Enterprise policy: implementing the Lisbon programme, progress made

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PURPOSE: Progress report on Member State's implementation of provisions relating to entrepreneurship as agreed at the Lisbon Council 2000. CONTENT: On the back of an economic boom the European Council decided in June 2000, to inject a greater degree of dynamism in the European economy through stimulating and encouraging greater entrepreneurship amongst European businesses. Ministers sought to make the transition towards a knowledge-based, competitive economy whilst at the same time maintaining the European social model. The later half of 2001 however saw a reverse in the EU's economic growth - a situation aggravated by the attacks on America on 11 September. Steps taken so far to fulfil the conclusions of the Lisbon Council include: - The launching of a benchmark which ascertains important factors affecting business conditions, including the length of time and the costs involved in setting up a company. - Work on structural indicators and on business demographics. Moreover, the 2001 Innovation Scoreboard was released in September 2001. - Introduction of the Multiannual programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (2001-2005) with particular emphasis on SME's. - Introduction of procedures for the identification and exchange of best practices across the Member States. - The endorsement of the European Charter for Small Enterprises. In order to gain a more complete picture of how these policies are being implemented the Commission has its disposal a number of tools. These include a competitiveness report, scoreboards, benchmarking, best procedure report, report on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises, observatory of European SME's and the setting of quantitative targets in enterprise policy. Whilst the Communication notes a degree of progress in the implementation of the Lisbon objectives it nevertheless berates Member States for not doing more. Progress, the report concludes, is too slow. The Commission gives warning that failure to act more actively in this field could have negative consequences on the whole of the European economy. Whilst recognising that the economic down-turn has led governments to focus their priorities elsewhere it nevertheless urges Member States not to ignore their commitments to stimulating a dynamic entrepreneurial dimension to the European economic project. It therefore concludes that renewing and strengthening the EU's commitment to good enterprise policies and practices through faster implementation of the Lisbon programme, must become a policy priority. Such a policy will inject a degree of business confidence that will, in turn, cushion the downswing in which the EU (like the rest of the world) seems set.