Research, development RTD, innovation: reinforcing economic cohesion and industrial competitiveness

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PURPOSE : Commission Communication to the Council, European Parliament, Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled 'Reinforcing Cohesion and Competitiveness through Research, Technological Development and Innovation'. CONTENT : Economic and social cohesion is enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty together with EMU and the completion of the Single Market. It is further underlined by the Amsterdam summit Resolution on Growth and Employment and by the November 1997 Jobs Summit, held in Luxembourg, which adds the requirement that priority should be given to the fight against unemployment. The Commission's Agenda 2000 document confirms that Structural Funds should continue to encourage competitive development and sustainable job-creating growth in the less-favoured regions. In order to foster diversification, restore economic dynamism and promote an active business culture, specific support measures should be out in place. These should include support for infrastructure, technological, financial and organisational innovation, SMEs and human resources, include equality of opportunity. Agenda 2000 also requires that account be taken of the prospects of the candidate countries. It recognises that knowledge policies - research, innovation, education and training - should play an important part in bridging the gap between scientific and technological excellence, on the one hand, and industrial and commercial successes on the other. Stimulating innovation in SMEs is regarded as particularly important. The common objective is to reinforce the competitive capacity of less favoured regions by ensuring that RTD and innovation policies are integrated within the productive fabric of the region. In order to do so, it is necessary to increase the awareness of national and regional authorities and economic players to : - strengthen the capacity of regions to integrate RTD and innovation into their economic development - improve the learning processes by which firms can become more innovative - assist firms and institutions to respond to the difficulties they face in adapting to new forms of work organisation - better co-ordinate sectoral policies at national level in supporting regional development efforts. The Communication also seeks to demonstrate that the complementary use of Community instruments - the Structural Funds and the Framework Programme for RTD - can contribute to cohesion and competitiveness. Moreover, candidate countries (Cyprus and Central and Eastern European countries) too can benefit from experience of EU support for RTD and Innovation in less favoured regions.