

In touch with EU



News from the Association

This issue of 'In touch with EU' is a little late, as we've been working on our new Moodle-based Resource Centre. Although progress has been slower than anticipated, we're pleased to announce that the first of 10 online training courses is now available.

'What the EU is' looks at the development of the EU, from its origins as the European Coal and Steel Community. It not only outlines the history of the Union, but also includes guidance on where to find relevant information. There are practical exercises on finding information, with most answers available as video clips. A site-wide glossary provides additional information on selected topics.

Having agreed the layout for the courses and overcome some initial teething problems, we're hoping to make quicker progress with the other courses, with the next in line being 'What the EU does' and 'How the EU works'.

The link to the Resource Centre is located in the Members' Area of our website. You'll need a username and password to access the site; if you haven't got them, or can't remember them, please mail eric@eia.org.uk.

Training courses

In addition to online training, we're also offering two courses next year. Both will take place in London, and both cost £150 to EIA Members and £175 to others. Places can be booked via our website, which also has programme details.

The courses are:

Finding out about the EU, 18 February; sessions include:
The European Union - what it is, what it does, how it works
Tracing policy and legislative documents
Tracing background and explanatory materials
Keeping up-to-date

Case law, 10 June; sessions include:
Europe's supreme court
The fundamental principles of EU law
The General Court and the Civil Service Tribunal
Tracking case law
Links to national courts

2011 Conference

The latest addition to our 2011 Conference programme is Julian Oliver, Secretary General of the Fondation EurActiv, which provides those behind the website EurActiv.com with guidance on editorial strategy and media independence. The Conference will be on Monday 14 March at the British Library. The cost is £30 to EIA Members, £45 to others. Places can now be booked via our website.

Feedback

Please send comments, criticisms etc about the newsletter to eric@eia.org.uk.

Eric Davies
EIA Coordinator

This newsletter can be printed, but the embedded URLs will be lost ...

Issue 3 - November 2010



It's official:

EU documents , publications and sources



First for Sport

Following changes made by the Treaty of Lisbon, 18 November 2010 saw the inaugural meeting of the Sports Council. Sports Ministers reached agreement on three major issues: structured dialogue with stakeholders from the sports sector, the role of sport in active social inclusion, and the role of the EU in the international fight against doping in sport. See: [Belgium Presidency news item](#).

Europeana

The European Commission has released an update on the Europeana digital library. The project now provides access to over 14 million digitised books, maps, photographs, paintings, film and music clips. See: Press Releases [IP/10/1524](#) and [MEMO/10/586](#).

Disability Strategy

COM (2010) 636 is the Communication 'European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe'. It 'outlines how the EU and national governments can empower people with disabilities so they can enjoy their rights' and proposes a range of specific measures to be taken over the next decade. The Commission 'will also consider whether to propose a 'European Accessibility Act' by 2012'. See: Press Releases [IP/10/1505](#), [MEMO/10/578](#); [Communication text](#).

Transparency

Following a decision by the High Level Group of the European Parliament and the European Commission on a joint Transparency Register, an inter-institutional agreement for a common register for organisations and individuals engaged in EU policy making and policy implementation now appears imminent. See: Press Release [IP/10/1498](#).

Security Strategy

The European Commission has adopted the Communication 'EU Internal Security Strategy in Action': Five steps towards a more secure Europe' (COM (2010) 673). It 'comprises 41 actions targeting the most urgent security threats facing Europe', including 'a shared agenda to disrupt criminal and terrorist networks, to protect citizens, businesses and societies against cybercrime, to increase EU security by smarter border management, and to strengthen the Union's readiness and response to crises.' See: Press Release [IP/10/1535](#); [Communication text](#).

Construction Products Regulation

The European Parliament's Internal Market Committee wants construction products containing hazardous substances to be appropriately labelled. The move comes ahead of the adoption of a new Construction Products Regulation to replace the current Construction Products Directive. MEPs want the new Regulation to require the 'declaration of performance' to include the hazardous substance information required by the REACH Regulation. See: Press Release [20101122IPR97428](#).

Tourism

Data from Eurostat show 'a clear seasonal influence on the number of nights spent in hotels and other collective tourism establishments'. The third quarter of the year is the high season, accounting for 43% of the 2.2 billion nights spent in the EU27 in 2009; the fourth quarter is the low season, with just 16% of nights. The data is taken from two Eurostat reports on seasonal patterns in the EU tourism sector. See: Press Release [175/2010](#).

Focus on ...

