Innovation in the economy and the entreprises, electronic trade, Go Digital initiative for SMEs

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PURPOSE: to present a Commission Communication on helping SMEs to "Go Digital" within the framework of eEurope. CONTENT: in response to the eEurope 2002 Action Plan, the Commission will undertake specific GoDigital initiatives aiming at: - identifying the main obstacles SMEs face as they engage in e-business; - proposing specific actions to help SMEs "go digital", in particular by building on existing policies and initiatives; - ensuring consistency among the various policies and initiatives to support SMEs going digital at the European, national, regional and local levels, and - learning from practical experience and to benchmark various strategies to help SMEs to go digital. The objective of this Communication is to identify the specific SME needs to fully reap the benefits of e-business and to present specific GoDigital initiatives to be implemented in 2001 by the Commission. Further actions will be taken in 2002 and onwards. GoDigital can help create better conditions for SMEs to enter into the digital age, but it cannot replace entrepreneurship or the enterprise that ultimately takes the decision. GoDigital's overall purpose is to put together and adapt where appropriate support activities to help SMEs to use information and communication technologies (ICT) with best possible efficiency. To this end, this GoDigital implementation plan will build upon existing Community programmes aimed at the specific needs of SMEs. These programmes include the DG Enterprise's Multi-Annual Programme (MAP), the DG Information Society's Information Society Technologies (IST) Annual Work Programme and the Structural Funds. The implementation plan will also be linked to national and regional programmes and initiatives with similar aims. Implementation will be flexible and decentralised, it will pursue common objectives, and reflect the need for closer co-operation among various support instruments for SMEs at the European level. The objective is to ensure that SMEs take full advantage of the existing support programmes and initiatives at national and European level. Against this background, GoDigital's priorities are to: - promote a favourable environment and framework conditions for electronic business and entrepreneurship; - facilitate the take-up of electronic business, by making available as much as possbile research and technological development (RTD) results and enabling SMEs in every sector to take advantage of them, and; - contribute to providing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills - by alleviating shortages of these skills among SMEs, and by exploring and developing new business skills for the new economy.