Practical arrangements for the introduction of the EURO. Green paper

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Support for the Commission move to implement and facilitate the transition to a single currency. The transition should be as speedy as possible, taking account of the market's capacity to adjust smoothly to change, the need to minimise costs, and the extent to which EMU was also used to boost job-creating growth. Pragmatic approach to practical problems: directives and regulations only when strictly necessary. Need for outline scenario so as to predict the situation of countries granted exemption, indicating the measures that would have to be taken to avoid monetary disruption and particularly the emergence of an unbridgeable gulf between these countries and those that had joined the single currency system. Need for stringent application, with a political vision, of admissibility criteria; political derogations only possible if they did not endanger the future stability of the single currency. Enhancement of the role of the European Central Bank: the independence provided for in the Treaty should be translated into practical terms. Starting date and duration of the various phases, to be announced as soon as possible. However, once established, no variation should be allowed. The market needed certainty, not conjecture. The costs of transition to the single currency should be borne and apportioned according to the rules of the market, with intervention only when really necessary. Need to set up, as soon as possible, a sound legal framework to underpin the single currency. In particular, the non-renegotiability of contracts and the validity of conversion rates on the securities and exchange markets (both European and non-European) should be guaranteed. Consumer interests should be heeded and protected as part of the overall policy of transition to the single currency. In particular, the consumer should be made aware of Europe's aim in adopting a single currency, the advantages he stood to gain and the way in which the transition to the new currency would be organised. This would require a joint, coordinated drive, involving the Commission, the Member States and companies, in particular banks. The consumer should be able to reap the benefits of the single currency at minimum cost. The Commission and the Member States, though refraining as far as possible from imposing regulations, would have to show great vigilance in ensuring that this condition was respected. The consumer should be able to familiarise himself with use of the single currency even before it came into force and check that the conversion rates were strictly applied. The Commission and the consumer associations had pinpointed one single way of achieving this result: dual indication of prices and charges on bills, banking documents and payslips. Businesses objected that the mandatory dual pricing requirement could generate additional costs, extra paperwork and organisational complications. While reserving the right to return to this matter, the ESC could not ignore the justification, in principle, of such arguments. The consumer rights referred to above should be protected but a balance had to be found with the rest of the market, including alternatives that achieved the same results. Effective training, education and communication strategies were needed: in the case of training, responsibility would devolve to the Commission, Member States, sectoral organisations and individual companies, in turn. By ensuring coordination, duplication of tasks would be avoided. Education should be provided in schools of all levels and types, with the single currency taught as a specific subject.