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

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This report on the activities of the European Union for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is drawn up in accordance with the Council Decision on the Third Multiannual Programme for SMEs. This Decision provides for the Commission to submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a two-yearly report on the progress achieved in taking SMEs into account in all Community policies and programmes, following its coordination action. This is the fifth report of this type. It reports on the latest developments that have occurred since the adoption of the previous report at the end of 1997 and outlines future prospects. The report is broken down into three main chapters: the first one deals with improving the framework conditions for SMEs, the second one with programmes and instruments with a particular financial impact on support for SMEs and the third with enlargement, pre-accession and cooperation with non-member countries. The conclusion describes the development of the process of increasingly taking SMEs into account in Community policies and programmes. In its conclusions, the report shows that the priority policy in favour of SMEs and the development of an entrepreneurial Europe confirms. It should also be noted that the taking into account of the participaton of the Community programmes has increased in the past years. There remains however, to efforts to be made on the issue so of the evaluation of the imapct of policy on the development of SMEs. If the Community contribution to the development of essentials in order to maximise the potential of competition, growth, innovation and the work of the SME. The report clearly shows that during the implementation of the Third Multiannual programme for the SMEs, enterprise policy, in particular in the support of the SME, has become an integral part of the the broad policy lines of the Union. A positive evolution similar to this is also observed in the Member States. This report describes the aims of the Integrated Programme for SMEs, the framework for coordinating the various EU initiatives in support of SMEs taken under enterprose policy or other Community policies or under the Concerted Actions. It demonstrates that the SME dimension is now an integral part of Community policies and has an impact on them. It also shows that SMEs are a priority in many programmes and that soem of them provide for special SME measures. The developments since the end of 1997 show that SMEs are at the centre of the European policy-making. The conclusions of this report also show that SME participation in Community programmes is improving in general.