Benchmarking, instrument to economic actors and public authorities

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OBJECTIVE: this communication from the European Commission seeks to propose measures to put the method of comparative evaluation of competitive performances ("benchmarking") into practice.
CONTENT: in its communication of 9 October 1996 (COS0491), the European Commission advocated widespread use of benchmarking in the economy and in society in order to compare performances in key areas and factors which determine economic success, together with the development and use of benchmarking within the framework of the European strategy on employment. Benchmarking may be implemented at corporate level, sectoral level (e.g. the chemical or automobile industry) or at the level of the general economic or social environment (in particular the cost of factors, infrastructures, qualifications, innovation, the environment). Although benchmarking initiatives may be taken by anyone in the economic sector, the added value of the Community dimension is that it provides the expertise to develop and apply more complicated methodologies, makes optimum use of experience, pools the know-how of the various national systems and motivates the Member States. This is what the Commission intends to do in the field of benchmarking at the level of the general economic and social environment by developing pilot projects in the following areas: a) new technological and organizational context; b) financing for innovation, especially intellectual property; c) logistics and transport; d) development of human resources. Implementing these pilot projects will result in a working method which guarantees transparency, dialogue and expertise. The main elements of this working method are as follows: - the Commission will set up a high-level panel on benchmarking to help it lay down priorities, organize the participation of industry at a practical level, assist the Commission in interpreting results with Community implications and transmit to industry the results which concern it; - the group of directors-general of industry will monitor all the work and ensure that the approach is politically coherent; - finally, on the basis of the inventory of experiments conducted by the Member States, the Commission will call on public- and private-sector economic research centres with expertise in this field to set up a network of expertise in order to facilitate the implementation of benchmarking. The results will be made available to all the Member States, Community institutions and interested parties and will provide food for regular debate on industrial competitiveness.