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

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PURPOSE : to strengthen EU innovation policy (update the Union's approach in the context of the Lisbon strategy). CONTENT : Innovation is a cornerstone of the "Lisbon strategy" launched by the European Council in March 2000, and emphasised by subsequent European Councils, in particular at Barcelona in 2002. The present Communication on innovation policy, together with the Communication on industrial policy in an enlarged Europe and the Green Paper on entrepreneurship, form a coherent framework for the development of an enterprise policy that fosters competitiveness of companies and contributes to the growth of Europe's economy. It also constitutes a timely contribution to the Spring European Council to be held on 20-21 March 2003. The object of the Communication is firstly to describe the diverse routes to innovation and analyse the consequences for the design of innovation policy and for the different means by which innovation policy is put into action, so that they are not hampered by a view of innovation which is too restrictive. This analysis is complemented by examination of the current challenges that are, to different degrees, specific to the EU, recognising that structures, problems and opportunities relating to innovation are not necessarily the same in all the world's major economic areas. Factors considered include the persistently inadequate performance of the Union, the implications of enlargement, demographic trends, and the large size of the public sector in EU economies. While innovation policy takes place mostly at the national and regional levels, the Member States and the Commission need to intensify their cooperation for the strengthening of innovation in the EU, including coordination and assessment mechanisms for mutual learning, as well as for taking stock of progress achieved. The Communication makes concrete proposals on how to turn European diversity into a strength. The Communication also suggests several new directions for EU innovation policy development and, in particular, interaction with other policy areas. Innovation policy must often be implemented via other policies, and the Communication suggests, inter alia, better coordination and a pro-active follow-up by the Commission and Member States. The conclusion provides a summary of the main measures proposed to be executed by the Member States, the Commission and in cooperation between both.