Commerce. Green paper

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OBJECTIVE: this Green Paper seeks to stimulate a wide-ranging discussion on the challenges facing commerce and the ways in which they can be met. SUBSTANCE: the Green Paper examines the structure and development of the commerce and distribution sector, emphasising the scale and diversity of commerce, which is the second largest economic sector in the EU. With 22 million people employed (i.e. 16% of the total workforce) in some 4.5 million companies it is a key sector for economic development and for employment. The Green Paper then describes the actions of Member States and the EU and their respective roles with regard to this sector. Finally the document identifies the challenges facing commerce and distribution, formulates a series of questions which require public consultation and sets a timetable for the study of possible choices on future initiatives to be submitted during 1997. The main challenges which must be faced include: - increased competition resulting from the growth in trade; - constraints associated with developing the full potential of the single market from heterogeneous regulations on a national, regional and local level; - the introduction of the Euro and the administrative, accounting and psychological changes it will involve. In this respect the national authorities and the Commission have a key role to play in helping the private sector to adapt to the single currency; - the development in the needs and wishes of consumers and the 'Europeanization' of their purchasing behaviour; - the simplification of the administrative and legislative environment of the commercial companies; - the growing use of electronic trading and the exploitation of new technology to facilitate direct trading; - the development of the information society and the ability of commerce to adapt to it and participate in it; - the maintenance of rural and urban cohesion. The Commission notes that the principle of subsidiarity is particularly important for this sector but because of the development of the internal market a growing number of decisions are taken at EU level.