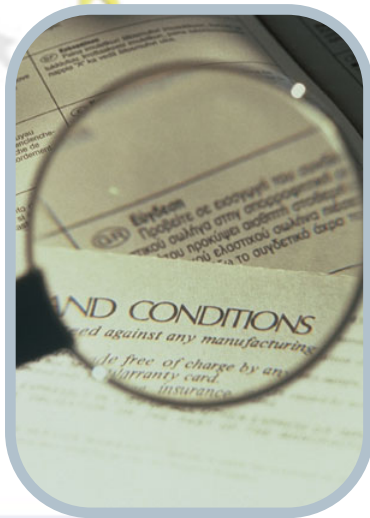
By evading packaging regulations over the three-year period it is estimated that the company avoided paying costs of approximately £8,600.

Businesses need to be aware of their legal obligations in respect of environmental issues.

For advice and further information please contact:
Stuart Miller, Partner, Miller Rosenfalck LLP, email:
sm@europeanbusinesslawyers.com, website: www.europeanbusinesslawyers.com

The EU Reform Treaty

Following French and Dutch voters' resounding double 'no' vote in March 2005, the European Union has dropped its ill-advised plans for a Constitution and has decided to amend two existing treaties instead. It is expected to be signed by all Member States in Lisbon next month, and ratified in time to come into effect before the 2009 European elections.



Map: © European Community, 2007

But why exactly does the Treaty matter, and why is it proving so politically divisive in the UK? This article tries to provide concise answers to these questions.

How similar will the Reform Treaty be to the draft Constitution?

It will contain most of the changes, unaltered, as envisioned within the original Constitution. For example:

- Removal of national vetoes in several important areas.
- A single President of the European Council for two-and-a-half years, replacing the current rotating system of one country every six months.
- A new post combining the jobs of the existing 'High Representative' for Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Commissioner for External Relations. This change is aimed at making EU diplomacy more focused and effective.
- A smaller European Commission from 2014, with fewer Commissioners than Member States.
- Redistributed voting weights between the Member States in the Council.

The main substance of the constitution will clearly be preserved. However, opinions on whether a referendum is necessary are split neatly down the middle.

Why are these purely institutional changes so important?

The implicit logic behind this internal streamlining is to enable the EU to move beyond arcane institutional debates, in order to focus with a single voice on critical current issues - energy

The EU Reform Treaty

security, climate change, terrorism and the EU's international 'voice' being paramount among them.

Can the Reform Treaty be rejected as well?

In theory, yes. So far, only Ireland has confirmed that it will hold a referendum. Referenda in the Netherlands and Denmark could also follow, with other countries yet to make a final decision. The majority, including the UK, are planning on parliamentary ratification. However, dropping all previous portentous references to constitutional symbols - an EU flag, anthem and motto - will increase its chances of success.

Will the Reform Treaty transfer powers from the UK government to the EU?

The Reform Treaty will not transfer any significant new powers from Britain to the EU. That the EU continues to function at all is due to elected national governments agreeing to its proposals. Opinions do differ on how much power this treaty transfers to the EU. However it will, firstly, not extend the powers of any European court to strike down UK legislation. Secondly, it will not create any greater social or economic rights than are already provided under UK law.

But does it not mean the end of the UK's national veto in up to 60 policy areas?

The Reform Treaty is expected to contain 50 articles that extend qualified majority voting (QMV). But 13 of them will not apply to the UK unless the government agrees to them. And the other 37 extensions are areas where the Government argues that QMV is necessary to promote major UK policy priorities, such as a common energy policy or a more rapid distribution of EU aid.

The new treaty will indeed abolish national vetoes in justice and home affairs and social security for migrant workers. However, Britain currently has opt-outs on the delicate issues of asylum, visas and immigration

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Will the Charter of Fundamental Rights feature?

Basically, yes. It will be referred to and be legally binding, but the full text will be included only as an annex. The UK was in favour of dropping the Charter altogether, arguing that it would give the Treaty a constitutional character. It has also secured a guarantee that the charter cannot be used by a European Court to change British labour or social legislation.

And what are the political arguments in the UK?

The Government argues that the Reform Treaty is not simply a cosmetic change to the old Constitution. Hence, as it does not change the way Britain is governed, there is no need for a referendum. Typical positive arguments for the Treaty include the need to simplify EU legislation, to allow national parliaments to better challenge proposals for new EU laws and to strengthen EU leadership.

The Opposition argues that significant powers will be transferred to Brussels from Westminster, and that the Reform Treaty is the Constitution in all but name. As the Government did promise a referendum on the 2005 Constitution, they deem it essential also to consult the British people this time. A typical argument against the Treaty is that it will limit the UK's sovereign independence, by accelerating the creation of a single, unaccountable EU state.

So only time will tell how Gordon Brown reacts to the ever-growing pressure for a referendum.

