European automobile industry: current situation, challenges and strategy for the future and proposals for action

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The Commission communication analysed the current situation of the motor industry and set out certain areas of reflection with a view to improving the competitiveness of European manufacturers. The document began by listing the challenges to be met by the motor industry: - strengthening the presence of European manufacturers in high-growth third markets: Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and China; - improving environmental performance through the industrial development of cleaner cars and through better results in terms of spatial planning and the improvement of infrastructures; - reducing production costs and improving the qualifications of the workforce of the companies concerned, particularly by developing close partnerships between equipment manufacturers and car manufacturers and between producers and distributors. In order to help the motor industry face up to these challenges, the Commission underlined that the Community's task would be to: - complete the internal market by eliminating fiscal differences between Member States and by harmonising and strengthening the existing standards on safety and emissions. With regard to competition, the Commission would propose the renewal of the 1985 regulation on the exclusive and selective distribution of vehicles in the Community and would continue to monitor closely the level of aid granted to the motor industry; - help the industry to succeed in its restructuring through the use of structural policy instruments in order to facilitate the adaptation of companies and their workforce to new systems of production and industrial changes. Three instruments would be of particular use to the motor industry in this context: Objective 4 of the Structural Funds, the new Community initiative on employment and human resources (ADAPT) and the programme for Community initiatives to benefit SMEs; - support research and technological development, particularly under the fourth framework programme (new technologies for the reduction of emissions and fuel consumption, electronics for engines, electric vehicles, etc.). The Commission stressed that primary responsibility for the changes to be made and the improvement of competitiveness rested with the industry itself.