

First Single Market Award goes to a Portuguese citizen



At the informal meeting of competitiveness ministers in Umeå on 14 October, the Swedish minister for Trade Dr Ewa Björling and Mr Jörgen Holmquist, Director General for Internal Market and Services at the European Commission, presented Ms Aurora de Freitas as the first-ever winner of the Single Market Award.

The initiative to establish a prize to reward people taking action to improve the functioning of the Internal Market was taken by the Swedish Presidency and the Commission. It is aimed at highlighting the importance of the Internal Market and raising awareness of the opportunities associated with the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the EU.

The winner is a 65-year-old Portuguese citizen, who has been living in France since 1968. She worked as a dressmaker and stylist for many years. Now that she is retired, she devotes her life to helping others to assert their rights in the EU's Internal Market by finding practical solutions to problems and by taking action to remove obstacles. For example, since 2004, Ms de Freitas has been lobbying French administrations to make it easier for Portuguese citizens to be granted residence permits in France. She is an example of what one single person can accomplish in the best interests of the EU. The two other front runners were the Slovakian Ministry of Health, Division of Healthcare Education, and the EU Coordination Unit, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich) Enterprise Europe.

The SOLVIT centres, with good insight into the actors operating in the Internal Market, were consulted in the nomination process and nominations ranged from companies to public bodies and NGO's to universities. Two separate jury groups from the Commission and the Swedish Presidency evaluated the nominations using three criteria: the complexity of the problem, the originality of the solution and the solution's effect.

The intention of the Single Market Award is to become well known as a means to communicate to citizens that their efforts are important for the future of Europe. Hopefully, the award will become an annual event at the informal meeting of the ministers for competitiveness. It will be up to the Commission and future incoming presidencies to promote the continuity of this tradition and to make the prize representative of the different flavours in Europe!

You can view a short interview with Ms de Freitas on DG MARKT's website, at:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/video-channel/sma_2009.htm

Swedish Presidency of the EU

<http://www.se2009.eu/>



Pictures: Gunnar Seibold/ Regeringskansliet