An industrial competitiveness policy for the European Union

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This communication contains an action programme to implement the objectives set out in the White Paper on "Growth, competitiveness, employment", which recommends an approach to industrial development based on the quest for global competitiveness. The Commission stresses that European industry has improved its competitiveness considerably over recent years, both in commercial terms and in areas such as research and the financial structure of enterprises. However, it considers that this objective should be pursued more vigorously in order to create and attract new jobs in Europe. The Commission proposes that all parties concerned act in a concerted manner so as to guarantee fast results from all the initiatives, which are based on the following four guidelines: 1) Promotion of investment in intangible assets: The Commission will give increased priority to investments in intangible assets (improved vocational training, promotion of human resources, greater attention to market requirements in research policy, development of intellectual property). 2) Development of industrial cooperation: The Commission intends to take the measures needed in order to facilitate industrial cooperation and give enterprises access to information and assistance, support the organization of "industrial round tables", propose the development of support mechanisms and technical expertise in order to assist operations of interest to the Community and present proposals on industrial cooperation with certain Union partners such as the countries of eastern Europe, Latin America, the Mediterranean basin and certain countries of Asia. 3) Strengthening competition: The Commission intends to strengthen the policy to reduce state aid (taking account of regional imbalances), re-examine the criteria for evaluating aid and simplify the rules, improve the coherence between the rules applicable to state aid and non-structural Community financing instruments, resolve the problems pending at the end of the Uruguay Round, combat fraud, especially concerning the origin of products, present proposals for developing international competition rules, set up a database on the obstacles to the smooth operation of the market and an "Industrial Assessment Mechanism" to identify industrial problems encountered on third markets, continue to improve the structure of the common customs tariff, examine the possibility of applying trade policy instruments to services and coordinating export promotion systems, actively continue eliminating distortions of internal and international competition. 4) Modernization of the industrial role of the public authorities: The Commission intends to support the work of the group on administrative simplification and continue efforts to streamline procedures by improving their transparency, examine the potential for eliminating legislative, administrative and regulatory disparities causing enterprises problems, examine the possibility of using Community instruments (Structural Funds) to facilitate the development of competitive industrial activities in the Union on the basis of regional specificities, encourage administrative cooperation between the Member States and the Commission and examine how decision-making structures can be improved.