Eurostars Joint Programme: participation by the Community in a research and development programme aimed at supporting research and development performing SMEs undertaken by several Member States

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The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy adopted a report drafted by Paul **RÜBIG** (EPP-ED, AT), and amended, in the framework of the codecision procedure, the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the participation by the Community in a research and development programme aimed at supporting research and development performing SMEs undertaken by several Member States.

The main amendments adopted in committee are as follows:

- Members ask that the grant of financial support to third parties and its payment should be transparent and non-bureaucratic. The financial support shall be paid as a lump sum. Where a lump sum payment is not compatible with the funding rules of the participating national programmes, a fixed percentage of the direct costs of the project in question (flat rate) should be preferred;
- for each project, the R&D performing SME(s) should collectively execute a large part of the overall R&D activities within the project;
- in the event that third parties participating in the programme and granted financial support are ranked in order of priority, that ranking shall be binding as regards the allocation of funding from the Community contribution and from the national earmarked budgets;
- the interim evaluation of the Eurostars Joint Programme, to be carried out by the Commission two years after the start of the Joint Programme, must also assess the eligibility criteria for the R&Dperforming SMEs, in particular what proportion of time and of annual turnover is dedicated to research activities. If the evaluation shows that the eligibility criteria are too stringent, such that insufficient proposals for the award of grants are accepted, the Commission and the dedicated implementation structure shall amend the general agreement in order to adjust those criteria accordingly. The simplification of regulation decided with reference to undertakings' administrative burdens must also apply in the Commission's contacts with the interested parties relating to these questions;
- the dedicated implementation structure shall take appropriate measures to give recognition to the Community contribution to the Eurostars Joint Programme both in the programme generally and in individual projects, including the use of a Community logo in all published material relating to the Eurostars Joint Programme;
- a new recital states that monitoring of the implementation of the Eurostars Joint Programme should be cost-efficient and should not impose unnecessary burdens on SMEs participating in the Programme. The requirements imposed should be clear and relevant and so framed that the individual undertakings can easily, on the basis of their activities, answer the questions put to them;
- lastly, Members stated that the Commission should set up a database containing the results of the projects and should make this information continually available.