The-eu-and-me.org.uk

This new website (www.the-eu-and-me.org.uk) from the Commission's UK office claims to be 'A No-Nonsense Guide for UK Citizens to what the European Union Delivers'. It focuses in particular on four themes: Travelling & Working; A Fair Deal for Consumers; Food & Environment; Fighting Crime.

Information on those themes is accessed via a tab at the top of the page labelled 'What the EU Does'. Other tabs lead to sections on 'The EU in my Area', 'EU Myths', 'News & Views'.

The centrepiece of the main page is a map of the UK, with clickable links to information on a range of topics selected from those covered in the 'What the EU Does' section, including air passenger rights, EU health insurance card, pet passports, animal health.

Elsewhere on the main page are links to 'The EU near you', 'EUtube' and 'Submit your story'. The last of these gives visitors the 'chance to tell us your stories about any aspect of the work the EU and Commission do'. There's a vetting process, so there's no guarantee of 'stories' appearing and - at the time of writing - there were no examples on the site.

According to a report in New Media Age, the site 'will replace the Commission's existing booklet, 'The EU: What's in it for me?', as the primary resource on the role of the EU for UK citizens' (a pdf version of the guide can be downloaded via a link on the main page).

The Commission seems to have been fairly coy about its new asset, although Jonathan Scheele, Head of the Commission's Representation in the UK, said: 'The EU affects the daily life of UK citizens in many ways that they are not aware of. Part of the role of my team here in the UK is providing just that sort of information. With this site, we are presenting the situation as it is at the moment – it is up to the reader to make up their minds about it.'

The verdict of Information World Review is:
'A light on information but heavy on features website
[...]
a great starting point for understanding more about what the EU does to you.'
Sorry? What the EU 'does to you'?
Looks like the Commission still has some way to go ...

A reminder that the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Information Office in the UK now share premises. Their new abode (Europe House) is at 32 Smith Square, London - which was previously Conservative Party HQ.

[Commission's UK website](#)
[Parliament's UK website](#)



Q&A

Our AskEric service gives EIA members the chance to pose their questions to our EU information experts. Whether it's simple or complex - if you're having trouble finding the answer, try AskEric ...

Eric was recently asked this question:

When I'm looking through recent legislation, I've seen that sometimes it says '(Text with EEA relevance)'. When I look through them, the directives (like 2009/103/EC) don't mention EEA. What does it mean?

AskEric answered:

'EEA' stands for the 'European Economic Area', which was created by an Agreement which entered into force on 1 January 1994. The Area comprises the EU Member States and members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

At the time, EFTA had seven members: Austria, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. Three of those countries (Austria, Finland and Sweden) have since joined the EU, and the Agreement was rejected by Switzerland. The current EEA-EFTA members are therefore Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

The EEA is primarily concerned with extending the 'four freedoms' of the EU Internal Market beyond the boundaries of the Union. In addition to the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital, it also covers other issues, including competition, education, social policy and environment.

Under the EEA Agreement, the EFTA members of the EEA apply EU legislation on the Internal Market and related issues, but do not have any say in formulating it.

As you've noticed, adopted legislation falling under the Agreement is identified by the addition of the phrase '(Text with EEA relevance)' to the title of the relevant document. Proposals also use the same term.

Snippets:

News and views from non-EU sources

euobserver

From: [Secret documents group was like 'bad Le Carre novel,' MEP says](#)

"Sometimes when a document is stamped 'super secret' it's not as sexy as you'd imagine. Sometimes it bordered on the ridiculous, like a bad Le Carre novel. We'd have to leave our mobiles and so on before entering the reading chamber. Then you saw a document that was, for example, the mission statement of Eulex, which was the same as we already had in the newspapers,"

Statewatch

From: [The UK's European Union Bill](#)

In November 2010, the UK government tabled a Bill which would provide for a referendum in the UK in many cases before the EU treaties could be amended in future. The Bill would also enhance parliamentary control of UK government decisions in relation to the UK in many other respects.

The following analysis explains this complex bill and comments on the underlying principles underlying it.

EurActiv

From: [Analyst: Citizens' distrust in Europe fuelled by member states](#)

It is up to member states, not Brussels, to inform citizens about the benefits of the EU and prevent them from being deceived, Stanley Crossick, a political analyst and doyen of EU integration, told EurActiv in an exclusive interview.

European Policy Centre

From: [European Policy Centre mourns the death of its Founding Chairman Stanley Crossick](#)

A lawyer by profession, Stanley will long be remembered for his passionate commitment to European integration. He took many of his precepts from Jean Monnet, one of Europe's founding fathers, especially the axiom "thought cannot be divorced from action."

