Small and medium-sized enterprises SMEs in the European Union: 3rd multiannual programme 1997-2000

1996/0087(CNS) - 10/07/1996 - Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report

Article 3 of the draft Council Decision contains a definition of the subsidiarity principle in the sense that it provides that the Commission shall take measures only in so far as they cannot be better achieved by the Member States. The multiannual programme now under consideration is not the only EU policy instrument to promote the establishment and development of SMEs. This policy must be at the heart of the EU's operational and legislative programmes, and in particular the internal market, the structural instruments, the Leonardo and Socrates education and training programmes, R&D and innovation, the financing instruments, particularly the EIB and the development of the information society. It is therefore important that, in addition to the third multiannual programme, other EU policies take greater account of this priority. The Committee stresses the importance of the simplification and improvement of Community legislation and the exchange of best practices and expects to see concrete results in terms of an improved business climate for SMEs in the short term. The Committee in particular emphasizes the importance of an efficient system of cost-benefit analyses. In its Opinion of 6 July 1994, the ESC looked in detail at the European Commission's Communication on the financing of SMEs. Many of the problems identified at that time still exist and need to be solved more and more urgently. The Committee has also noted with approval the Commission Communication on the development of capital markets for fast-growing small and medium-sized enterprises (EASDAQ = European Association of Securities Dealers Automatic Quotation). The Committee endorses the proposal to establish a new guarantee instrument (ELISE = European Loan Insurance Scheme for Employment) to help employment - creating SMEs to obtain loans. The Multiannual Programme also covers actions for the craft sector, commerce, the distributive trades and specific target groups such as women and young entrepreneurs. The Committee is pleased that the financial resources made available for these target groups are significantly larger than in previous years.