EU Roaming Regulation

Eric Davies assesses the implications of the EU Roaming Regulation, which came into force on 30 June 2007.



Map: © European Community, 2007

Said to abolish the last border in the European Union's internal market, the EU Roaming Regulation will see substantial reductions in the costs of using mobile phones across the 27 Member States. Some 110 million business customers and 37 million tourists are affected by high roaming charges. The new legislation does not set an ideal price for roaming charges, but ensures that they are not unjustifiably greater than charges made for mobile use in the home country. The European Commission says that the new regulation makes roaming fairer for operators as well as consumers and will allow smaller operators to compete.

Roaming

The 'roaming' system which enables people to use mobiles outside their home country is based on a 'host operator' (ie the mobile phone company in the destination country whose network is being used) handling all or part of each call made and received. That operator then charges the operator in the home country for the calls made, at an agreed wholesale rate. The phone user will then be billed by the home operator - but at a higher rate than the wholesale price paid to the host operator.

Mobile phone operators have set up roaming arrangements, so people using a network in another country are usually transferred automatically to a specific host operator, without being able to choose which provider - and which rate - they would prefer to use.

The preamble to the new regulation states that excessive charges to consumers result 'from high wholesale charges levied by the foreign host network operator and also, in many cases, from high retail mark-ups charged by the customer's own network operator' and that 'neither wholesale nor retail prices for

EU Roaming Regulation

roaming within the EU are justified by the underlying costs of providing the service.'

Despite the majority of people in the EU using mobile phones in their own country, the high cost of roaming means that only a minority use them in another Member State. Last September, a Eurobarometer survey found that 79 per cent of EU citizens have a mobile phone but that 81 per cent of mobile phone users use their phones less when abroad because of high roaming charges.

Given the apparent unwillingness of service providers to cut costs voluntarily, the European Commission was asked by the European Parliament and Member States to introduce legislation to make companies reduce the charges made to customers.

The Eurotariff

The regulation introduces the concept of the 'Eurotariff' - a retail price which a home provider can charge for the provision of roaming calls, which does not exceed the maximum charge permitted under the new legislation. Operators in all 27 Member States will have to offer a Eurotariff in conformity with the price structure shown in Table 1 below, as set out in the regulation. These are the maximum charges which operators can levy; the Commission believes that consumers will benefit from further reductions as service providers compete for the 'roaming' market.

By the end of July 2007, all mobile phone users should have received an offer from their service provider for a roaming Eurotariff. Those accepting the offer should have it activated free of charge within a month. People failing to respond by the end of September will be automatically placed on a Eurotariff, unless they already have a special roaming package.

EU Roaming Regulation

The regulation applies only to voice calls within the EU - it does not apply to short message services (SMS) or other mobile phone facilities such as data services (viewing web pages or checking e-mail). It does however require national regulators to monitor developments in the prices of roamed SMS and data services - although the Commission would like to see mobile operators voluntarily reducing roaming charges for these services.

The introduction of maximum wholesale charges - the 'inter-operator' tariff - should also help to ensure that operators are able to offer lower prices to consumers. These will be capped at the rates shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Eurotariff pricing structure (excluding VAT)

	Summer 2007	Summer 2008	Summer 2009
Maximum charge per minute for calls made abroad	49 cents	46 cents	43 cents
Maximum charge per minute for calls received abroad	24 cents	22 cents	19 cents

Table 2: Capped rates (excluding VAT)

	Summer 2007	Summer 2008	Summer 2009
Maximum inter-operator tariff, per minute	30 cents	28 cents	26 cents

Consumer benefits

The lower prices will apply to calls made to home, to locations in the visited country and to locations in another Member State. Lower prices for roaming throughout the EU - whether at

EU Roaming Regulation

Eurotariff rates or below - are just one benefit the new regulation will bring to consumers.

Better pricing information is another advantage: people travelling to another Member State will now receive a free SMS from their service provider ('without undue delay') giving basic personalised pricing information on the roaming charges (including VAT) that apply to the making and receiving of calls by that customer in the visited Member State (frequent travellers will be able to have this service turned off by their operator).

People will also be able to ask for information on roaming charges free of charge either via SMS or voice call.

Further information

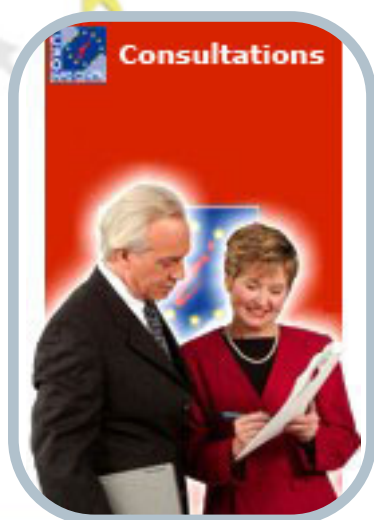
The 'Roaming Regulation' is formally entitled 'Regulation (EC) No 717/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2007 on roaming on public mobile telephone networks within the Community and amending Directive 2002/21/EC'. The text and associated materials can be found via the Commission's 'Roaming' website: ec.europa.eu/roaming.