EUbusiness

From: [Europeana - Europe's digital library - guide](#)

Launched in 2008 with two million objects, Europeana has already passed the initial target for 2010 of 10 million objects. On 18 November 2010 the Reflection Group [...] set up by the Commission to explore new ways to bring Europe's cultural heritage online addressed the EU's Council of Culture Ministers and the European Parliament's Committee on Culture. The Comité des Sages' report is due to be published at the beginning of 2011.

Notre Europe

From: [European political parties: the missing link](#)

The next European elections will take place in 2014. Why then focus today on the participation of European citizens on this vote? The answer is simple: if we want to reverse the decline in participation over the last thirty years which paradoxically has taken place at the same time the European Parliament has been steadily gaining power within European institutions, we must act now.

Last word

Cherchez les COMs


Paul Clarke, EIA Chairman

There is no doubt that Commission documents – COMdocs – are the most important sources of EU information available. As well as being the source of most of the Union's legislation, they also include a wide range of communications, reports and White and Green Papers. That they should be readily available online is a boon that can only properly be appreciated by those old enough to remember waiting for them to arrive in large badly-wrapped parcels delivered by the postman. However, the key word in the above sentence is 'readily' and it has to be said that for far too long the European Commission has made keeping track of new COMdocs into a form of Sudoku.

Take their location: [EUR-Lex](#) is the obvious and proper place for them to be published and, given their significance, it would be reasonable to expect that they would be clearly visible on the home page. Instead, they are listed under the heading 'Collection' and named not 'Reports and proposals', but '[Preparatory acts](#)'. Another example of the Commission claiming to make things available to the citizen, but then assuming that only those au fait with EU-speak will actually do any searching?

From this point, things improve and we now see a clear heading 'COM documents'. Clicking on that, it would be useful to see what has been added over say the last week, so that at a glance we can keep up to date with new developments. However, on the day of writing (23 October 2010) we see a document (available only in German as it happens) dated 26 May 2010. Further investigation reveals that there has been no new material added since 7 October 2010 which would suggest, wrongly, that the Commission has gone into premature hibernation. To take just one example: on 18 October a Commission press release described a new Green Paper on e-procurement and gave a link to the Internal Market website, where it was possible to access COM (2010) 571 final, a Green Paper on expanding the use of e-procurement in the EU.

continued ...

This site is a part of  Europa



EUR-Lex

Access to European Union law

EUROPA > EUR-Lex Home

Cherchez les COMs - *continued*

So my first complaint is that documents are repeatedly being publicised, put on DG websites, made available to - and therefore mentioned in - the press, but not made available in the one place that we are led to assume will be our one-stop-shop for 'preparatory acts'.

Following on from this, my second criticism is that, when the Green Paper on e-procurement is eventually added to the collection, it will be dated 18 October 2010 – however long it takes to make it available and however many other, later, documents have been added in the meantime. This is a serious problem with EUR-Lex, because the 'Latest documents made available' page has no system. Sometimes documents are listed for less than a day before being consigned to the 'Access by year' list, where they then slot into a date which can be days, weeks or even months previous. Hence my reference to Sudoku: one of the only ways to keep track of new material is to keep your own list of COMdoc numbers by date, and to regularly check this against the official list to try to spot when a new number suddenly appears against 2 October 2010, or whenever.

What should be done?

In my opinion, the rule should be the same as for tender notices, which can be published elsewhere but must always be published first on TED, the official EU database. So any COMdoc must be available in EUR-Lex either before, or simultaneously, being published anywhere else or mentioned in a press release (unless it is clearly stated in other sources that the COMdoc is not yet publicly available).

Secondly, the date on any document should be the date it is added to EUR-Lex: readers have no interest in the date it was adopted by the Commission; what matters is the date it becomes publicly available. If necessary, the adoption date can always be added - rather as legislation is published in an Official Journal dated 23 October 2010, but will say that it is a 'Council Decision of 15 October 2010'.

The date of publication is important because my third and final suggestion is that the 'Latest documents made available' page should always contain the last, say, three days of documents added, under their publication date, so that users can be certain that they really are looking at all the latest documents. The Commission devotes entire websites to issues of transparency and making documents publicly available. It could usefully start by getting its key access point for its most important documents better organised.

** The Green Paper on e-procurement (COM (2010) 571) announced on 18 October was finally published on EUR-Lex on 28 October.*

www.eia.org.uk