Entrepreneurship, innovation policy and the small and medium enterprises SMEs. Green Paper and Charter

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In order to prepare the ground for the Green Paper on entrepreneurship in Europe launched the same day, the Commission adopted a package of documents outlining EU policy towards small and medium-sized enterprises: - Thinking Small in an Enlarging Europe; - Report on the Implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises; - Report on the implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises in the candidate countries to accession to the EU; - Creating an entrepreneurial Europe: The activities of the European Union for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); - The SME Envoy: an active interface between the Commission and the SME Community. This ‘SME package’ provided a snapshot of recent progress in small business policy across Europe and pointed to possible future policy actions. A key finding was that EU Member States and candidate countries needed to focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) more often in their policy and law-making: consultation of small businesses was still too low in both these areas. Europe therefore urgently needed to give small businesses the opportunity to voice their views. However, the documents also stressed that substantial progress had been made in key areas such as education for entrepreneurship, exchange of good practices and simplification of administrative procedures, both in candidate countries, which were facing the challenge of building an entrepreneurial culture, and in Member States. To help develop a more stable and creative enterprise sector in candidate countries, the financial sector was encouraged to take a closer look at SME lending as a source of opportunities, rather than just risks. The Commission had recently taken several initiatives to support SMEs. In this context, the recently appointed SME Envoy had a crucial role in ensuring a more coordinated approach on SME issues. At Community level, the Structural Funds were to spend some EUR 16 billion on SME-targeted projects in the period 2000-2006. SMEs were also an important target for the Sixth Framework Programme for RTD. For 2002-2006, nearly EUR 2.2 billion had been allocated to support SMEs’ research and innovation efforts.