It is due to expire on 30 June 2010, by which time the Commission hopes there will no longer be a need to regulate roaming tariffs. National operators must monitor and supervise compliance with the regulation, and the Commission will report on its implementation by the end of 2008.

This article first appeared in Croner's Europe Briefing number 184, part of a looseleaf and newsletter European information package. For subscription enquiries contact the Croner.CCH Customer Services Team on 020 8247 1175 or visit the trade portal on www.tradeinternational-centre.net or www.croner.co.uk.

Consultations

Here we provide a selection of current consultations that are of interest to SMEs.



Possible European Private Company status

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on providing European SMEs with a new European legal form, uniform in all Member States. The objective is to look at simplifying cross-border business activities in the EU. The consultation will assess the economic need for a European Private Company (EPC) status, in addition to the other already existing European legal forms, i.e. European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), the European Company (SE) and the European Co-operative Society (SCE). It is thought that these company statuses are not always sufficient to address the needs of small businesses.

The questionnaire is divided in two sets of questions:

- The first set is addressed to businesses, and in particular to the management of SMEs and larger companies. The questions monitor evidence of legal and other barriers companies face when they conduct business through an establishment (subsidiary or branch) in another EU Member State. Respondents' views are also requested on the relevance of a new European legal form.
- The second set has more of a legal approach and aims at gathering stakeholders' opinions on the content of a possible Statute.

The questionnaire is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/company/epc/index_en.htm

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Responses will be taken into account in a forthcoming impact assessment and possible legislative proposal.

The deadline for responses is 31 October 2007.

For further information, contact: DG MARKT Unit F2, European Commission, B-1049 Brussels or to Markt-F2@ec.europa.eu

Information Roundup

New on-line partner search database for Information Society and e-business projects

Are you interested in taking part in an ICT or e-business project and get EU funding? If so, you are invited to check out the new online partner search database developed by DG Information Society of the European Commission. This database contains contact details of organisations looking for partners to join a consortium and of their upcoming ICT projects for eGovernment, eHealth, eInclusion and other ideas relevant to ICT sector. You do not have to be a registered user to search the database, and it can be browsed by country, theme and/or organisation activity.

The link to the database is:

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/ict_psp/cf/partner/sign_up/

New measures for linking EU design registration system with WIPO international system

The European Commission proposes to link the 'Community Design' system, which protects designs within the EU, with the international design registration system of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). The proposals would allow companies, with a single application, to apply for protection of a design not only throughout the EU with the Community Design, but also in the member countries of the Geneva Act of the Hague Agreement (19 countries including Singapore, Korea, Turkey and Switzerland) concerning the international registration of industrial designs. The Geneva Act allows designers to obtain design protection in a number of countries through a single international registration filed with the International Bureau of WIPO, replacing a whole series of registrations with different national or regional offices.

This simplified procedure would lead to a saving of costs since there would no longer be a need to provide translations of the documents, to keep watch on the different deadlines for renewal

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of a great number of national registrations and to pay a series of national fees and fees to agents in different countries. The simplified procedure would also facilitate access to protection in third countries.

A wide range of industrial sectors such as textiles, furniture, cars, jewellery, mobile phones etc. are expected to benefit from the creation of the link between the Community design system and the Hague arrangement. Also, it will have a positive impact on R&D and innovation activities.

It is expected that EU businesses will be able to benefit from the new system from the beginning of January 2008.

For more information please see:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/indprop/design/index_en.htm

Fast-track to competitive business

R&D-performing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are the entrepreneurial stars of Europe. Responding to their specific needs, the Commission has adopted EUROSTARS, a new Joint Programme with 27 EUREKA countries to finance R&D partnerships with research-performing SMEs. In addition to the Commission contribution of €100 million, 22 EU Member states and 5 countries associated to FP7 will jointly contribute another €300 million, giving a total investment of €400 million over 6 years. This will, in turn, mobilise up to €400 million in additional private funding, resulting in an estimated €800 million package to support European R&D performing SMEs. Through EUROSTARS, participating countries will pool their national programmes and research funding in favour of SMEs, resulting in better, more efficient use of funds.

'Lighten the Load' Campaign 2007

Each year, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work selects an important issue affecting EU businesses, culminating

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with the European Week of Safety and Health at Work, each October.

