

Enterprise policy: multiannual programme MAP 2001-2005

2000/0107(CNS) - 07/03/2001 - Document attached to the procedure

This report from the Commission constitutes its Annual Implementation Report on the European Charter for Small Enterprises. The European Charter for Small Enterprises, adopted on 13 June 2000 and welcomed by the Feira European Council on 19-20 June, called upon Member States and the Commission to take action in a number of areas to support and encourage small enterprises. Recognising the crucial role that these types of enterprises play in the growth of the European economy, the Charter aimed to focus the minds of policy makers on the factors that are critical to their development and prosperity. In order to follow-up the recommendations in the Charter, the Commission undertook to report annually on progress to the Spring Summit. Action in favour of SMEs takes place under a variety of headings, which are reviewed in a number of different Commission reports. This report can only make a brief reference to these other publications, as it is not possible, for reasons of space, to reproduce all their findings here. An exercise to evaluate and summarise the progress of Member States and the Commission in improving the environment for businesses was already underway at the time of the Feira European Council. Following its completion, a detailed report, along with a paper summarising results from other best practice-related activities, was submitted to the Industry Council on 5 December 2000. This report made a number of recommendations as to where Member States could better their performance, and highlighted thirty-one examples of good practice from individual countries that could be replicated elsewhere. Importantly, it also enabled the Commission to verify that Member States are acting in accordance with the recommendations of the Charter. In particular, progress has been made in the area of better legislation and regulation, where almost all Member States introduced initiatives to improve the regulatory framework for business. Most Member States have put emphasis on making start-ups for SMEs easier and faster by establishing on-line access for registration and the introduction of one-stop shops. Efforts have also been made to strengthen the technological capacity of small enterprises by the majority of Member States, but these will need to be further improved. In the areas of education and training and availability of skills, much work has yet to be accomplished. The European Union presents a patchy picture for the time being: some Member States put a great deal of emphasis on education, but most unfortunately do not. More attention also needs to be given to tax systems and financial matters. For its part, the Commission has acted on the recommendations and addressed to it the Action Plan to Promote Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness, and has ensured that the objectives of the new Multiannual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship are compatible with those in the Charter. The Commission is also launching 11 projects, in cooperation with the Member States, to identify best practice in areas that correspond to the Charter's guidelines. As regards future reports, progress by Member States will continue to be monitored through the best Procedure annual report, which will be presented to the Industry Council at the end of each year, beginning in 2001. This will draw together the results from all the different activities aimed at identifying and benchmarking best practices.