Euro, practical aspects: banking charges for conversion, display for prices, citizens' information. Recommendations

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OBJECTIVE: to state the main outlines and methods of the information strategy for the euro. SUBSTANCE: as the transition to Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) is moving into a decisive phase this year, the Commission has drafted a communication because it wishes to recall the very high priority that needs to be given to communication measures relating to the euro. On the basis of its experience of communication work since 1996, the Commission considers that communication strategies should in future concentrate on the following points: - explaining the euro to as many citizens as possible, as well as the reasons why Europe is moving to EMU and what the euro will mean for them; - helping every citizen to become familiar with the new currency, to acquire a sense of its value and to handle it with ease and confidence; - encouraging small and medium-sized companies throughout all economic sectors to begin their preparations to avoid any delays at the date of final transition, 01/01/2002. The Commission stresses the need to take advantage of the periods between 02/05/1998 and 01/01/1999 and between 1999 and 2001 to shift the information effort into a higher gear at a time when the public will be particularly interested and receptive. A second wave of major coverage should be planned for 2001. The general public, SMEs, local and regional authorities and elected representatives, national civil servants and non-member countries should be the main targets towards which the information efforts are directed. A few broad common principles can be identified: - the importance of disseminating practical, concrete information; this could involve the provision of training and advice for SMEs; - the importance of contributing to a climate enabling the general public to understand and accept the euro; - the importance of gauging public opinion and assessing the impact of action taken. As far as methods are concerned, communication on the euro should be guided by the subsidiarity principle and managed through partnership: - partnership with the Member States under tripartite agreements between the Member State concerned, the Commission and Parliament and part-financing agreements, which make it possible to develop communication plans comprising messages and instruments that are tailored to national cultures and structures; - partnership with information multipliers which distribute targeted information. The Commission's action will be organized along the following lines: - providing information, basic material and technical support for multipliers and for specialized audiences; - taking part in the framing and implementation of national communication plans for the euro through partnership; - ensuring that information activities on the euro are consistent across the Community and facilitating contacts and exchanges of information between the Member States; - encouraging and taking part in cross-border initiatives and activities intended for non-member countries. If all citizens are to find, in their daily lives, information which is in tune with their concerns, it is essential that communication activities should give pride of place to decentralized work at grass-roots level. Lastly, all the available media should be used actively, with special emphasis on radio, television and the Internet.