Internal market: strategy over the next five years

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The Action Plan for the Single Market put forward an ambitious 18-month programme in parallel with the introduction of the euro. This working document outlines the progress achieved in this regard. The document stresses that the action plan was implemented with good results and that the way is open for the next stage of the single market which will involve the combination of two distinct elements: firstly, a common vision of strategic objectives for the single market in the long term and, secondly, the ongoing examination of market performance. The internal market scoreboard highlights some positive developments. The recent progress of certain Member States (e.g. Belgium and Germany) demonstrates that intense activity within the administration, with vigorous political support at the highest levels, can yield significant results over a short period. Similar efforts are now required from a number of Member States (notably Portugal, Italy and Greece) whose implementation record remains poor. Some Member States have made progress removing obstacles to the functioning of the Single Market through the use of Contact Points for Citizens and for Business and Coordination Centres (acting as a link between Member State administrations and with the Commission) which have been established under the Action Plan. Concerning infringement procedures against Member States under Article 226 (formerly 169) of the EC Treaty for failure to apply Single Market rules, the scoreboard notes a rise in the number of 'reasoned opeinion' and referrals to the Court of Justice, largely as a result of faster handling of infringement cases by the Commission. Implementation of priority Single Market policies remains uneven across sectors and within Member States. Although competition among utilities has increased, particularly in the telecommunications and energy sectors, gaps still remain in the implementation of the relevant EU legislation. The implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation continues to be an important source of problems on many Member States. Although the overall volume of legislation whose implementation is late may have fallen, the slow pace of implementation of new measures continues to fragment the single market. Lastly, the processes of feedback and information of citizens and business still need to be strengthened.