Enterprise policy: the future operation of the information and cooperation networks

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OBJECTIVE: this report on the future operation of the information and cooperation networks in the enterprise policy (EIC, BC-NET and BRE-NET networks) takes account of the current data and critical analysis concerning possible developments before setting out the prime objectives to be met and their operational and financial consequences. SUBSTANCE: the strategic objective of enterprise policy networks is to provide SMEs with an infrastructure for information, advice and support throughout the entire Community and beyond. The Commission report emphasises the significant achievements of the irreplaceable methodology used for the networks, which relies on a broad partnership with decentralised intermediary bodies which are responsible for a large proportion of cofinancing. Nevertheless, the quality, efficiency and adequacy of resources must be improved to meet the needs of SMEs. As a result, the composition of the networks must be adapted to meet the objectives of developing a quality policy and assessing its results, reviewing the remit of the central structure, with emphasis on encouraging quality and training, and enhancing the network effect and impact of promotion. As regards financing, costs must be rationalised whilst computer and telematics systems must be modernised in order to reconcile local development and the globalisation of trade. SMEs will need to receive greater support when drawing up strategies for globalisation, be better informed on markets and receive effective advice on methods of cooperation to enable them to make the most of the potential of the internal market and new opportunities on the markets, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, Latin America and Asia. Finally, the Commission believes that it would be of benefit for the networks to work in coordination with other Community programmes and other national and regional bodies.