For 2007, the Agency has chosen the issue of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and will campaign to raise awareness of the importance of health and safety in Europe's workplaces. This year, the European Week of Safety and Health at Work will be 22-26 October, under the campaign slogan 'Lighten the Load.' Musculoskeletal disorders affect particularly the agriculture and construction sectors, and are now among the most common work-related problems reported in the EU15. In 2005, 1 in 4 workers suffered back pain, while a number also suffered from muscular pains.

The Agency chose musculoskeletal disorders as the Health and Safety Week theme for a number of reasons. The Agency has recognised the importance of preventing MSDs by providing support to a number of groups, including employers, workers and safety representatives. In addition, the agency wishes to use the week to demonstrate the need for retention, rehabilitation and return to work for those suffering from MSD's.

A number of materials are available on the campaign website, including an information pack on the Lighten the Load campaign, and factsheets on MSDs. The EIC Glasgow also hopes to raise awareness of the Lighten the Load campaign during Health and Safety Week in October. Any plans for future events and activities will be communicated via the Gateway to Europe newsletter.

If your organisation would like to learn more, or to take part in the 'Lighten the Load' campaign, details are available from the campaign website: <http://ew2007.osha.europa.eu/about>

Information Roundup

SME feedback

Many people criticise the European Union for being inaccessible, creating too much red tape and complicated legislation and policies. If these problems apply to your business the European Information Centre wants to hear about it.

The SME Feedback initiative is designed to improve feedback from businesses, consumers and citizens so that information can be collected for use in the EU's policy making process. The initiative will be used to evaluate existing EU policies and open consultations on new initiatives.

The European Information Centre is looking for businesses to tell them about problems that have arisen in their experience of EU legislation, cross-border dealings, the euro, public tenders, doing business in other countries, etc.

Details of your problems will be fed back to the Commission (company details will be kept completely confidential). The feedback may not solve the problem overnight, but it will help the Commission identify problems and try to simplify EU rules. For further information contact the EIC at eic@birmingham-chamber.org.uk or call 0121 455 0268.

VAT changes

The EU has taken a major step towards aligning the rules for completion of the Single Administrative Document (SAD) Customs declaration across all EU member states. SAD harmonisation introduces changes to the way that import, export, warehousing, transit and community status declarations are completed.

You may find that the information your business is required to supply to Revenue & Customs will change as of July 2007. Details of changes can be found on www.hmrc.gov.uk

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If you make electronic Customs declarations to Revenue & Customs, you should ensure that your software is updated to take account of the changes.

Happy birthday SOLVIT!

The SOLVIT network is celebrating its 5th anniversary this year. The network was created in July 2002 by the European Commission and the Member States and its aim is to identify and solve misapplication of internal market laws by public authorities. The SOLVIT centres are located in every EU Member State as well as Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Since 2002 it has resolved more than 1300 problems, which means it handles around 60 new cases per month. Cases submitted by businesses represent about a third of all cases. Around 80 per cent of these problems are resolved, most of them within the deadline of ten weeks.

For more information about the SOLVIT network, news, success cases, figures and analysis visit SOLVIT's website at <http://ec.europa.eu/solvit>

Latest on REACH

A new European Union (EU) regulation on chemicals became law in the UK on 1 June 2007. Known as REACH - Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals - it affects companies that make, trade in or use individual chemicals, mixtures of chemicals and also articles and the chemicals within them. The acronym REACH is fitting as its scope is very broad and in some way it touches on most areas of business.

REACH is relevant to familiar things with which we all have contact - metals, glues, paints, solvents, detergents, plastics, polishes, pens, computers, etc; aspects of REACH affect all of them.

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The significance of REACH will grow gradually over the next few years and it has the potential to have a massive impact on the way chemicals are managed within the EU. The legislation was some time in the making and generated major debate across a spectrum of interests - commercial (from major chemical companies through to small businesses), environmental and consumer groups.

REACH is designed to improve the availability and quality of information about chemicals through a registration scheme. It also shifts the balance of responsibility more towards business, rather than regulatory authorities, for assembling such information and assessing what it means in terms of effective measures to protect our health and the environment. It will go further - some chemicals with properties of particular concern will need to be authorised for use or may not be allowed for some uses. This could have significant implications if such chemicals are crucial to a business or are components of business-critical materials.

To help business to adjust to these changes REACH requires that all EU Member States provide help, via a designated 'Competent Authority' (CA). In the UK, the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) is delivering this REACH CA role. As part of its awareness-raising activities, the UK REACH CA is running a series of nationwide roadshows in collaboration with local business support organisations. These roadshows will be short sessions (options of breakfast or early evening) to bring those attending up to speed with what REACH is about and what they need to think about and act on. UK REACH CA staff will be present all day to answer more specific questions and the sessions are free to attend. For more information about dates and how to book, visit the HSE REACH website at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/reach/diary.htm>

The UK REACH CA also has a website (www.hse.gov.uk/reach) where anyone can find out more about REACH and its potential impact.