



Business Support on Your Doorstep

EU Alert

network
enterprise europe

9th April 2010

Using Mobile Phones at Sea

The European Commission has adopted new rules to make it easier for passengers and crew on ships in the EU's territorial waters to make mobile phone calls or send and receive text messages when they are out of range of land-based mobile phone networks. The new rules harmonise the technical and legal conditions for on-board communication services and pave the way for innovative applications, such as remote monitoring of containers stored on-board. This brings new legal certainty and economic opportunities, for service providers who want to offer seamless maritime mobile connectivity across borders. EU Digital Agenda Commissioner Neelie Kroes said: "Tens of millions of people who travel and work on ships anywhere in European territorial waters will be able to use their mobile phones without problems of interference as a result of the new rules just adopted by the Commission".

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/326>

European Union and Convention on Human Rights

The Commission has proposed negotiation directives for the Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Lisbon Treaty provides for the legal basis for the EU to accede to the ECHR, which is the most important instrument to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe. The EU's accession to the Convention will further strengthen the EU's system of protection of fundamental rights. "Accession to the ECHR has political, legal and symbolic importance", said President José Manuel Barroso.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/291>

Commission Examines Updated Stability Programmes

The European Commission has examined the updated stability and convergence programmes (SCPs) of Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovakia, Sweden, Finland and the United Kingdom. These assessments have to be seen against the background of the sharp economic and financial crisis which has had a major impact on public finances. Reflecting the working of automatic stabilisers and discretionary stimulus measures implemented in line with the European Economic Recovery Plan (EERP) to cope with the exceptional economic circumstances, a large majority of Member States is currently subject to the excessive deficit procedure following corresponding Council decisions in 2009.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/288>

Banana Dispute Settled

The Commission has adopted a €190 million support package for banana exporters from African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. This proposal was part of the historic Geneva Agreement on Trade in Bananas. The EU concluded this deal with Latin American countries and the US in December 2009 which settles 15 years banana disputes. It also cuts the tariff which the EU applies to bananas imported from Latin American countries. Today's measures aim to support ACP banana exporters to adjust to this new trading environment, taking into account each country's specific situation. The measures will focus on three goals: boosting the banana sector's competitiveness, promoting economic diversification and addressing broader social, economic and environmental impacts.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/287>

Scoreboard Shows Europe Needs More Innovation

Most EU Member States until 2008 were steadily improving their innovation performance. The economic crisis may, however, be hampering this progress, according to the 2009 European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) published today. Early indications show that the worst hit are Member States with lower levels of innovation performance, potentially reversing the convergence process witnessed over recent years. Meanwhile, the latest statistics show that the EU is having difficulty in catching up with the US in innovation performance, although it maintains a clear lead over the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China, despite rapid improvements in China.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/286>

EU Visa Code Comes into Force

As from 5 April, the EU Visa Code will become applicable. The Visa Code gathers into a single document all legal provisions governing decisions on visas. It increases the transparency, develops legal security and ensures equal treatment of applicants while harmonising rules and practices for the Schengen States (22 Member States and 3 associated states) applying the common visa policy. Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, responsible for Home Affairs, stated: "As from 5 April, the conditions for issuing visas for the Schengen area to third-country nationals will become clearer, more precise, transparent and fairer. Getting an EU visa will become faster. The EU Visa Code will ensure that the application of EU visa law is fully harmonised."

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/387>

Electronic System to Monitor Excise Goods

On 1 April 2010, a new electronic system for monitoring and controlling the movement of excise goods (alcohol, tobacco and energy products) within the EU becomes operational. The Excise Movement and Control System (EMCS) will make intra-Community trade in excise goods cheaper and simpler for operators, while also making it quicker and easier for Member States to tackle excise fraud. Designed to replace the current paper-based system, the EMCS is a computerised structure for recording in real-time the movement of products for which excise duties have still to be paid. It is estimated that about 100 000 traders dispatch around 4.5 million consignments of excise goods between Member States each year, and the EMCS will help to reduce the financial and administrative burdens that they face. Member States' authorities and economic operators can join the system progressively until 1 January 2011, after which the EMCS will be fully applied throughout Europe.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/401>

New Initiative Would Give Citizens Greater Influence

European citizens would for the first time be able to directly suggest new legislation through the European Citizens' Initiative, proposed in detail today by the European Commission. An innovation contained in the Lisbon Treaty, the ECI will allow at least one million citizens from at least one third of EU Member States to invite the European Commission to bring forward legislative proposals in areas where the Commission has the power to do so. The proposal sets out how many signatures must be gathered from each country, and suggests that the Commission examine whether the initiative is admissible after 300,000 signatures have been gathered from three Member States.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/397>

Legal Tender of Euro Banknotes and Coins

The Commission has adopted a recommendation on the legal tender of the euro banknotes and coins, a legal concept which has concrete implications for the daily life of European citizens. Although euro-area Member States share a single currency, interpretations of what its legal tender status means may still differ across countries, depending on Member States' pre-euro legal traditions. This recommendation clarifies the scope and effects of the legal tender of euro cash in the euro area. The recommendation gives useful guiding on many practical questions related to payments with euro banknotes and coins, for example that payments in cash, including high denomination banknotes, should, in principle, not be refused by retailers or that payments with banknotes and coins should not be surcharged.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/331>

Consultation: Management of Spent Fuel and Radioactive Waste

The online questionnaire is related to a possible legislative proposal governing the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste, which aims at re-launching a Commission initiative to enact binding legislation in the field.

While it is for each Member State to choose whether or not to invest in nuclear energy, the nuclear safety and security framework applied everywhere in the EU is of common interest. The cross-border impact of nuclear energy and increased international cooperation requires the EU to maintain the highest safety, security, non-proliferation and environmental protection standards for nuclear generation. The EU therefore needs to develop a common legislative framework with respect to the safety of nuclear installations and the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste.

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/consultations/2010_05_31_fuel_waste_en.htm

Consultation: Generalisation Tariff Preferences

The EU's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is a trade arrangement through which the EU provides preferential access to the EU market to 176 developing countries and territories, in the form of reduced tariffs for their goods when entering the EU market. The GSP scheme is an important element in the EU's active support for the sustainable development of developing countries.

The present GSP Regulation expires on 31 December 2011. The purpose of the present consultation exercise is to seek comments from interested parties as inputs to the Commission's work to prepare a future proposal to the Council and Parliament on a successor Regulation. The consultation is aimed at all parties with an interest in the EU GSP scheme, including stakeholders within the EU and in third countries, including beneficiaries.

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=NEXTGSPSCHEME&lang=en>

If you have any queries about the EU Alert bulletin, or would like some more information about any of the topics in this edition, please contact Enterprise Europe West Midlands on 0121 455 0268

www.een-midlands.org.uk

