The craft industry and small enterprises: keys to growth and employment in Europe, 2nd conference in Berlin

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OBJECTIVE: the purpose of this report is to analyze the results of the second European Conference on the Craft Industry and Small Enterprises (Berlin, 26-27 September 1994) so that priority actions can be planned and recommendations made to Member States with a view to taking greater account of this sector, which is particular important in generating employment. CONTENT: the Berlin Conference on the Craft Industry and Small Enterprises gave some 1,300 delegates from the sector the chance to meet and highlight the problems faced by the European craft industry. A list of 144 proposed basic guidelines was drawn up during the conference, reflecting the concerns of the sector at both national and European level. Having taken due account of these proposals, the Commission has attempted to define a global strategy of actions encompassing the following elements: - continuing administrative simplification, taking maximum account of the specific situation of SMEs in new legislation. This sector also needs to be given better access to Community programmes; - the integration of SMEs in the internal market, mainly by increasing the involvement of this sector in standardization work and supporting the networking of representative associations in order to take greater account of the demands of small enterprises with regard to certification; - support for the cross-border provision of services, by creating cross-border development agencies responsible for giving the sector information and advice; - transnational cooperation, by stepping up transnational cooperation between craftsmen in order to facilitate contacts between enterprises (organizing trade fairs etc.); - improving international competitiveness, mainly by stepping up projects with the Central and Eastern European Countries and Mediterranean countries; - training and further training projects for the managers of the sector and other apprentices not covered by current Community programmes, mainly by planning training modules on European issues for representative associations and supporting the creation of European networks of female bosses and young craftsmen in order to facilitate training in enterprises in other Member States; - jointly-designed qualifications, by defining ways of recognizing craft diplomas and designing European diplomas in consultation with professional associations and Member States; - integrating SMEs into the information society, by allowing small enterprises to benefit from the potential offered by new technologies; - improving access to financing for the craft industry and SMEs, mainly by developing mutual guarantee schemes and facilitating cooperation between banks and enterprises; - improving the knowledge, visibility and representativity of the craft industry at European level, by supporting the launch of various initiatives, such as the European Academy of Craft Industries and SMEs, cofinancing European competitions for young craftsmen, organizing European arts prizes etc. Apart from defining these various actions, the Commission also attempts to define a series of recommendations for Member States and national and European standardization committees. It identifies 5 main recommendations: - within the framework of certain Community policies, including regional policies: to recognize the role and responsibility of associations representing the craft industry and small enterprises in training, support and involvement in local, regional and national consultation bodies; - to promote the introduction of apprenticeship and work experience; - to create favourable conditions for small enterprises and craft enterprises by developing teaching and a new approach to the spirit of enterprise in educational systems; - to improve the advice available to enterprise creators and newly-formed enterprises, mainly through minimum prior training (basically in financial administration and management); - to recommend that national and European standardization bodies introduce an SME impact assessment procedure in the field of standardization (as already used at European level).