Opportunities for exporting renewable energy technologies

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'Support for renewable energies as a new objective of external economic policy is a decisive instrument for Europe in securing growth, competitiveness, employment and protection of the environment', according to Mr ELCHLEPP (PSE,D), whose report on the external prospects of the EU in exporting renewable energy technology and services was adopted unanimously by the Committee. The committee calls on the Commission to develop a long-term European strategy to encourage the export of technology for the utilisation of renewable energies. An essential instrument for the implementation of such a strategy should be the creation of a 'European Export Council for Renewable Energies', on the lines of the US Export Council on Renewable Energies, whose role would include improving the competitive situation of SMEs through effective start-up aid to help gain access to third countries· markets. It would also, encourage the foundation of export cooperatives among SMEs in the EU , linking these up with comparable establishments in the target countries.The committee pointed to the rapidly increasing global need for renewable energy technology (the overall world market for renewable energy technologies amounted in 1995 to ca. ECU 29 billion) and underlined the contribution which a cheap, decentralised energy supply from renewable sources could make to social, cultural and economic development in the Third World. It further noted the competitive advantages currently enjoyed by European producers and hence the more favourable export position in competition with the USA and Japan. In contrast , the lack of effective aid for exports, in particular for SMEs was criticised. Support for renewable energies will help the EU fulfill its obligation to achieve the objectives of Kyoto and is highly desirable from the point of view of security of supply, (the dependence of Member States on energy imports will probably increase to 70% by the year 2020). Thus, as well as avoiding the risk of political blackmail, it will relieve the burden on the EU·s balance of payments. The committee believes that the current funding of the EU energy programmes is quite inadequate in view of the importance of promoting renewable energies. It calls for action to ensure that there is a separate budgetary provision for renewable energies in the EU·s energy support programmes, as well as in structural and ACP aid. The PHARE, TACIS and MEDA support programmes should aslo be adapted to take this need into consideration. The European Investment Bank is called upon to grant cheap loans below the existing minimum loan threshold (e.g. by means of collective loans) for SMEs involved in projects in the field of renewable energy in third countries.