Structural Funds: priorities for the adjustment of programmes to the end of 1999. Guidelines

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OBJECTIVE: defining the priorities of the structural funds up to the end of 1999 (Commission guidelines). SUBJECT: the objective of the guidelines is to define a general policy and framework of priorities for the adjustment of current programmes. The Commission's analysis makes it possible to identify various categories of investment of prime importance for the harmonious development of the Union. It emerges that between now and the end of 1999, the structural funds should concentrate on: (1) Basic infrastructures and the productive environment: - better combination of financial instruments and of more effective utilization of subsidies in particular EIB and EIF loans; - development of measures accompanying infrastructural projects to maximize the impact on local employment; - measures to improve international competitiveness of SMEs by means of systematic integration of financial services, start-up capital, risk capital and financial engineering instruments as part of aid structures for small enterprises; - promoting the development potential of indigenous employment through local development and employment initiatives (e.g. encouraging tradition and quality and placing the emphasis on local products and services, encouraging innovation in rural areas and the introduction of new technologies); - including tourism in local and regional strategies. (2) Research and technological development: - giving particular attention to aid measures for technological development as part of the review of current programmes and increasing the share of resources earmarked for RDT and innovation. - exploiting the new possibilities of the information society (e.g. new jobs in the services sector, improving the effectiveness of local administration, facilitating direct access for the public to information services in schools, libraries and local development centres. (3) The environment and sustainable development: - greater emphasis on preventive measures (water, atmospheric and soil pollution), taking account of the growing importance of the 'eco-sector'; - encourage training and greater awareness with regard to environmental issues; - improve the urban environment (e.g. increased use of public transport, improvement of the urban environment, and upgrading of the cultural heritage as a major element for the promotion of tourism; - ensure that rural development policies contribute more to the protection of the environment and satisfies growing needs with regard to quality, health and safety. (4) Utilization of human resources (education and training) - switching from a passive to an active employment policy by means of a preventive approach designed to combat long term unemployment (clearer identification of target groups, training and pathways to integration combining individual assistance with an integrated approach at local level. - giving greater importance to anticipating developments so as to help SMEs assess early on the impact of industrial changes on their own needs and capacities. - establishing closer links between the education system and the labour market; - strengthening education and training systems (supplementary ERDF assistance to be provided for investments in this area in Objective 1 and 6 areas). (5) Equal opportunities: - support for measures contributing to equality between men and women: improvement of social infrastructures, access to employment and working conditions, creation by women of SMEs and cooperatives, measures to reconcile professional and family life including child-care facilities. - taking into account the problems of handicapped persons in all policy formulation sectors. (6) Programme quality and effectiveness: the Commission proposes that the partnership between the Commission, the national regional and local authorities, the coherence of measures taken, the effectiveness of monitoring and information provided to the public be improved.