

A Citizen-Centred Single Market?
by Julian Micallef

Freedom is a positive word and the drive to make the European Union's single market a veritable channel for the free movement of people, goods, services and capital has extended to more than twenty years.

Much remains to be covered to fully integrate the market, yet this project is certainly leaving its mark. The right to live and work in other Member States, as well as having a wider choice of products at competitive prices should favour citizens. Business is offered the opportunity to be based in a market of half a billion people with similar regulations. These are the benefits that are being emphasised by the European Commission as it looks to make the internal market better and more comfortably set in a globalised world.

An illustration of the effect that has been brought about by the removal of barriers are the approximately 15 million Europeans who have been able to work or retire in another country since 1993.

Observers have noted a shift in the Commission's vision for the single market. Citizen and consumer issues are being placed more on the forefront. Developments in areas such as health mobility and consumer protection could pave the way for clearer and wider-reaching policies. Studies on cross-border payments conducted by the Commission have shown substantial savings on charges after EU regulations were effected in recent years.

The focus that is being suggested by a paper for European leaders is geared towards a market that functions better for everyone. This is very much in line with the efforts being made for better and simpler regulation to enhance competitiveness.

It must be said though, that the aim is the achievement of better standards of living and prosperity. Competitiveness for its sake alone is unsustainable. The European Union seeks to use various tools to help in the process. The setting up of the Globalisation Adjustment Fund to train workers left without jobs is one such instrument.

The new head of the Internal Market Directorate General has stated that decentralisation coupled with greater cooperation at national and EU levels should be one of the steps that need to be taken. As a stocktaking exercise continues, Europeans should anticipate more policies that cater for their needs and expectations.

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