Trade, follow up to the Green paper COM(1996) 0350. White Paper

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PURPOSE : This White Paper presents the follow-up that the Commission intends to undertake with respect to the Green Paper on Commerce, which it adopted on 20/11/1996. The aim of the Green Paper was to provide food for thought and to launch a consultation procedure on the importance of this sector to the economy, on the challenges facing it and on possible ways of remaining competitive, thus maintaining its major contribution to employment and social cohesion. CONTENT : The aim of the White Paper is not to launch a major initiative nor to introduce radical changes of policy. The commerce and distribution sector needs a strategy essentially based on improving competitive conditions in the market in which competitiveness is the best response to consumer demand. The White Paper therefore sets out specific problems and practices calling for action at Community level in order to ensure the smooth running of the market and thereby guarantee that the sector can best contribute to consumer welfare. The Paper proposes a number of actions designed to create a coherent strategy for promoting the sector in the coming years; these actions fall into four priority groups : 1- improving the use of policy instruments to assist commerce (better understanding of the sector, changes in the structure of commerce : new challenges for policy); 2- improving the administrative, legislative and financial environment (simplification of administrative procedures, access to finance, improving the dialogue between commercial enterprises and their partners - social dialogue, consumers, credit institutions); 3- strengthening competitiveness and promoting entrepreneurship (electronic commerce, co-operation between businesses, training, commerce in rural and less-favoured urban areas, commerce and tourism, commerce and environment); 4- encouraging Europeanisation and internationalisation (the Euro, international trade, enlargement of the EU).